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## Examining social identity and intrateam moral behaviours in competitive youth ice hockey using stimulated recall

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<sup>a</sup>School of Physical and Health Education, Nipissing University, North Bay, ON, Canada; <sup>b</sup>School of Sport, Exercise, and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, UK; <sup>c</sup>School of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada

### ABSTRACT

Social identity – identity formed through membership in groups – may play an important role in regulating intrateam moral behaviour in youth sport (Bruner, M. W., Boardley, I., & Côté, J. (2014). Social identity and prosocial and antisocial behavior in youth sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 15(1), 56–64. doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2013.09.003). The aim of this study was to qualitatively examine this potential role through stimulated recall interviews with competitive youth-ice-hockey players. Twenty-three players ( $M_{age} = 13.27$  years,  $SD = 1.79$ ) who reported engaging in high, median or low frequency of antisocial teammate behaviour (determined through pre-screening with the Prosocial and Antisocial Behaviour in Sport Scale [Kavussanu, M., & Boardley, I. D. (2009). The prosocial and antisocial behavior in sport scale. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 31(1), 97–117. doi:10.1123/jsep.31.1.97]) were recruited from eight youth-ice-hockey teams in Canada. Interviews involved participants recalling their thoughts during prosocial/antisocial interactions with teammates, prompted by previously recorded video sequences of such incidents. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed all athletes – regardless of reported frequency of intrateam antisocial behaviour – felt prosocial interactions with teammates enhanced social identity. In contrast, the perceived influence of antisocial teammate behaviour on social identity differed depending on athletes' reported frequency of intrateam antisocial behaviour; those reporting low and median frequencies described how such behaviour undermines social identity, whereas athletes reporting high frequency did not perceive this effect. The study findings highlight the potential importance of intrateam moral behaviour and social identity for youth-sport team functioning.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### KEYWORDS

Group dynamics; prosocial behaviour; antisocial behaviour; team sport

Approximately 21.5 million youth (aged 6–17 years) in the United States participate in a team sport (Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, 2011). Given this high participation rate, sport teams represent a promising context to facilitate the personal and social development of youth (Holt, Black, Tamminen, Fox, & Mandigo, 2008). Sport teams provide youth with rich environments for important interpersonal interactions with peers and opportunities to develop social bonds as their social realm expands beyond the family to peer groups (Allen, 2003; Wagner, 1996). Interactions with peers in a sport team setting also affords youth with vital opportunities to build their own personal identity. A central component of young athletes' self-concept is the identities they form through membership of sport teams, their social identities. However, despite the potential significance of athletes' social identities, minimal research has examined how such identities impact on athletes' moral development (Bruner, Boardley et al., 2014).

Social identity represents "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his/her knowledge of his/her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel &

Turner, 1979) describes the processes through which people identify with membership of particular social groups, as well as the outcomes (individual and group) that result from the identification (Bruner, Dunlop, & Beauchamp, 2014). Of particular importance to the current project is that perceptions of group identification can significantly influence moral behaviour towards group members (Hornstein, 1976; Nezelek & Smith, 2005; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961).

A considerable body of research in organisational and social psychology has examined social identity and moral behaviour. More specifically, such research has been conducted in contexts including gangs (e.g., Goldman, Giles, & Hogg, 2014), business organisations (e.g., Tidwell, 2005) and political sectarian violence (e.g., Merrilees et al., 2013). Although research has largely supported an effect of social identity on moral behaviour, there is also evidence to suggest this relationship may be bidirectional (e.g., Goldman et al., 2014). As an example, Goldman and colleagues (2014) examined antisocial behaviour such as violence (e.g., drive-by shootings) in youth gangs. The authors revealed increased perceptions of status, self-esteem and social identity in the group, particularly among new gang members who had engaged in violent and aggressive behaviours towards others.

In a review of the literature concerned with prosocial behaviours, Penner and colleagues (2005) have also highlighted the need to look at consequences of moral behaviour on group outcomes – thus providing additional support for the moral behaviour-social identity relationship. Taken together, these findings indicate possible bidirectional effects between social identity and moral behaviour in youth sport.

In the sport literature, moral behaviour is defined as a broad range of intentional acts that can result in positive or negative consequences for others (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2010), and is frequently subdivided into prosocial and antisocial behaviour. Prosocial behaviour is defined as voluntary acts intended to help or benefit another individual or group (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998), whereas antisocial behaviour signifies voluntary acts intended to harm or disadvantage another individual or group (Sage, Kavussanu, & Duda, 2006). As such, both types of behaviour have clear relevance to young athletes' social and moral development. Surprisingly, minimal research has investigated the salient role social identity may play in regulating moral behaviour in sport (Bruner, Dunlop et al., 2014).

One exception to this is initial work by Bruner, Boardley and colleagues (2014) who investigated the interrelationships between social identity and moral behaviour in youth sport. This study prospectively examined whether social identity predicted prosocial (e.g., encouraging a teammate) and antisocial (e.g., verbally abusing a teammate) behaviour towards teammates in 329 high school athletes from 26 teams (Bruner, Boardley et al., 2014). This study investigated links between moral behaviour and two dimensions of social identity: (1) ingroup ties – perceptions of similarity, bonding, and belongingness with the group, and (2) ingroup affect – positive feelings resulting from group membership (Cameron, 2004). Importantly, results demonstrated adolescents' ingroup affect at the beginning of the season positively predicted prosocial teammate behaviour at the end of the season.

