

Group Dynamics in an Elite Canadian Nordic Ski Team



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Thank you!

The results from this study have made a valuable contribution to sport psychology and group dynamics research. Please take a moment to read through this information sheet to gain a better understanding of the project and the key findings that were discovered through your involvement. Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated!

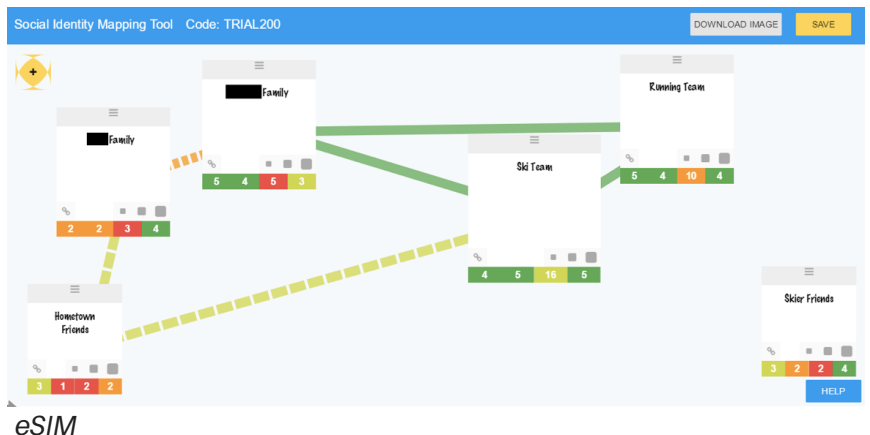
What were the goals of our study?

The social environment within individual sport teams may have a significant influence on the success, development and well-being of athletes. Although group dynamics concepts such as social identity and team cohesion have been explored in team sports settings, research has not yet focused on the group dynamics of elite individual sport teams. With this in mind, we aimed to explore elite individual sport athletes' perceptions of social identity and team cohesion, and the potential influence they may have on the success and development of the athlete in a group of athletes who train together all year, and then compete against each other.

What did we do?

We used a mixed-methods approach with 6 members of a Canadian National Development Centre Ski Team. Each skier completed a Social Identity Map (eSIM), and two semi-structured interviews (one in the early phase of the season when athletes were training together, and one about half way through the season when athletes were in the midst of competing against each other). Thematic analysis was used to explore potential differences in perceptions of social identity and cohesion between the two different time points.

The eSIM tool creates a social identity map for participants. They can display the importance and relevance of social groups in their lives by changing the size, location and colour scheme of boxes. They can also make boxes connect with different coloured lines to show different levels of connectivity.



Key Findings

Team Membership

- Teammates are people that athletes socialize with the most, almost exclusively
- Team membership crossed the mind of all participants everyday
- Team membership gives athletes status in both the elite skiing world, and the non-skiing world; seen as comparable to a full-time occupation

Conflict

- Extended time spent together (i.e., training camps, trips) often resulted in irritability between teammates
- Conflict arose when managing emotions surrounding outcomes of selection races

Team Cohesion

- Cohesion seen as imperative for team success
- Important to maintain a positive team mindset in order to achieve positive team and individual results
- Cohesion appeared to peak at TP1, when athlete focus was on development, and not competition
- Aim was to establish team as cohesive unit early, and then maintain to withstand the challenges of a competitive season together

Practical Implications for Athletes and Coaches

Athletes

- Strive for team success to create a supportive and positive team culture
- Teammates should be viewed as support networks, never rivals, both in and out of competition

Coaches

- Develop and promote a positive team culture as far in advance of the race season as possible in order to have it stand up to the stresses of race season
- Be mindful of clashing personalities and duration of time together when planning team trips

Future Directions

- Aim to better understand the benefits and challenges involved in being part of individual sport team settings, in order to develop the most productive athlete development infrastructure possible
- Investigate the possible relation between social identity and conflict in individual sports teams
- Explore the impact which subgroups have on team cohesion and performance
- Aim to better understand the role which individuals play on the day to day mindset and enjoyment of their teammates in sports

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