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DOI:
10.1080/1612197X.2021.1891119

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Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Danioni, F, Kavussanu, M, Regalia, C & Barni, D 2021, '“My teammates think it is alright to fight to protect friends”: collective moral disengagement in team sports', *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 598-612. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2021.1891119

Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal

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"My Teammates Think it is Alright to Fight to Protect Friends": Collective Moral Disengagement in Team Sports

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In Press: International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology
https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2021.1891119

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Abstract

Moral disengagement refers to a set of cognitive mechanisms used to justify transgressive behaviours in order to avoid self-sanctions and minimize negative emotions. Moral disengagement has been widely studied in sport psychology, but only at the individual level. Collective moral disengagement (CMD), which refers to the *shared beliefs* in justifying negative actions performed by the members of one's group, has received little research attention. In this study, we aimed to examine whether CMD and performance motivational climate predict adolescents' antisocial behaviour towards teammates and opponents in team sports. We surveyed 172 Italian adolescent athletes (Mean age = 15.41 ± 1.73 years; 51.7% females). Participants completed a questionnaire measuring CMD, performance motivational climate and antisocial behaviour towards teammates and opponents. We found positive direct effects of CMD and performance motivational climate on antisocial behaviours. CMD was also related to antisocial behaviour towards teammates more strongly when performance motivational climate in the team was high. Our findings suggest the need to consider collective morality to better understand young athletes' antisocial behaviour in sport.

Keywords: moral justification, performance climate, antisocial behaviours, adolescents, team sport.

"My Teammates Think it is Alright to Fight to Protect Friends": Collective Moral Disengagement in Team Sports

Introduction

The study of morality has a long research tradition in developmental, social, and clinical psychology (e.g., Killen, 2018; Prentice et al., 2019). Many scholars have attempted to understand why individuals engage in inappropriate behaviours. Albert Bandura (1990, 1999) has detailed a complex process describing how moral agency is regulated. According to Bandura, moral agency has two aspects, namely inhibitive and proactive morality. While the former implies the power to resist from behaving inhumanely, the latter is the power to behave humanely. Individuals experience self-sanctions and negative emotions such as for example guilt and shame when they violate their moral standards. Differently, they experience positive self-reactions when they act in line with these standards (Bandura, 1991; Bandura et al., 1996). These reactions regulate behaviour anticipatorily. Indeed, people are more likely to avoid adopting those kinds of behaviours that may cause them self-sanctions and negative emotions.

This self-regulatory process can be disrupted by Moral Disengagement (MD). Bandura (1990) theorized the existence of eight mechanisms of moral disengagement, which are: moral justification, advantageous comparison, euphemistic labelling, distortion of consequences, attribution of blame, dehumanization, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility. MD allows the cognitive restructuring of an unethical behaviour. Indeed, this is a fundamental process through which moral agency is regulated. Specifically, the set of mechanisms which compose MD are adopted in order to reduce the negative effects of transgressive actions, avoid self-sanctions, and redefine the personal role in causing harm to other people. This process enables disengagement from usual moral standards and reduction of guilt or other negative emotions arising from their violation. The more frequently people use these mechanisms, the higher is the level of MD. Bandura explains in this way how people are likely to adopt unethical behaviours without feeling guilty for this.

MD has been studied in a variety of fields, from organizational environments (e.g., Egels-Zandén, 2017; Martin et al., 2014) to interpersonal relationships (e.g., Haddock & Jimerson, 2017; Kokkinos et al., 2016). Research has clearly shown the relevance of MD in facilitating transgressive behaviour (e.g., Bandura et al., 2001) towards the self, like the alcohol and drug assumption (e.g., Newton et al., 2014; Quinn & Bussey, 2015), but also towards other people/things, like bullying and aggression (e.g., Barchia & Bussey, 2011; Russo et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2016).