Further analyses by Bruner, Boardley and colleagues (2014) investigated the potential mediational role of task cohesion (individuals' perceptions of the level of unity possessed by the group around task aspects, e.g., team goals, objectives; Eys, Loughhead, Bray, & Carron, 2009a, 2009b) and social cohesion (individuals' perceptions of the level of unity possessed by the group regarding social aspects, e.g., social relationships, friendships; Eys et al., 2009a, 2009b) in explaining the social identity-moral behaviour relationships. The mediational analyses showed ingroup affect had a negative effect on antisocial teammate behaviour mediated by task cohesion. Further, social cohesion mediated a positive effect of ingroup ties on antisocial teammate behaviour. This latter social cohesion finding is consistent with qualitative research indicating high social cohesion may be problematic for team functioning due to increased formation of cliques and sub-groups within teams, as well as communication problems (e.g., greater tendency to start and continue verbal fights and bickering with teammates) (Hardy, Eys, & Carron, 2005).

The work of Bruner, Boardley and colleagues (2014) provided partial support for the relevance of Cameron's (2004) multidimensional model of social identity to youth sport. More

specifically, Bruner, Boardley et al. (2014) found strong support for the relevance of two dimensions of social identity from this model (i.e., ingroup affect and ingroup ties). However, the relevance of a third dimension – cognitive centrality (i.e., the importance of being a group member) – was not supported due to poor internal consistency. As such, we constrain our research interests to the two dimensions of social identity (ingroup ties, ingroup affect) that the work of Bruner, Boardley and colleagues (2014) found to be potentially important for moral behaviour in youth sport.

The study by Bruner, Boardley and colleagues (2014) offered initial evidence of a social identity-moral behaviour relationship in youth sport. However, there is currently an absence of qualitative research exploring *how* social identities that youth form through their sport team membership may influence moral behaviour towards teammates. Qualitative approaches have been shown to aid understanding of group dynamics constructs (e.g., Eys et al., 2009b) and moral behaviour in sport research (e.g., Long, Pantaléon, Bruant, & d'Arripe-Longueville, 2006; Tractlet, Romand, Moret, & Kavussanu, 2011). As such, the purpose of the current study was to qualitatively examine the potential role of social identity on intrateam moral behaviour in youth sport. The study was conducted in a sport associated with frequent antisocial behaviour – youth ice hockey (see Shapcott, Bloom, & Loughhead, 2007; Smith, 1979).

## Methods

### Qualitative methodology

A social constructivist orientation guided the research investigating youth perceptions of social identity and moral behaviour towards team members. We adopted a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology conceiving that reality is socially constructed and multifaceted involving multiple subjective realities (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In undertaking this approach, we acknowledged that the mind plays an important role in constructing reality through contextual meanings and interpretations and that knowledge is co-created by the interaction of participant and researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

One specific qualitative methodological approach suited to addressing the study aim is stimulated recall interviewing. Stimulated recall is an introspective research approach in which participants are invited to recall specific thought processes and memories when prompted by a video sequence (Lyle, 2003). This methodology, which combines two forms of qualitative research (interviews and observations), has been extensively used in the fields of education (e.g., Housner & Griffey, 1985), nursing (e.g., Skovdahl, Kihlgren, & Kihlgren, 2004) and counselling (e.g., Martin, Martin, Meyer, & Slemon, 1986). More recently within sport, stimulated recall has been used in the context of examining coach decision-making (Lyle, 2003), and thought processes of coaches in coach-athlete interactions (Buckham, Erickson, & Côté, 2012; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009). Further work in sport has used stimulated recall to examine athletes' antisocial behaviour (Shapcott et al., 2007; Tractlet et al., 2011). An identified strength of the unique

methodological approach in comparison with standard interviewing are improvements in memory recall (i.e., reductions in fade and bias) when responses are informed and stimulated by video (Dempsey, 2010).

### Criterion-based sampling and participants

Patton (1990) identified a number of categories of purposeful sampling. One such category is criterion-based sampling, which involves the researcher predetermining a set of criteria for selecting participants (e.g., specific characteristic or experience; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). To provide potentially unique perspectives on social identity and teammate-directed moral behaviour, criterion-based sampling (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) was used to recruit athletes with high, median and low frequencies of reported antisocial behaviour from each of eight competitive youth ice hockey teams.

### Pre-screening

Three (i.e., one high, one median and one low frequency) athletes per team were invited to participate in a stimulated recall interview. To identify these athletes, players from eight competitive youth ice hockey teams ( $N = 111$ ) completed the five item antisocial behaviour towards teammates (e.g., "criticized a teammate") subscale from the Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Sport Scale (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009) prior to a scheduled practice. Participants were asked to think about their experiences while playing for their team this season and indicate how often they had engaged in the five antisocial teammate behaviours this season. The five items were preceded by "While playing for my team this season, I...". Items were answered using a 5-point scale, anchored by 1 (*Never*) and 5 (*Very Often*). Evidence supporting the construct validity and reliability of the measure with samples including youth athletes has been reported (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009, 2010; Bruner, Boardley et al., 2014; Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009). The mean score for the antisocial teammate behaviour subscale was then calculated. Athletes' who scored the highest and lowest mean score on this subscale, along with athletes who scored along the median frequency, were then invited to participate in a stimulated recall interview. All invited athletes volunteered to participate.

The initial sample included 24 athletes from 8 competitive north-eastern Ontario youth ice hockey teams. One of the male youth participants classified as high in antisocial teammate behaviour did not show up for the scheduled stimulated recall interview and the interview could not be rescheduled within 24 h of observation as stipulated by the study procedure. The final sample included 23 participants (13 males; 10 females<sup>1</sup>; 7 high [4 males, 3 females], 8 median [5 males, 3 females], 8 low [4 males, 4 females] in reported antisocial teammate behaviour), with ages ranging from 11 to 17 years of age ( $M_{\text{age}} = 13.27$  years,  $SD = 1.79$ ). Participants represented three levels of competitive hockey: peewee (11–12 years of

age;  $n = 9$ ), bantam (13–14 years of age;  $n = 12$ ) and midget (15–17 years of age;  $n = 3$ ).

### Procedure

Prior to conducting the study, ethical approval was obtained from the first author's institutional ethics review board and the four participating hockey associations. Coaches from the participating hockey associations were invited to participate through presentations at coaches' meetings. Participants were then recruited from the teams of interested coaches. Informed consent was then obtained from the coaches, athletes and parents.

