



# How teammate behaviors relate to athlete affect, cognition, and behaviors: A daily diary approach within youth sport



Alex J. Benson<sup>a,\*</sup>, Mark W. Bruner<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario, Ontario, Canada

<sup>b</sup> School of Physical and Health Education, Nipissing University, North Bay, Ontario, Canada

## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** The current study examined prosocial and antisocial behaviors from teammates as predictors of within-person differences over time in self-reported prosocial and antisocial teammate behaviors toward teammates and social identity strength.

**Design:** Over a 10-day period, a daily diary approach was used to collect 848 observations from 100; male,  $n = 45$ ; female,  $n = 55$  youth hockey athletes who were between 11 and 17 years of age ( $M_{\text{age}} = 13.24$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ).

**Method:** Participants completed daily diaries related to their experiences of prosocial and antisocial behavior from teammates, the prosocial and antisocial behaviors they directed toward teammates, and social identity strength. Linear mixed-level modelling was used to examine how daily experiences of moral behavior from teammates over-time were linked to within-person differences in moral behaviors toward teammates and social identity strength.

**Results:** Multilevel analyses showed significant within-person variance in athletes' moral behaviors toward teammates and their social identity strength. These differences were predicted by daily experiences of prosocial and antisocial behavior from teammates. Athletes reported a stronger social identity on days they experienced a higher number of prosocial behaviors, and a weaker social identity on days they experienced a higher number of antisocial behaviors. The frequency of daily experienced prosocial and antisocial behaviors interacted in predicting self-reported prosocial and antisocial behaviors toward teammates.

**Conclusion:** Daily prosocial and antisocial behaviors from teammates are systematically related to the ways that athletes behave toward their teammates as well as the strength with which they identify with their sport team.

## 1. Introduction

Scholars have called for greater attention to how the social environments in sport teams contribute to athlete experiences (Martin, Bruner, Eys, & Spink, 2014; Smith, 2003). A social environment refers to the nature of interactions as well as the quality of ongoing interpersonal relationships among social actors in a particular social setting (Shaw, 1981). Thus, the social environments within sport teams are neither monolithic (i.e., sport teams have distinct social environments), nor are they experienced uniformly by athletes (i.e., individual experiences differ as a result of how one interacts with others in the group) (Holt, Black, Tamminen, Fox, & Mandigo, 2008). Several lines of inquiry evidence the significance of athletes' social environments on cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes. Examples include research showing positive links between attraction to the task aspects of a team and the use of more adaptive pre-competition coping strategies

(Wolf, Eys, Sadler, & Kleinert, 2015), general psychological need satisfaction and emotional regulation (Taylor & Bruner, 2012), and perceived sociomoral atmosphere and prosocial behavior (Rutten et al., 2007). Moreover, the social environments within youth sport teams may be particularly consequential for athletes. Relationships outside the family unit become increasingly salient during adolescence, with peer acceptance surfacing as a highly relevant goal for youth (Harris, 1995).

Theoretical accounts from developmental and social psychological perspectives cast the interaction between individuals and their peers as a key issue relevant to social behavior (e.g., Bandura, 1991) and youth development more generally (e.g., Brown, 2004; Harris, 1995). In this regard, sport offers ample opportunities to meet and interact with other youth (Smith, 2003), with some evidence suggesting that adolescent athletes enjoy greater popularity and status as a result of being a member of a distinct social group (Sussman, Pokhrel,

\* Corresponding author. Social Science Centre Rm 8408, Western University, London, Ontario N6A 5C2, Canada.  
E-mail address: [abenson3@uwo.ca](mailto:abenson3@uwo.ca) (A.J. Benson).

Ashmore, & Brown, 2007). Although the nature of peer influence is nuanced, Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker (2006) provide a useful framework for understanding the hierarchically embedded nature of peer influence in youth sport teams. This framework situates emergent group processes (e.g., cohesion, motivational climate) at the highest level of social complexity, with interpersonal relationships forming a lower level of complexity (e.g., friendships). However, specific interactions that occur between teammates forms the basis of youth athletes' experiences with their peers (Holt et al., 2008). Despite the importance of teammate interactions as they pertain to sport experiences, scarce attention has been devoted to examining how teammate interactions relate to within-person changes in athlete cognition, affect, and behavior. Examining within-person changes over time provide insight into the dynamics of how youth are influenced by (and adapt to) their social environment (Brown, 2004; Granic & Patterson, 2006). Thus, the current research sought to examine youth athletes' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to prosocial and antisocial behavior from teammates.