Moral Disengagement in Sport

Sport and physical activity contexts are highly relevant to the study of morality (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2011; Shields & Bredemeier, 2007; Weiss et al., 2008). Indeed, due to their "social nature", sport contexts provide occasions for both prosocial and antisocial actions, such as helping an injured opponent or cheating (Kavussanu, 2008). As emphasized by Boardley and Kavussanu (2007) "players are often evaluated based on the outcomes of their actions rather than the means through which they achieve them" (p. 609); this makes clear the relevance for studying the extent to which athletes are morally disengaged in their sport activity.

In order to capture the complexity of moral disengagement in sport, researchers have used a variety of methods, both qualitative (e.g., Corrion et al., 2009) and quantitative (e.g., Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011). Research has shown that MD in sport tends to be higher in males and in younger athletes, and it is respectively negatively and positively related to prosocial and antisocial behaviours towards teammates opponents (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007, 2009; Lucidi et al., 2008; Stanger et al., 2013). Personal values (Šukys & Jansonienė, 2010) and personality traits (Jones et al., 2017) were found to be related to the extent to which young athletes morally disengage in their sport environment. Specifically, moral values, such as contract maintenance and obedience, and narcissism, have been respectively negatively and positively related to MD (Jones et al., 2017; Šukys & Jansonienė, 2010).

From Individual to Collective Moral Disengagement

Both in sport and in non-sport domains, the literature (e.g., Bandura et al., 2001; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2011) has mainly focused on moral disengagement as an individual difference that is assumed to influence people's ethical decision making and behaviour. However, recent studies (e.g., Gini et al., 2015) have emphasized how self-regulation of morality is not influenced by internal psychological factors alone. Indeed, interpersonal and social factors need to be considered when examining moral disengagement, such as peer group morality. Bandura introduced collective moral disengagement (CMD) as "an emergent group-level property arising from the interactive, coordinative, and synergistic group dynamics" (White et al., 2009, p. 43), which refers to the beliefs in justifying negative actions shared within a significant social group. CMD can contribute to the development of group norms, collective ways of thinking and behaving and includes the same eight mechanisms of individual moral disengagement (IMD). Thus, the regulation of moral conduct at the collective level is influenced by the same set of mechanisms that compose IMD. A practical example may be helpful to better understand the difference between individual and collective moral disengagement (IMD and CMD). When we focus on IMD, we consider the individual's belief that "some people deserve to be treated like animals", this being a clear example of dehumanization. In contrast, by shifting the focus on CMD we consider the extent to which the individual believes that the members of his/her group think some people deserve to be treated like animals. Indeed, an athlete may not personally consider that other people deserve to be treated like animals, but if his/her teammates do so this might influence the athlete's behaviours during sport competitions.

CMD is a recent conceptualization of the MD construct, and it has been mainly investigated in the classroom, which is a context especially germane to peer influence (Gini et al., 2015). CMD in the classroom was found to play a key role in influencing peer aggression and bystander behaviour in bullying among pre-adolescents and adolescents (e.g., Gini et al., 2014, 2020). In a study carried out on a sample of 918 adolescents the relation between IMD and peer aggression was stronger at high levels of CMD. More recently, Gini and colleagues (2020) highlighted how the

negative relation between IMD and moral distress derived from observing peer aggression was significantly moderated by students' perceptions of CMD. CMD is also directly and positively related to passive bystanding bullying behaviour. All in all, the perception of the group being overall morally disengaged influences the relation between IMD and unethical behaviours (Thornberg et al., 2018).

In light of the above findings, CMD appears to be a construct highly significant to sport. Sport teams are extremely relevant social groups, particularly during adolescence. Indeed, adolescents who practice team sport share an important part of their daily experiences with their teammates and being a member of a sport team is related to beliefs and values and involved in identity construction (Danioni & Barni, 2019a). However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has empirically investigated CMD in sport.

Antisocial Behaviour in Sport

A great amount of sport literature has focused on antisocial behaviour (e.g., Kavussanu, 2008; Kavussanu & Al-Yaaribi, 2019). Antisocial behaviour in sport refers to voluntary behaviour intended to harm or disadvantage another individual (Kavussanu et al., 2006; Sage et al., 2006), as for example intentionally fouling or injuring an opponent. Researchers have also distinguished between antisocial behaviours directed towards teammates and opponents (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009). The behaviours directed towards teammates are mostly verbal ones, while those directed towards opponents are verbal and physical acts (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009).