### Observation

For each team, two training sessions were videotaped and audio recorded midseason to capture athletes' prosocial and antisocial behaviours towards teammates. In videotaping the training sessions, two cameras were used. The first camera focused on athletes to capture athletes' behaviours and athlete-athlete interactions in detail. The second camera was used to capture the entire play area. A parabolic microphone operated by trained research assistants recorded athletes' verbalisations and was synced to the video recordings. Each training session lasted between 1 and 2 h, resulting in approximately 20 h of athlete video/audio recording. The first videotaped session served two purposes: (1) to acclimate the athletes and coaches to the presence of the research team and equipment, and (2) to serve as pilot video to ensure that all of the equipment was in good working order and that the sound settings were appropriate for a hockey arena. The footage from the subsequent practice session was then analysed and used for the stimulated interview.

The video from each recorded training session was uploaded, reviewed and coded for prosocial and antisocial behaviour by one of three trained research assistants. Prosocial behaviours were identified as behaviours intended to help or benefit another individual (e.g., helping an injured teammate off of the ice, or sharing a water bottle during a break; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989; Kavussanu, 2006). Antisocial behaviours were defined as behaviours intended to harm or disadvantage another individual (e.g., pushing or tripping a teammate; Kavussanu, Stamp, Slade, & Ring, 2009; Sage et al., 2006). The final clips were purposefully selected to exemplify the prosocial and antisocial behaviours that were demonstrated within each team. Only those clips that met the operational definitions of the two types of moral behaviour were included; however, the maximum number of clips selected for each team was limited to four clips per prosocial and antisocial behaviour category. While some teams exemplified a variety of prosocial and antisocial behaviours from which to choose, other teams demonstrated less than four clips for one or both moral behaviour categories. For those teams with less than four clips demonstrating either prosocial or antisocial behaviours, all available

<sup>1</sup>The bantam boys' team included one female player. During prescreening, this female player was classified as low in antisocial behaviour towards teammates and was therefore invited to participate in the study. This explains why there was one more female and one less male player in the sample than would be expected.

clips were included in the interview protocol. The selected video clips were compiled chronologically into one continuous filmstrip using iMovie'11 with each clip being separated by blank footage.

### *Stimulated recall interviews*

The stimulated recall interviews took place within 24 h of the teams' last videotaped session (i.e., session in which the behaviours were coded), and occurred before the teams' next practice session or competition. Interviewing the participants within 24 h of the practice session was conducted to align with previous boundaries of stimulated recall interviews (i.e., within 48 h, Shapcott et al., 2007; Tractlet et al., 2011) to minimise recall bias and situate participants within a similar circumstance/context during the interview procedure. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 min in duration and took place at a mutually agreed upon time and location (e.g., after hockey practice at the ice hockey rink). The interviews followed a semi-structured open-ended format, which is similar in style to an ordinary conversation with the interviewees doing most of the talking (Patton, 2002). This allowed the trained research assistants to focus on the topic of discussion but also allowing the interviewees the freedom to answer openly without restrictions.

Over the course of each interview, the video clip was stopped during the blank footage and athletes were asked a series of questions. Those questions expanded on their perceptions of the prosocial or antisocial behaviours displayed through the video footage, and how it may affect specific aspects of their social identity. Sample interview guide questions included aspects of ingroup affect (e.g., Do interactions such as this influence how you feel towards being a part of the team?) and ingroup ties (e.g., Do interactions such as this influence how you think about being a part of the team?). Following the initial questions regarding the athlete's perceptions of the prosocial and antisocial video clips, the research assistant further probed athletes' on past experiences of prosocial and antisocial behaviours they have observed during the present season. In doing so, the research assistant systematically went through the previous sequence of interview questions expanding on the athletes' perceptions of their discussed behaviour in their past prosocial and antisocial experiences and how it may affect their social identity. Throughout the interview athletes were able to stop and replay the current video clip whenever needed.

### *Data analysis*

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A research assistant verified each transcript by playing the audiotape of each interview in its entirety and following along with the transcript. This technique highlighted any errors that required correction from the initial transcription. Identifying and personal information was removed from the transcripts to ensure participant anonymity. A thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014) was conducted involving six phases: (1) immersion in the transcripts, (2) generating initial codes relating to social identity

and moral behaviour based on definitions from the literature, (3) searching for and identifying themes relating to these definitions, (4) reviewing these themes, (5) defining and naming these themes and (6) writing a report. The thematic analysis implemented through the first five phases identified what participants were saying about their social identities and moral behaviour when viewing the selected prosocial and antisocial video clips (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). More specifically, the transcription and initial reading (immersion in the transcripts) facilitated the generation of initial codes. After codes were gathered, the process allowed for potential themes to emerge, which were further compared in relation to individual transcripts and to the entire data set.

Highlighting and coding of the transcripts was done using NVivo (version 10.0.638.0 SP6 (64-bit); QSR International) computer software. Two coders (fourth and fifth authors) were involved in the initial coding of the transcripts. The coders met with one another and the lead author to achieve consensus and check one another's biases (i.e., analytical triangulation) throughout the coding process (e.g., Mathison, 1988). Participant coding incorporated information on team number (e.g., Team #1, Team #2), level of participation (i.e., Peewee = PW, Bantam = BTM, Midget = MGT), gender (i.e., male or female), identifying characteristic (i.e., high in antisocial behaviour toward teammates = High, median in antisocial behaviour towards teammates = Median, low in antisocial behaviour towards teammates = Low); and participant number (e.g., P01, P02, etc.). Through this process identifier codes were created for the participants (e.g., Team #2, Peewee level, High in antisocial behaviour towards teammates, Participant #03 = Team #2, PW, Female, High, P03). When required, square brackets [] have been used to add additional words to clarify quotes.