Prosocial and antisocial behaviors conceptually map onto the proactive and inhibitive elements of morality, respectively, which makes the experience of such behaviors psychologically meaningful (Bandura, 1999). Whereas *prosocial behavior* refers to acts that are intended to help or benefit others (e.g., encouragement), *antisocial behavior* refers to acts that are harmful or put others at a disadvantage (e.g., verbal abuse) (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Kavussanu, Seal, & Phillips, 2006). Although studies on the antecedents of moral behavior in sport have garnered traction over the past decade, research on consequences of athletes being the recipient of teammate moral behaviors is scarce. One exception is a cross-sectional study showing that being the recipient of more frequent prosocial behavior from teammates corresponds with greater enjoyment, more effort, and higher levels of perceived performance (Al-Yaaribi, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2016). These researchers also found that more frequent antisocial teammate behavior corresponded with less enjoyment and more anger among sport participants. Notwithstanding these insights into the consequences of being the recipient of prosocial and antisocial behavior from teammates, researchers have yet to examine how experiencing such behavior is related to changes in how athletes think, feel, and act in relation to their teammates across time.

### 1.1. Behavioral responses to prosocial and antisocial behavior from teammates

Does being the recipient of prosocial and antisocial behaviors from teammates contribute to differences in how athletes treat their teammates? Theory relevant to this question suggests that, from a social cognitive perspective, observing peers engage in specific behaviors, or being the recipient of such behaviors, can signal to an individual what is permissible or desirable in a particular context (Bandura, 1991). Likewise, a main tenet of interpersonal sensemaking theory is that group members make sense of their environment by constructing explanations for the social interactions they experience in a particular context (Weick, 1995). To facilitate this process, group members create cognitive accounts that link social experiences to specific outcomes, and these cognitive accounts drive social behavior. For example, research on workplace behavior showed that people are more likely to engage in helping behaviors in response to positive workplace interactions, and more likely to engage in counter-productive work behaviors in response to negative workplace interactions (Spector & Fox, 2002). This is also evident in sport, with research showing that youth athletes' perceptions of poor sportspersonship by their coach and teammates was positively linked to their personal sportspersonship behaviors (Shields, LaVoi, Bredemeier, & Power, 2007). In a study of prosocial and antisocial behaviors toward teammates, athletes who perceived their teammates to engage in higher levels of antisocial behavior toward one another, also consequently reported engaging in more frequent antisocial behavior

toward teammates (Benson, Bruner, & Eys, 2017). Thus, with respect to how youth athletes behaviorally respond to daily prosocial and antisocial behaviors from teammates, we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 1.** Athletes will report more frequent prosocial behaviors on days they experience more prosocial behaviors from teammates.

**Hypothesis 2.** Athletes will report more frequent antisocial behaviors on days they experience more antisocial behaviors from teammates.

### 1.2. Cognitive and affective responses to prosocial and antisocial behavior from teammates

The second area of interest is how experiencing prosocial and antisocial behaviors from teammates is related to how athletes think and feel about their sport team across time. Here, we focus on the construct of social identity, which is “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 member” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). Cameron (2004) conceptualized social identity as a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive and affective components: *Ingroup ties* refers to the psychological bonds to a group; *cognitive centrality* refers to the value ascribed to group membership; and *ingroup affect* refers to the positive emotions associated with group membership (Cameron, 2004). Social identities can govern people's cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to social stimuli—insofar as people strongly identify with a particular group (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). For example, ingroup affect measured earlier in the season positively predicted prosocial behavior toward teammates later in the season (Bruner, Boardley, & Côté, 2014). In a separate study, ingroup ties positively predicted personal and social skills as well as initiative of youth sport participants (Bruner et al., 2017). Although social identification processes appear to affect interpersonal behavior, extant theory provides a basis to suggest that interpersonal behaviors may also strengthen or diminish an athlete's social identity.

The idea that the degree to which one identifies with a group can change across time is supported by self-categorization theory, which states that social identity salience is driven by the degree to which contextual factors highlight the momentary relevance of a particular social category and/or the degree to which group membership is cognitively accessible (Oakes, Turner, & Haslam, 1991). There is also research pointing to how people's motives for identification can contribute to changes in social identity across time (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2012). More relevant to the current study, the nature of social interactions within a group can also shape one's social identity (Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005). For example, interactions that make an individual feel socially validated as a group member can positively affect social identity strength over time (Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005). Although studies in the sport domain have yet to examine within-person changes in social identity strength, there is some evidence that group-related perceptions relate to social identity. For example, perceived groupness (Martin, Balderson, Hawkins, Wilson, & Bruner, 2017) and perceived outcome interdependence (Bruner, Eys, Evans, & Wilson, 2015) were positively associated with ingroup ties, cognitive centrality, and ingroup affect. Notably, a study using stimulated recall methodology found that prosocial teammate behaviors were perceived to positively affect social identity strength, whereas antisocial teammate behaviors were generally perceived to negatively affect social identity strength (Bruner, Boardley, Allan, Root, et al., 2017). Based on these findings together with extant theory on the dynamic nature of social identity processes, we hypothesize that experiencing prosocial teammate behaviors would enhance an athlete's sense of group membership, whereas experiencing antisocial teammate behaviors may diminish such feelings:

**Hypothesis 3.** Athletes will report higher social identity scores (i.e., a

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