In a recent review on antisocial behaviours in sport, Kavussanu and Al-Yaaribi (2019) highlighted that "the construct most consistently associated with antisocial behaviour in the context of sport is moral disengagement" (p. 6). As already mentioned, moral disengagement mechanisms operate by cognitively restructuring antisocial behaviours and its consequences, thus making them more likely to be adopted. Literature in sport psychology is consistent in showing a strong positive relation between moral disengagement and antisocial behaviour, especially toward opponents (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009, 2010; Hodge & Gucciardi, 2015; Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011).

Research has also consistently shown how both personal (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010; Nicholls, 1989) and social environmental factors, in the form of coaching, parental and peer influences (e.g., Benson & Bruner, 2018; Danioni & Barni, 2019b; Hodge & Gucciardi, 2015), may be related to the extent to which young athletes act in an antisocial manner. Among others, the role of performance oriented motivational climate has been considered. Having its theoretical roots in the achievement goal theory (Ames, 1992), the situational goal structure labelled as motivational climate can be performance or mastery oriented. In a performance climate there is emphasis on normative success and outperforming others, whereas in a mastery climate the emphasis of the context is instead on participation.

Performance climate has gained a lot of attention also in the sport domain, and it is the climate created by the team coach whenever he/she evaluates success using normative criteria such as winning, rewards only the best athletes, and puts emphasis on doing better than others (e.g., Bortoli et al., 2012). It is a relevant group level construct (Papaioannou et al., 2004) and it has been extensively considered in team sport with respect to its direct influence on several transgressive behaviours (e.g., Danioni & Barni, 2019b; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009; Harwood et al., 2015; Hodge & Gucciardi, 2015; Stanger et al., 2018). The influence of performance climate on moral behaviours has been also considered together with IMD (e.g., Stanger et al., 2018). Indeed, when the emphasis is on outperforming others, unsportsmanlike behaviours may be approved by adopting moral disengagement mechanisms. In a recent study of football players recruited from three countries, performance climate positively predicted doping likelihood and augmented the positive relation between IMD and doping likelihood (Kavussanu et al., 2020).

The Present Study

In sum, research has consistently highlighted the relevance of IMD in youth sport (e.g., (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007, 2009; Stanger et al., 2013). However, to date no study has investigated the role of CMD in antisocial sport behaviour. As indicated above, this construct has the potential to influence antisocial behaviour of athletes who take part in team sport. The purpose

of this study was to examine whether CMD predicts antisocial behaviour towards teammates and opponents in adolescent athletes taking part in team sport. Based on the previous literature (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009; Hodge & Gucciardi, 2015; Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011), our first hypothesis (H1) was that CMD would be positively associated with antisocial behaviours both towards teammates and opponents.

The second predictor of antisocial behaviour examined in this study was performance motivational climate. In line with the available literature on team motivational climate (e.g., Kavussanu, 2006; Miller et al., 2005), we expected performance climate to be positively related to the two antisocial behaviours (H2). Performance climate in the team could also moderate the moral disengagement-antisocial behaviours link, by reinforcing the possibility to morally disengage to enable antisocial behaviours. We therefore examined the moderating role of performance climate on the relation between CMD and antisocial behaviours towards teammates and opponents. We expected performance climate to moderate this relation (H3) such that CMD would be more strongly associated with antisocial behaviours at higher levels of performance climate (e.g., Kavussanu et al., 2020). Considering performance climate will allow us to better understand the specific role of CMD in influencing antisocial behaviours in team sport both towards teammates and opponents.