### *Quality of the research*

Grounded ontologically in relativism and epistemologically in subjectivism, a list of criteria was developed and implemented to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of the data collection, analyses and findings (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The list of criteria should be viewed as characterising traits intended to guide evaluations of quality with respect to the process and outcomes associated with this research (Smith, 1993; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In the context of this study, the following criteria have been selected: (1) importance of the research, (2) appropriate, thorough, and thoughtful methods, (3) credibility, (4) negotiated verification and (5) reflexivity.

The importance of the research was established through the application of SIT to a new context of youth sport, using a new methodological approach of stimulated recall, with a goal of providing implications to practitioners and suggestions for future research (e.g., Cohen & Crabtree, 2008; Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014). The use of appropriate, thorough, and thoughtful methods are described as a necessary standard and key component of conducting qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). In keeping with the recommendations of Sparkes and Smith (2014) and others (Seale, 1999; Tracy, 2010), we aimed to provide transparency of the methodological decisions made throughout the process of data collection

and analysis. To achieve this criterion, detailed records of the methods and methodological decisions were recorded including the rationales for these decisions.

Credibility for the findings was achieved through triangulation between investigators (use of multiple investigators) and peer debriefing between the first author and second and sixth authors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Field notes and analysis notes were kept to ensure a continuous audit trail for dependability of the findings. Finally, the analysis notes were utilised in the confirmability audit conducted by first and fourth author following the analyses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several of the techniques used to achieve credibility also contributed to appropriate, thorough, and thoughtful methods, as well as the process of negotiated verification. In this context, negotiated verification has been defined as a process in which readers are allowed to discern for themselves the dependability of the data, based on the information provided by the researcher (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008).

Negotiated verification was provided through thick description of decision-making processes, including an audit trail and meetings to achieve consensus among multiple coders. Finally, in keeping with suggestions of Sparkes and Smith (2014) and aligning with a subjective, relativist perspective, we acknowledged the futility of objectivity and sought to be reflexive. In doing so, we employed a critical friend (the second author) to discuss and reflect on the findings.

## Results

Data analyses resulted in the identification of three over-arching themes (see Table 1). A common theme across all three groups (i.e., high, median low-antisocial behaviour) was that prosocial teammate behaviours positively influence social identity. The two other themes represented differing perspectives of teammate antisocial behaviour based on the reports of athletes classified as high in antisocial behaviour and those who fell into the low or median antisocial behaviour groups. More specifically, the theme specific to the high-antisocial behaviour group was characterised by *justification and acceptance* of antisocial behaviours in the team sport environment. Alternatively, the theme specific to the median/low-antisocial behaviour groups encompassed *acknowledgement of social*

*harms* stemming from antisocial behaviours in this context. Importantly, throughout the analysis it was evident that all three members of each team (i.e., high, median and low in self-reported antisocial behaviours) were in general agreement on the overall environment within their team, but provided a unique perspective of each scenario/clip in relation to social identity and moral behaviour in their team. During data analysis some gender-specific sub-themes also emerged. In the following sections, we begin by overviewing the three over-arching themes before discussing these gender-specific sub-themes.

### Prosocial behaviour and social identity

A prominent theme was that all participants conceived prosocial teammate behaviour as positively influencing social identity. For example, one athlete described how prosocial behaviours such as cheering for one another during practice elicited pride, "Makes me proud of being part of the team because they are cheering and they're saying 'go', 'good job' and stuff" (Team #3, PW, Female, Low, P09). The athlete went on to discuss the ingroup ties and ingroup affect that prosocial behaviour fostered, "I like seeing my teammates cheer for each other. It makes me feel good because it means they care about you and you're getting better and not just them getting better by themselves" (Team #3, PW, Female, Low, P09). Another athlete highlighted how observing a simple prosocial act such as a teammate patting another team member on the head at the end of practice influenced their ingroup affect or feelings towards the team:

It is just good to see that we are all proud of each other and we know that we did good and we have to keep working. It just feels good to have someone come up to you and tell you, 'you did good' and just feels good inside. (Team #6, MGT, Male, High, P16)

While reflecting on enhanced ingroup affect after watching a clip of some teammates celebrating a player who skilfully passed an opponent and scored a goal, one athlete stated "That makes me feel good about being on the team that makes me think that we are all friends and everything. That's more what our team is about" (Team #1, BTM, Female, High, P01).

Table 1. Theme summary.

Theme	Description of theme	Gender-specific subthemes	Participant characteristics
Prosocial Behaviour & Social Identity	All participants conceived that prosocial teammate behaviour positively influences social identity	Theme was evenly represented across male and female teams	All three groups of participants (i.e., high median, low-antisocial teammate behaviour)
Social Harms Stemming from Antisocial Behaviour	Athletes who reported median or low levels of antisocial behaviour towards teammates described such behaviour as harmful to the team and also to athletes' social identity	Physical aggression contributed to negative affect on male teams "Two-faced" athletes and cliques adversely impacted ingroup ties on female teams	Male participants who reported median and low-antisocial teammate behaviour Female participants who reported median and low-antisocial teammate behaviour
Justification & Acceptance of Antisocial Behaviour	Athletes who reported high levels of antisocial behaviour towards teammates reported less of an impact of antisocial teammate behaviour on social identity often justifying or "excusing" such behaviour	Physical aggression accepted or approved as a means of "joking around" on male teams "Two-faced" athletes, cliques, and instances of exclusion reported more frequently on female teams	Male participants who reported high-antisocial teammate behaviour All three groups of female participants (i.e., high, median, low-antisocial teammate behaviour)

Athletes commonly discussed the importance of prosocial intrateam behaviour and how it affects one another in relation to their teammates' feelings. Athletes described behaviours such as helping with equipment malfunctions (helmet clips) or working as a team to pick up pucks helped to build ingroup affect. When asked about a prosocial interaction that occurred during the season, an athlete reflected on the end of practice when team members work together to put away the pucks and clear the equipment off the ice for the Zamboni [ice cleaner]:

