

Dear Participants, Parents, and Coaches,

We are e-mailing you to provide a summary of the results from a study that you, your child, or the team you coach, participated in during the Fall of 2016/Winter 2017. As researchers, we realize that we could not conduct this research without the time and interest of those who participate, so we work to ensure that we pass on information that may be valuable.

Recent studies on youth development through sport have demonstrated links between the social environment in youth sport and the moral development of adolescents. The purpose of the study was to examine how positive peer interactions (e.g., receiving positive feedback from a teammate) as well as negative peer interactions (e.g., being socially excluded by teammates) are associated with (1) how athletes feel about their team, (2) how personally important it is to be a team member, (3) how close and connected athletes feel to their teammates, and (4) how athletes behave toward their teammates. To achieve the aim of the study, we used a daily experience sampling method to track youth athletes' experiences with their teammates over a ten-day period. In total, 100 athletes from seven teams participated, with a total of 848 daily questionnaires obtained (a response rate of 84.80%).



Parental consent and youth athlete assent was obtained from all athletes who participated. We distributed questionnaires in-person to collect background and demographic information. For the daily experience portion of the study, athletes were provided with a dated booklet that contained ten questionnaire packages – one for each of the subsequent ten days (one team completed these questionnaires online). At the start of each daily questionnaire, athletes indicated whether they had a practice, game, social event, or any interaction with their teammates. Next, athletes responded to a series of Yes/No questions about their interactions with teammates. This provided a daily measure of how frequently athletes were recipients of positive and negative behaviours from teammates, as well as how frequently athletes were engaging in positive and negative behaviours toward teammates. We also included a daily social identity questionnaire to assess how positively athletes feel about their team, how personally important it is to be a team member, and how close and connected athletes feel to their teammates.

RESULTS

Many athletes reported high levels of enjoyment and felt strong social bonds with their teammates.

Overall, positive interactions among teammates were much more common than negative interactions among teammates.

Athletes reported feeling **more positive about their team**, feeling **a stronger connection with their teammates**, and **attached greater importance to their team membership** on days that they **experienced a higher number of positive behaviours** initiated by their teammates.

Athletes reported feeling **less positive about their team**, feeling **a weaker connection with their teammates**, and **engaged in more negative behaviours** toward teammates on days that they **experienced a higher number of negative behaviours** initiated by their teammates.

What are some potential implications of this work?

Relationships that lie outside the family unit become particularly important during adolescence, making peer acceptance an important goal. The current research sought to understand how teammate interactions influence youth athletes' social behaviour and the quality of their sport experiences. A key finding is that athletes reported stronger bonds with their teammates, felt more positively about their group, and placed greater importance on group membership on days that they experienced more positive behaviours from teammates. This finding may seem intuitive, but this is the first time evidence has been gathered to show how self-reported experiences correspond to changes in how athletes feel about their teammates and the ways they act toward teammates.

Future Research

Although it is reassuring that many athletes in the study reported experiences associated with a positive social environment, it would be insightful for future research to study teammate interactions in teams characterized by more problematic social behaviours.

Conclusion

Sport experiences can be an effective vehicle to promote positive youth development because sport provides youth with opportunities to set and achieve challenging goals, develop supportive relationships, and to experience personal growth by acquiring new skills. Our research highlights the important role that peer interactions play in relation to youth athletes' sport experiences

Contact Information

Thank you for your time. If you are interested in this and other work, try visiting our lab website at: <http://groupdynamics.nipissingu.ca/>. We encourage you to contact us about this (and future) studies, or to discuss this topic more generally. Once again, we would like to thank you for the time that you spent to help us!

We would like to acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) as well as Sport Canada for funding this work via a postdoctoral fellowship awarded to Dr. Alex Benson, and a SSHRC Insight Grant awarded to Dr. Mark Bruner.

All the best,
Alex Benson, Ph.D., alexb@nipissingu.ca
Mark Bruner, Ph.D., markb@nipissingu.ca
Groups for Youth Development Laboratory
Department of Physical and Health Education
Nipissing University