Method

Participants and Procedure

One hundred and seventy-two[1] adolescents (51.7% female) practicing team sports took part to the present study. All the participants were high school students, ranging from 13 to 19 years of age (M = 15.41, SD = 1.73) and living in Northern or Central Italy. Most of them played volleyball (60.4%), followed by soccer (19.8%), basketball (12.2%) and rugby (7.6%); they trained with their team on average 3.1 times per week (SD = .66).

[1] The a priori power analysis, with alpha = .001, power = .99 and a medium effect size (ES f^2) of .15 (Cohen, 1988) showed that the sample size was appropriate for the analysis (G*Power 3.1; Faul et al., 2009). Part of this dataset was used in the two studies [masked for review].

Participants were recruited by contacting their sport teams via the coach or the team manager and were informed about the main objectives of the study. Adolescents and their parents were informed by letter about the main objectives of the research, and they were advised that participation would have been free and voluntary. Those who consented to participate in the study filled in a self-report and anonymous questionnaire either before or after a regular training session, in the presence of the coach and of a research staff member. Additionally, written consent from parents was obtained for minor participants (response rate: 86%). The study was approved by the [masked for review] and followed the APA ethical guidelines for research. The principal investigator of this study had previously completed the National Institute for Health training course "Protecting Human Research Participants" (Certificate Number: masked for review).

Measures

Socio-demographic information. Participants were asked questions about their personal characteristics (sex and age) as well as their sportive activity (type of sport practiced, number of weekly trainings).

Collective moral disengagement. We adapted Gini et al.'s (2014) 17-item scale, originally developed to measure adolescents' CMD in the classroom, to the team sport context. Respondents were introduced to the scale as follows: "Please rate the extent to which you think each opinion is shared (or not) among your teammates". Item examples are "How many teammates in your team sport think that if kids fight and misbehave in sport it is their coach's fault?" (displacement of responsibility) and "How many teammates in your team sport think that it is okay to insult a teammate because beating him/her is worse?" (advantageous comparison). Respondents were asked to answer on a 5-point Likert scale which had the following labels: "None", "About a quarter (25%) of teammates", "About a half (50%) of teammates", "About three quarters (75%) of teammates" and "Everyone". The original scale consists of 17 items which cover all eight mechanisms (from 1 for euphemistic labelling to 4 for distortion of consequences) and provides a total score of collective moral disengagement.

We carried out a Confirmatory Factor Analysis with a one factor solution on our adaptation of the scale using maximum likelihood estimation with AMOS program. Since the theoretically expected solution was not completely satisfactory (χ^2/df = 2.02; CFI = .86; RMSEA = .08) we deleted item 2 ("How many teammates in your team sport think that it is okay to tell small lies because they don't really do any harm?") and item 10 ("How many teammates in your team sport think that it is alright to fight when your team's reputation is threatened?") because they both had a weak loading on the factor. This resulted in an improved model that reached acceptable fit indices, χ^2/df = 1.88; CFI = .90; RMSEA = .07 (Bentler, 1990; Brown & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999). We therefore used a 15 items version of the CMD scale.

Performance climate. We used the Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire-12 (PMCSQ-12; Bortoli & Robazza, 2004) to measure adolescents' perception of the performance motivational climate in their team. The scale was derived from the work of Newton et al. (2000) and tested on Italian male and female adolescent team sport players (Bortoli et al., 2009). Participants were asked to respond on a 5-point scale (from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree) referring to the extent to which they perceived the climate described within their sport team. The subscale measuring performance climate is composed of 6 items (item example: "On this team, only the top players 'get noticed' by the coach").

Antisocial behaviour. We measured antisocial behaviours towards both teammates and opponents using the two relevant subscales of the Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Sport Scale (PABSS)[2] (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009). Adolescents were asked to rate the frequency with which they engaged in each behaviour described on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1= never to 5= very often). Example items are: "While playing sport this season, I intentionally distracted an opponent"

[2] For this study, we used 11 items of the full scale (originally composed of 20 items, since it also assesses prosocial behaviour) after a pilot study carried out on adolescents practicing the four team sports included in the study. We eliminated two items from the antisocial behaviours towards opponents subscale since they were not applicable for the volleyball players who took part in the study, as volleyball does not generally present the circumstances for that specific behaviour, since it is not a contact sport (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009)

(6 item, antisocial behaviour towards an opponent) and "While playing sport this season, I verbally abused a teammate" (5 item, antisocial behaviour towards a teammate).