It makes me feel happy because it's always nice that you can have that kind of relationship with your team. It makes me feel like I'm a part of the team because we're all working together; you're all having fun putting away the pucks. (Team #2, PW, Female, Low, P06)

Stronger feelings of group membership from one's teammate's prosocial behaviours also led to stronger perceptions of ingroup ties, stronger sense of connectedness and bonds between the athletes. For instance, a player described how interactions such as a teammate passing out water bottles to one's teammates during a break influences his perceptions of ingroup ties and being on the team, "I feel part of a team. Instead of just having guys I play hockey with, I have teammates that are like your family because that's the kind of bond you gain with them over the year" (Team #6, MGT, Male, Low, P18). Another clip of an athlete pouring water through a teammate's facemask for him to drink while in discussion with his coach elicited a parallel response, "I feel good and I am glad that he is helping other teammates and helping other people ... because it seems that someone is going around like caring and wants to be part of this team" (Team #7, PW, Male, High, P19).

Athletes also identified the importance of including injured teammates within activities and how it can positively affect their feelings and how they may perceive with being a part of the team. This sentiment was evident in watching a clip of the team interacting and speaking with an injured team member watching practice:

I think this is a good thing because just seeing that even when he [teammate] is not really playing anymore he's still part of the team...It would definitely make that player feel like he's part of the team just seeing that all these people are still talking to him, like, "oh, what happened?" It's definitely a positive feeling, happy just seeing people getting along and caring about each other. (Team #6, MGT, Male, Median, P17)

### *Social harms stemming from antisocial behaviour*

A second overarching theme was that only athletes who reported median or low levels of antisocial behaviour identified antisocial behaviour as harmful to the team and also to athletes' social identity (ingroup affect, cognitive centrality, ingroup ties). Athletes described how intrateam antisocial interactions negatively impact cognitive centrality (perceived importance of the team to the athlete) and ingroup affect (how the athletes feel about team membership). For example, athletes frequently identified how antisocial behaviour such as physically joking around with one another influenced how they think they are perceived from those watching, thus

negatively affecting their cognitive centrality, "I mean I feel like if someone else was watching they kind of think we were just a bunch of random people. Not like a really good team, which is kind of important to me" (Team #1, BTM, Female, Median, P02). The athlete then went on to discuss how the interaction impacted the athlete's ingroup affect, "It's not a good feeling, some of my athletes aren't getting along. If someone else was watching I'd be kind of ashamed" (Team #1, BTM, Female, Median, P02).

Athletes also described how these negative interactions can influence and disrupt their team by affecting their perceptions of ingroup ties towards each other. As an example, one athlete described how physically pushing each other can negatively affect cohesion amongst the team:

I wouldn't want that at all, I would want that to stop cause it's just not nice. Even that could hurt someone, then they wouldn't feel good and then they wouldn't be a part of the team anymore because of that one person. I don't think it's good for the team it could break us up. (Team #2, PW, Female, Low, P06)

This physical mode of antisocial behaviour was evident on one of the bantam teams, as one of the athletes described a situation of one athlete deliberately hitting and concussing another teammate. These actions were described as unacceptable and separated team members from this individual:

I didn't like that at all like I was watching and I saw it all perfectly and it just made me feel like he shouldn't, I don't know he shouldn't be doing that kind of stuff especially to your own team. He should of known better. It just made me like that player a little bit less because he like he didn't care about the other player's feelings. (Team #4, BTM, Male, Medium, P11)

### *Justification and acceptance of antisocial behaviour*

Athletes who were identified as high in antisocial behaviour towards teammates frequently reported less of an impact of antisocial teammate behaviour on social identity. This finding was in contrast to the harmful perceptions of the role of intrateam antisocial behaviour on social identity by athletes who reported median or low-antisocial teammate behaviour. High-antisocial athletes often justified or "excused" intrateam antisocial behaviour as having fun or just fooling around with each other with minimal mention of its impact on the team, "I guess they were just fooling around or let's just say chirping each other, a lot of people do that on our team just for fun" (Team #6, MGT, Male, High, P16). Acceptance of antisocial behaviours was displayed when athletes viewed physical antisocial behaviours between team members (e.g., play fighting) as "faking fighting" or "dropping the gloves":

They're just chirping each other and they dropped the gloves, they're just fooling around. I guess they just wanted to show to each other who would win in a fight. I guess it's for fun so you have to cheer the guys on. (Team #6, MGT, Male, High, P16)

In some instances, athletes perceived intrateam antisocial behaviour as strengthening bonds on the team. For instance, when watching a clip of a teammate skating up and engaging another team member in a fight a high-antisocial athlete reported, "[We] just pick on each other it's kind of fun. It kind of keeps you entertained. You have your place in the

social part of the team” (Team #5, BTM, Male, High, P13). A similar sentiment of antisocial behaviour being viewed as positively influencing the team was highlighted by the same athlete when watching an athlete squirt another athlete in the face with water:

It's actually more positive. It makes you feel like you're part of the team. I think that it just makes it good and now you know that you're part of the team. It's good that we like to make people feel welcome. (Team #5, BTM, Male, High, P13)

### Gender and antisocial teammate behaviour

Two gender-specific sub-themes emerged within each of the broader themes associated with how antisocial behaviours occurred and were commonly perceived in relation to social identity (i.e., justification and acceptance of antisocial behaviour and social harms stemming from antisocial behaviour). Specifically, these sub-themes related to (1) physical aggression contributing to negative affect on male teams, and (2) “two-faced” athletes and cliques negatively impacting ingroup ties on female teams. In addition to these themes, one negative case emerged from the interviews. A negative case is “a case that doesn't fit the pattern” (Strauss & Corbin, 2010, p. 84). In this instance, a female goalie on a male team shared how antisocial teammate behaviour directed towards her impacted her social identity.