Data Analysis

After calculating descriptive statistics and bivariate Pearson correlations between the study variables, we tested the relation between CMD and antisocial behaviours in sport and the moderating role of performance climate in this relation through two hierarchical regression models, one for each type of antisocial behaviour (i.e., towards teammates and towards opponents). In considering this relation, we controlled for adolescents' sex because of their well-known influence on IMD in sport (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007, 2009). In Step 1 adolescents' sex (0 = male, 1 = female) was entered in the model to control for its effect on antisocial behaviours. In Step 2 the role of CMD and performance climate was examined, whereas in Step 3 the interaction term between these two predictors was added. CMD and performance climate were mean-centred before computing the interaction terms to avoid multicollinearity and for easier interpretation of model coefficients (Aiken & West, 1991). Simple slope analysis was performed to probe any significant interaction effect. The simple slopes were tested at ± 1 SD of performance climate scores. All analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) version 24 (IBM, 2016).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Before carrying out the regression analysis, we checked the skewness and kurtosis for all the variables considered. They showed a reasonably normal distribution (CMD: skewness= .64, SE=.19 and kurtosis= .29, SE=.37; performance climate: skewness= -.02, SE=.19 and kurtosis= -.66, SE=.37; antisocial behaviours towards teammates: skewness= .82, SE=.19 and kurtosis= .33, SE=.37; antisocial behaviours towards opponents: skewness= .86, SE=.19 and kurtosis= .22, SE=.37). We also checked graphically for the homoscedasticity assumption, which was satisfied in both regression models. No outliers were eliminated.

Five participants did not respond to the CMD scale, so they were not included in the correlation and moderation analyses, which were therefore carried out on 167 respondents.

Main Analysis

In Table 1 we present Cronbach's alphas, and descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations of all the study variables.

[Table 1 near here]

Based on cut off guidelines from previous literature (e.g., Loewenthal, 2004; Williams, 1988), Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated good-to-very-good reliability for all scale scores, ranging from .71 for performance climate to .89 for CMD. Adolescents showed moderate levels of both CMD and performance climate. They reported to sometimes engage in antisocial behaviours towards teammates and only slightly more frequently in antisocial behaviours towards opponents. CMD was positively associated with both performance climate and antisocial behaviour towards teammates and opponents. Males reported more frequent antisocial behaviours and higher levels of CMD compared to their female counterparts.

In Table 2 we present the hierarchical regression analyses results.

[Table 2 near here]

CMD was a significant positive predictor of antisocial behaviour towards teammates, and to a much higher extent, towards opponents. Performance climate was also a positive predictor of antisocial behaviour towards teammates and opponents. Importantly, performance climate moderated the relationship between CMD and antisocial behaviours towards teammates, but not opponents. Simple slope analysis indicated that CMD was a stronger predictor of antisocial behaviour towards teammates when adolescents perceived a higher level of performance-oriented climate in their team, $\beta=0.54$, SE=0.09, 95% CI [0.35, 0.73], $p < .001$, compared to when they perceived a lower level of performance climate, $\beta=0.13$, SE=0.12, 95% CI [-0.10, 0.37], $p = 0.276$ (Figure 1).

[Figure 1 about here]

Discussion

Peer group morality is a relevant variable to consider in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of morality in sport. However, moral disengagement, which is the self-regulatory process which allows the cognitive restructuring of an antisocial behaviour, has been studied solely at the individual level in the sport psychology literature (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007, 2011). A few studies carried out in the school context have shown how also interpersonal and social factors, especially the social groups people belong to, may play a key role in moral disengagement process (e.g., Gini et al., 2020; Thornberg et al., 2018).

The current study is the first to examine the construct of collective moral disengagement in team sport athletes. This construct is particularly relevant during adolescence, as sport teams represent an important context to study the role of peer groups on the social development (Bruner et al., 2014).

In support of our first hypothesis (H1), the more adolescents perceive their teammates as tending to justify negative actions by using moral disengagement mechanisms (i.e., high CMD), the higher the frequency of their antisocial behaviours towards opponents, and, to a lesser extent, towards teammates. In other words, CMD had a strong relationship with antisocial behaviour towards the "out-group", namely the opponents. This result was held constant regardless of adolescents' sex as well as the motivational climate characterizing the team. Both antisocial behaviours and CMD were higher for male athletes compared to their female counterparts, in line with previous studies (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007, 2009; Kavussanu & Roberts, 2001).

Performance climate was slightly and positively related to antisocial behaviours towards teammates and opponents, supporting our second hypothesis (H2). It seems therefore that in a context perceived as emphasizing success and outperforming others, athletes may be keener to engage in unfair play to achieve success. Indeed, the adoption of antisocial behaviour may be a way to cope with an environment where the importance of winning is emphasized. This is in line with

previous research showing that performance-oriented climate makes more likely the adoption of unsportsmanlike conducts (Kavussanu et al., 2002).

An interesting finding of the current study is that performance climate augmented the relationship between CMD and antisocial behaviours towards teammates, partially supporting our third hypothesis (H3). Specifically, CMD predicted antisocial behaviour towards teammates more strongly when adolescents perceived a high performance-oriented climate in their team. The perception of a morally disengaged team may legitimize the adoption of antisocial behaviours towards teammates especially when the coach puts great emphasis on winning. The relationship of CMD with antisocial behaviours towards teammates - the "ingroup" - depends on the motivational climate within the team. Previous literature (e.g., Kavussanu et al., 2013; Kavussanu & Stanger, 2017) indicates that individuals tend to respond differently to others in terms of morality in sport contexts depending on whether they are members of their own group (the in-group), which is in this case the team, or members of a different group (the out-group), in this case, the opponents.

Although CMD did not appear to have a strong role on young athletes' antisocial behaviours within the team (especially if compared to when the recipient is an opponent), its presence in a team characterized by a performance-oriented climate may reinforce this undesirable behaviour. In line with Kavussanu and colleagues' findings (2019), moral and motivational factors may "work in synergy" to facilitate the adoption of antisocial behaviours. It is moreover very interesting to note that these two variables, which refer to the morality and the motivation which characterize the ingroup, are more likely to have together an "in-group effect", promoting antisocial behaviours towards teammates.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine CMD in sport. In line with recent studies on morality in the sport domain (e.g., Kavussanu et al., 2020), we integrated elements from the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) and from the achievement goal theory (Ames, 1992; Newton et al., 2000). The prominent situational goal structure, which has been shown to play a relevant role in sport (e.g., Bortoli et al., 2012; Stanger et al., 2018), appears important in order to

gain a wider comprehension of morality in sport. Considering features of the context and the athletes' perspectives may provide a more comprehensive picture on morality and can advance our understanding of its relations with antisocial behaviours.

Practical Implications

The present findings have some practical implications. Based on the results of our study, coaches should be aware that the presence of some members of the group morally disengaging can negatively influence the team and this can be exacerbated if they themselves are keen to promote a motivational climate mainly based on winning and outperforming others. Indeed, the coexistence of these two factors may promote antisocial behaviour within the team. Due to the relevant role of CMD together with performance motivational climate in shaping athletes' moral behaviour, it is important to carry out interventions aimed at preventing them. Coaches may foster group-based discussions on young athletes' perceptions of the group morality in their team and of the prominent motivation climate. This would allow to correct possible misperceptions on these, potential errors in their own enhancement of a specific motivational climate within the team, and, more relevant, reduce undesired diffusion of moral disengagement mechanisms at collective level. Coaches may for example provide a view of the opponents as athletes putting efforts in the trainings and in the matches in order to win, and not only as someone who has to be defeated.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Although our research revealed some interesting findings, it also has some limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results. First, the sample was one of convenience, as participants were chosen according to the willingness of their sport team to take part in the study. Second, the CMD scale originally derives from the school domain, so, despite it was adapted to the sport context by asking participants to refer to their team- rather than schoolmates-, the content of the items does not specifically focus on sport. Based on the relevance of this construct in the sport domain, future research could develop a new CMD measure which is focused on sport. Third, the cross-sectional design of the study limited both causal inferences from the data and considerations