#### Physical aggression contributing to negative affect on male teams

For the male teams, antisocial behaviour was commonly stated as being verbally and physically overt and directed towards their teammates. Similar to the overall findings, there was a range in male athlete responses towards antisocial teammate behaviour based on the player's frequency of antisocial behaviour. Couched within the *justification and acceptance of antisocial behaviour* theme, high-antisocial males were more accepting and approving of the behaviour in comparison with median and low-antisocial team members. High-antisocial male athletes often rationalised the antisocial interactions such as picking on team members and slashing one another as a means of making fun and joking around with team members. For example, when viewing an antisocial clip of two athletes pushing each other and firing a puck at each other, a high-antisocial male athlete commented, “...it seems kind of friendly, that they are not trying to kill each other” (Team #7, PW, Male, High, P19).

On the other hand, median- and low-antisocial behaviour males were less accepting and at times expressed frustration and decreased ingroup affect associated with the antisocial teammate behaviour – representing males' perspectives within the *social harms stemming from antisocial behaviour* theme. For instance, when viewing two teammates fighting in practice, one median antisocial behaviour team members shared the following:

Kind of anger and just worrying about the status and the kind of relationship that could end up hurting the team. If I was part of one (a fight) it would definitely make me feel like I was less part of the team. (Team #6, MGT, Male, Median, P17)

As another example, when recalling an instance in practice in which a player concussed a team member the athlete expressed his disapproval:

I didn't like that at all, I was watching and I saw it all perfectly and it just made me feel like he shouldn't be doing that kind of stuff especially to your own team... He should have known better, it just made me like that player a little less because he didn't care about the other player's feelings. (Team #4, BTM, Male, Median, P11)

#### “Two-faced” athletes and cliques negatively impacting ingroup ties on female teams

Female athletes reported antisocial behaviour as more verbal and covert than the male athletes particularly for off-ice behaviour away from the rink. Although the stimulated recall clips were of on-ice incidents, the conversations often moved to off-ice antisocial teammate behaviour. For the female athletes, this covert, verbal antisocial intrateam behaviour was often described as “two-faced” and negatively influenced social identity. This was highlighted by one female athlete who stated,

You'll be on the ice you know you have that face where everyone is your friend, but as soon as you're out of it they'll be girls talking bad about other girls on their team. There were just some girls that were saying to her like, not to her face. To her face they were totally nice and then off from her face they were kind of like a different person like they aren't on the same team. (Team #1, BTM, Female, Low, P03)

Concerning the *justification and acceptance of antisocial behaviour* theme, all female athletes – not only athletes reporting high levels of antisocial behaviour towards teammates – inadvertently excused the covert nature of antisocial behaviour among team members by expressing the general sentiment that “it just happens”. For example, a female athlete describes the two-faced nature of team members using a similar phrase:

It happens; it's pretty much like most girls that live a second life. Like they talk bad about girls outside of hockey and then in hockey it's like it never happened... I don't think it is good at all because I don't get how they can act like it's all good at the arena, but as soon as you're [at] school you know cause those girls [are] at a different school you can just say whatever you want. (Team #1, BTM, Female, Low, P03)

Female athletes reported more cliques and instances of exclusion than males as illustrated here:

Well our team is like there is a little bit of cliques here and there. There's one group it's kind of like the older kids, none of the younger kids so it's kind of a little scary sometimes. They think they're too good for our team. (Team #1, BTM, Female, Median, P02)

In addition to age, the perceived thought of why athletes formed cliques on their team was highlighted by another athlete that focused more on athletes being segregated by skill level:

They think they're too good for our team, if they think that then they think “why do I have to be friends with all these people, I'm never going to play with them again cause I'm always going to be on a higher team. (Team #1, BTM, Female, Median, P02)

A third interpretation was offered by one athlete who felt that some athletes just don't know each other well enough: "There are certain people on our team that don't get along. It's just because they barely know each other so they just judge each other I guess" (Team #2, PW, Female, High, P04).

Additionally, female athletes reporting low or median levels of intrateam antisocial behaviour identified a number of social harms related to antisocial behaviour among teammates. The covert antisocial intrateam behaviour was found to affect ingroup ties, particularly perceptions of bonding away from the rink. It was difficult for females to understand why team members would act prosocially at the rink and then antisocially off ice away from the rink.

As soon as we step into the arena you feel it immediately like I'm there with my girls and we're just going to have fun on the ice. Cause as soon as you walk out the doors of the arena it totally just disappears. (Team #1, BTM, Female, Low P03)

In a similar vein, the notion of teammate exclusion emerged in the female athlete interviews. As an example, a female athlete discussed the frustration from a team member being excluded. "We have a couple people that try and ruin things I guess you can say. People don't usually include her in very many things. And she just kind of gets frustrated and [retaliates]" (Team #1, BTM, Female, Median, P02). Interestingly "cliques" were also uncovered when female athletes observed coded positive teammate interventions. When presented a clip of two teammates high fiving each other after a goal in practice, one female athlete described how it was a clique of girls on the team that kept to themselves. Thus, from an outside perspective what appeared to be prosocial was actually antisocial in nature. "They're like one group, and it's kind of the older kids, none of the younger kids ... they usually do that [celebrate/high five]. It's only with their friends" (Team #1, BTM, Female, Median, P02).

### *Negative case: female goalie on a male team*

On one of the male bantam teams, there was a female goalie that played throughout their season. When interviewing her and her teammates, there appeared to be difficulty associated with being a lone female athlete amongst a male team that brought upon intrateam antisocial behaviour that negatively affected her social identity. For instance, the female goalie highlighted how team members would question her ability and place on the team through chirping and poking fun at her, which produced a feeling of sadness and a desire to prove herself to the team. These antisocial behaviours being targeted at her by her male teammates also created a feeling of isolation from the rest of the team and created low feelings of team connectedness:

Made me feel, like I wasn't part of the team and they were excluding me. I felt, like less a member of the team because I didn't feel a part of it because it was mostly all of them teaming up on me. (Team #4, BTM, Female, Low, P12).