regarding the bidirectionality of the links among variables. Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to test the direction of causality. Fourth, it may be interesting to analyse in more representative samples of the young athletes' population the interplay between IMD and CMD in order to catch the complexity of these constructs in the sport field. Moreover, so far, we have only addressed the extent to which teammates are "collectively morally disengaged"; however, it is important to note that peers are not the only source of influence for young athletes. It may therefore be interesting to address the extent to which also significant adults in this life domain - such as coaches and parents which research has consistently showed to influence young athletes' moral behaviour (e.g., Bortoli et al., 2012; Danioni & Barni, 2019a, 2019b; Wagnsson et al., 2016) - morally disengage.

Finally, social identity, namely the self-concept deriving from the fact of being a member of a specific social group as a team sport, may influence young athletes' behaviour (e.g., Bruner et al., 2014), especially towards teammates (e.g., Bruner et al., 2017). The effect of CMD on moral behaviours in youth sport may become stronger if the team assumes relevance for the young athletes' self-concept; indeed, further research should test if this moderates the existing relation between CMD and moral behaviour in sport.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study provided evidence of the importance to consider CMD in the team sport domain. Team sport contexts, especially during adolescence, are highly characterized by peer influence, and peers can play a role also in influencing young athletes' moral mechanisms and behaviours. CMD was highly related to antisocial behaviours towards opponents, while its effect on antisocial behaviours towards teammates was stronger when performance climate was higher. All in all, our results clearly highlight the importance to consider morality at collective level in studying moral behaviours in team sports; moreover, the interplay between moral and motivational factors seems to provide a finer comprehension of moral behaviours, which can be extremely relevant in guiding interventions with adolescents in sport.

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Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha (α), Descriptive Statistics, and Pearson correlations between Study Variables

	α	*M* (*SD*)	Actual Range	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Collective Moral Disengagement	.89	2.25 (.73)	1.13-5.00	1				
2. Antisocial Behaviour towards Teammates	.79	2.12 (.78)	1.00-4.60	.41**	1			
3. Antisocial Behaviour towards Opponents	.78	2.27 (.87)	1.00-4.83	.50**	.59**	1		
4. Performance Climate	.71	2.60 (.76)	1.00-4.33	.30**	.26**	.27**	1	
5. Sex	-	-	-	-.58**	-.42**	-.33**	-.12	1

Note. Possible range of scores 1–5 for all variables. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$. Sex: 0 = male, 1 = female.

Table 2

Moderation Analysis Results

Predictor	*b*	ß	95% *CI*	*b*	ß	95% *CI*
	Antisocial behaviour towards teammates			Antisocial behaviour towards opponents		
Step 1	R^2= .17**			R^2= .11**		
Sex	-.65**	-.42**	[-.87, -.44]	-.57**	-.33**	[-.82, -.32]
Step 2	R^2= .24**			R^2= .26**		
CMD	.20*	.19*	[.01, .38]	.49**	.42**	[.29, .69]
Performance Climate	.17*	.17*	[.02, .31]	.15*	.13*	[.00, .31]
Step 3	R^2= .27**			R^2= .27		
CMD* Performance Climate	.26**	.19**	[.08, .45]	.05	.03	[-.16, .25]

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01. Sex: 0=male, 1=female. CI = confidence interval for estimate. CMD = Collective Moral Disengagement.