Interestingly, although the antisocial verbal behaviours were often viewed by the female athlete and some of her male team members as harmful to her social identity, the female athlete revealed that she felt some of the antisocial

behaviours directed towards her made her feel more like a part of the team (e.g., being treated like any other player on the team).

In some ways it's like a negative influence but, I feel part of the team when that (negative chirping) happens. I know that they do that to each other, and that if they are going to do it to each other I would rather them do it to me as well, 'cause then it is no different for anyone else no matter who they are. (Team#4, BTM, Female, Low, P12)

Taken together, the contrasting views both negative and positive of teammate antisocial behaviour on social identity differentiated the female athlete from the rest of the data.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the social identity and intrateam moral behaviour relationship in youth competitive ice hockey. The study findings extend previous empirical research on social identity and intrateam moral behaviour in youth sport (Bruner, Boardley et al., 2014) by providing an in depth understanding of the relationship between intrateam moral behaviour and social identity. Athletes uniformly perceived prosocial teammate behaviour as increasing athletes' perceptions of social identity. However, the influence of antisocial behaviour was found to vary based on the frequency of antisocial behaviour of the athlete. Median- and low-antisocial behaviour team members perceived antisocial teammate behaviour as harmful towards the thoughts (i.e., cognitive centrality), bonds (i.e., ingroup ties), and feelings (ingroup affect) towards the team. In contrast, high-antisocial behaviour team members didn't perceive their antisocial actions as detrimental to the team and other athletes' perceptions of social identity often viewing them as joking and fooling.

A key finding consistent with a proactive morality was that all athletes conceived prosocial behaviour towards team members as positively impacting social identity. From a theoretical perspective, this result aligns with Bandura's (1999) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) indicating that prosocial behaviour towards teammates may be motivated by the pleasant emotions (e.g., pride) that would be anticipated to result from engaging in prosocial acts towards teammates. Empirically, the finding supports social identity research in sport which found ingroup affect, positive feelings towards the team, to be associated with prosocial behaviour towards teammates in a sample of youth engaged in a variety of high school sports (Bruner, Boardley et al., 2014). The finding also supports key tenets of SIT theory indicating the prosocial behaviour towards group members may in part be driven by an individual's motivation to create and maintain a positive self-concept including the social groups they are a part of (Tajfel, 1981).

Unlike the uniform perceptions of prosocial teammate behaviour on social identity, athletes' perceptions of the effects of antisocial behaviour towards teammates on social identity differed depending on the frequency with which they reported engaging in such behaviour. To elaborate, athletes reporting median or low frequencies of antisocial behaviour

towards teammates viewed antisocial teammate behaviour as harmful to social identity. Similar to the prosocial behaviour finding, this is consistent with SIT and SCT theories. For SCT, the result is consistent with Bandura's (1999) suggestion that people refrain from engaging in activities that have negative emotional outcomes (i.e., socially and/or personally). For SIT, the finding supports Tajfel's supposition that individual's may be motivated to refrain from antisocial behaviour towards group members for fear of diminishing the positive self-concept of the group.

In contrast to the athletes who reported engaging in median and low frequencies of intrateam antisocial behaviour, the athletes who reported engaging in a high frequency of antisocial behaviour justified and downplayed the negative outcomes of such conduct. In terms of how athletes justified such behaviours, numerous statements reflected mechanisms of moral disengagement (see Bandura, 1991; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2011). Moral disengagement is a collective term representing eight psychosocial mechanisms through which people can justify and rationalise harmful acts and prevent anticipating negative emotions (e.g., guilt, shame) that should normally deter such behaviour (Bandura, 1991, 2002). Four mechanisms that were evident in athletes who reported high frequency of antisocial behaviour towards teammates when discussing such conduct were moral justification, euphemistic labelling, advantageous comparison and diffusion of responsibility.

Moral justification involves cognitive reconstrual of transgressive behaviour as achieving social or moral purposes, thus rendering it personally and socially acceptable (Bandura, 1991). Athletes who engaged frequently in antisocial teammate behaviours evidenced this mechanism by portraying beneficial and positive outcomes for social identity stemming from intrateam antisocial behaviour. For example, one athlete morally justified engaging in a fight with another teammate:

It's actually more positive, it makes you feel like you're part of the team. I think that it just makes it good and now you know that you're part of the team. It's good that we like to make people feel welcome. (Team #5, BTM, Male, High, P13)

As evidenced by the previous example, athletes who engaged in moral justification to rationalise the antisocial teammate behaviours also used euphemistic labelling, involving the selective use of language to cognitively disguise the transgressive acts as less harmful (Bandura, 1999). In this instance, the athlete described how fighting with a team member was a part of "making the athlete feel welcome". Use of another moral disengagement mechanism – advantageous comparison – was also evident. This mechanism involves comparing a harmful act with one perceived to be more heinous, thus making the former behaviour appear trivial in comparison. For example, one male antisocial athlete indicated "...it [shooting pucks at each other] seems kind of friendly that they are not trying to kill each other" (P19). Through use of advantageous comparison, the athlete is implying firing pucks at one another is inconsequential – or could even be deemed friendly – when – or even.

A final mechanism – diffusion of responsibility – was also apparent. Diffusion of responsibility involves diminishing

person accountability for harmful behaviour and/or its outcomes through the division of labour, group decision-making or group action (Bandura, 1991). In sport, group decision-making (i.e., collective decisions relating to engagement in transgressive acts) or group action (i.e., collective engagement in a harmful action) are most often seen (see Boardley & Kavussanu, 2011). Of the two, group action was manifested here. An example of this is seen in one player who said,

I guess they were just fooling around or let's just say chirping each other, a lot of people do that on our team just for fun. (Team #6, MGT, Male, High, P16)

As seen earlier, euphemistic labelling is again evident here, with the athlete sanitising the nature of antisocial behaviour by describing it as "just fooling around". As such, the current findings support Bandura's (1991) theory in that athletes who engaged frequently in antisocial behaviour evidenced moral disengagement when discussing such actions. As such, the current findings are consistent with the developing body of literature highlighting the importance of moral disengagement for our understanding of antisocial behaviour in sport (e.g., Boardley, *in press*).