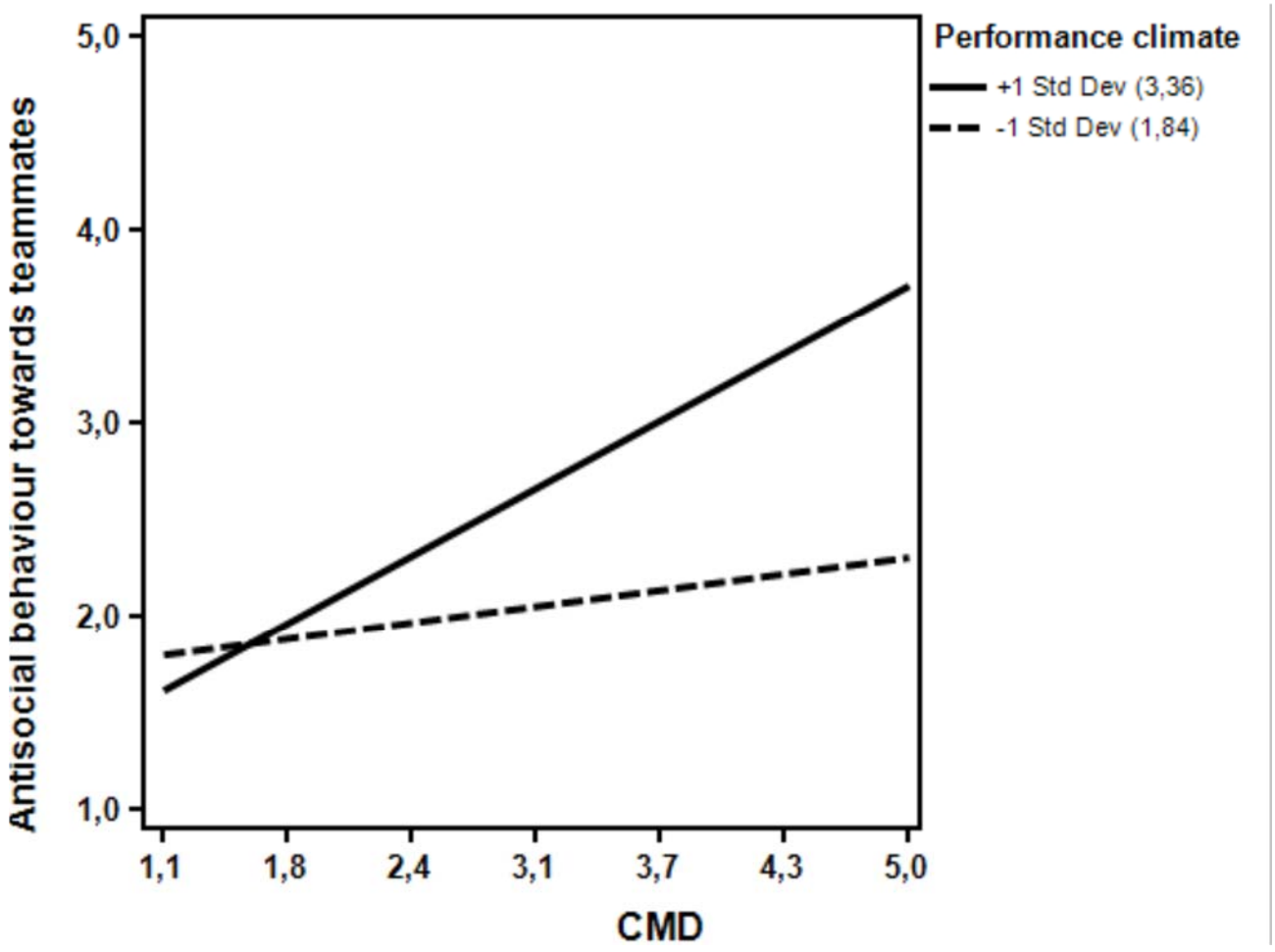

Figure 1

The Moderating Role of Performance Climate in the CMD – Antisocial Behaviour towards Teammates Relationship

Note. CMD = Collective Moral Disengagement. Range of response: 1-5.