Gender-specific themes relating to antisocial behaviour towards teammates and social identity made unique contributions to the extant literature. More specifically, our findings showed how male athletes reported more verbal and physically overt antisocial behaviour while females reported more covert, verbal antisocial intrateam behaviour. This discovery adds to current findings that show males engage more frequently than females in antisocial behaviour towards teammates (e.g., Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009; Kavussanu et al., 2009). Gender also appeared to play a role in how antisocial teammate behaviour influenced social identity. More specifically, median- and low-antisocial male athletes reported how physical antisocial teammate behaviour was a source of frustration for the athletes decreasing ingroup affect. The impact of off-ice antisocial verbal behaviour by females (e.g., two faced, covert, verbal behaviour behind athletes backs) on ingroup ties of the team was observed. Collectively, the findings contribute to the role of gender in understanding antisocial behaviour towards team members and social identity.

The presence of cliques and greater covert, verbal antisocial behaviour among females particularly in off-ice settings was also notable in conjunction with recent work on the facilitative and debilitating consequences of subgroups in sport (Martin, Evans, & Spink, 2016; Martin, Wilson, Evans, & Spink, 2015). In their discussion of coaches' and athletes' perceptions of subgroups, Martin and colleagues (2015) identified both positive (e.g., motivation, support) and negative outcomes associated with subgroups. The authors also reported the connotation of cliques as negative subgroups. Based on the previous findings identifying the potential for subgroups to be inclusive or problematic demonstrating exclusionary behaviours resulting in the debilitating outcomes to the individual and team (Martin et al., 2015), the off-ice and clique findings reported by the female athletes in the present study were problematic decreasing ingroup ties.

During the analysis, a negative case (i.e., a case that did not fit in with the pattern of the data) was revealed when a

female goalie reported conflicting feelings associated with antisocial behaviours from her all-male teammates. This player shared feelings of isolation and decreased social identity, but also indicated that negative verbal comments or “chirps” from team members made her feel like a part of the team. At first glance, a negative case may appear to negate the main findings; however, the inclusion of such a case offers richness and complexity in exploring the social identity construct (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Research in the physical education context has also used negative cases to help fully explain teachers’ perceptions of enhancers and inhibitors to physical education curriculum change (Bechtel & Sullivan, 2007).

The use of stimulated recall combining observation and qualitative interviews provided novel insight into perceptions of social identity and teammate behaviour in youth sport. As a concrete benefit of the method, a female athlete watching teammates high five, which was categorised as a prosocial behaviour was perceived to be an antisocial behaviour due to the team members acting as a clique and only congratulating themselves after a good play. Without the use of stimulated recall as a method, the connection and richness of the observation data and athlete’s interpretations would be lost. The findings support the utility of the method to examine moral behaviour in sport (Shapcott et al., 2007; Tractlet et al., 2011).

As with any study, this one is not without its limitations and the findings should therefore be interpreted with these in mind. First, the research involved the lone perspective of the athletes on the observed teammate behaviour. It may be beneficial to gain alternate perspectives of the athlete moral behaviours from coaches and parents. Second, the video observation sessions were taped during two practices mid-season. To address this limitation, future research may examine teammate interactions in competition as well as off-ice settings given the noted off-ice issues particularly for females (see Rutten et al., 2008 for an example of such an approach). A third limitation of the study was that athletes were not separated by gender prior to data analysis, which may have led to some gender-specific themes not being identified. Although gender-specific themes emerged (i.e., greater off-ice issues and cliques for females, more physical, overt behaviour in males), the identification of such themes was not the primary focus of the study. However, it may be interesting in future research to analyse data from males and females separately to see if any further on-and off-ice gender-specific themes relating to moral behaviour and social identity become apparent.

Beyond those already identified when discussing study limitations above, there are number of additional avenues of future research stemming from the current work. For example, based on the rationalisations offered by athletes reporting high frequencies of antisocial behaviour (e.g., goofing around, having fun), it would appear constructive to more in-depthly examine the moral disengagement mechanisms used by athletes to justify antisocial behaviour (e.g., Tractlet et al., 2011). It may also be beneficial to examine the role of gender in the social identity–moral behaviour relationship in a larger sample using advanced statistics to

account for the nested nature of the participants on intact teams (e.g., multilevel analyses) and explore the efficacy of a coaching intervention to improve social identity and intra-team behaviour in youth sport. Finally, researchers could also investigate social identity and moral behaviour in other sport settings beyond the competitive youth hockey environment, such as interdependent sport settings in which athletes train together but compete separately (Evans, Eys, & Bruner, 2012).

In addition to the conceptual and empirical contributions of the study to the extant literature, the findings have practical implications for coaches and sport practitioners. The results offer support for coaches and practitioners to allocate time with their athletes to establish a team social identity and promote prosocial teammate behaviour and dissuade antisocial teammate behaviour in practice, competition and social settings. The reported differences in perceptions of antisocial behaviour by high-antisocial team members are a finding for coaches to be cognisant of with their teams. Furthermore, the gender findings provide additional considerations for coaches of male (e.g., to watch for overt, physical antisocial teammate behaviour) and female (e.g., to watch for covert, verbal antisocial teammate behaviour and cliques at the rink and at social settings) teams.

## Conclusion

Since Tajfel and Turner’s early research in the 1970s, laboratory and field research highlights how ones’ group identification may have important implications for moral behaviour (Hornsey, 2008). The results from the present study support and extend the salient role that social identity may play on teammate behaviour in youth sport and vice versa. Youth sport coaches and practitioners should aim to build a sport team environment to foster social identity and prosocial behaviour towards team members.

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