

“My teammates think it is alright to fight to protect friends”

Danioni, Francesca; Kavussanu, Maria; Regalia, Camillo; Barni, Daniella

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1 **“My Teammates Think it is Alright to Fight to Protect Friends”:**

2 **Collective Moral Disengagement in Team Sports**

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4
5 Francesca Danioni¹, Maria Kavussanu², Camillo Regalia^{1,3}, Daniela Barni⁴

6
7 ¹Family Studies and Research University Centre, Catholic University of Milan,
8 Largo Gemelli, 1, 20123 Milano (Italy). Email: francescavittoria.danioni@unicatt.it

9 ²School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences
10 University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TT (United Kingdom). Email:

11 M.Kavussanu@bham.ac.uk

12 ³Departement of Psychology, Catholic University of Milan,
13 Largo Gemelli, 1, 20123 Milano (Italy). Email: camillo.regalia@unicatt.it

14 ⁴ Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Bergamo,
15 Piazzale S. Agostino 2, 24129 Bergamo (Italy). Email: daniela.barni@unibg.it

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23 Corresponding author: Francesca Danioni, Family Studies and Research University Centre,

24 Catholic University of Milan – Largo Gemelli, 1, 20123 Milano (Italy). E-mail:

25 francescavittoria.danioni@unicatt.it

26 ORCID: 0000-0002-6227-0722

27

Abstract

28
29 Moral disengagement refers to a set of cognitive mechanisms used to justify transgressive
30 behaviours in order to avoid self-sanctions and minimize negative emotions. Moral disengagement
31 has been widely studied in sport psychology, but only at the individual level. Collective moral
32 disengagement (CMD), which refers to the *shared beliefs* in justifying negative actions performed
33 by the members of one's group, has received little research attention. In this study, we aimed to
34 examine whether CMD and performance motivational climate predict adolescents' antisocial
35 behaviour towards teammates and opponents in team sports. We surveyed 172 Italian adolescent
36 athletes (Mean age = 15.41 ± 1.73 years; 51.7% females). Participants completed a questionnaire
37 measuring CMD, performance motivational climate and antisocial behaviour towards teammates
38 and opponents. We found positive direct effects of CMD and performance motivational climate on
39 antisocial behaviours. CMD was also related to antisocial behaviour towards teammates more
40 strongly when performance motivational climate in the team was high. Our findings suggest the
41 need to consider collective morality to better understand young athletes' antisocial behaviour in
42 sport.

43
44 **Keywords:** moral justification, performance climate, antisocial behaviours, adolescents, team sport.
45

“My Teammates Think it is Alright to Fight to Protect Friends”:**Collective Moral Disengagement in Team Sports****48 Introduction**

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

60 This self-regulatory process can be disrupted by Moral Disengagement (MD). Bandura
61 (1990) theorized the existence of eight mechanisms of moral disengagement, which are: moral
62 justification, advantageous comparison, euphemistic labelling, distortion of consequences,
63 attribution of blame, dehumanization, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility.
64 MD allows the cognitive restructuring of an unethical behaviour. Indeed, this is a fundamental
65 process through which moral agency is regulated. Specifically, the set of mechanisms which
66 compose MD are adopted in order to reduce the negative effects of transgressive actions, avoid self-
67 sanctions, and redefine the personal role in causing harm to other people. This process enables
68 disengagement from usual moral standards and reduction of guilt or other negative emotions arising
69 from their violation. The more frequently people use these mechanisms, the higher is the level of
70 MD. Bandura explains in this way how people are likely to adopt unethical behaviours without
71 feeling guilty for this.

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

78 **Moral Disengagement in Sport**

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

86 In order to capture the complexity of moral disengagement in sport, researchers have used a
87 variety of methods, both qualitative (e.g., Corrion et al., 2009) and quantitative (e.g., Hodge &
88 Lonsdale, 2011). Research has shown that MD in sport tends to be higher in males and in younger
89 athletes, and it is respectively negatively and positively related to prosocial and antisocial
90 behaviours towards teammates opponents (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007, 2009; Lucidi et al.,
91 2008; Stanger et al., 2013). Personal values (Šukys & Jansonienė, 2010) and personality traits
92 (Jones et al., 2017) were found to be related to the extent to which young athletes morally disengage
93 in their sport environment. Specifically, moral values, such as contract maintenance and obedience,
94 and narcissism, have been respectively negatively and positively related to MD (Jones et al., 2017;
95 Šukys & Jansonienė, 2010).

96

97

98 From Individual to Collective Moral Disengagement

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

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

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

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

135 **Antisocial Behaviour in Sport**

136 A great amount of sport literature has focused on antisocial behaviour (e.g., Kavussanu,
137 2008; Kavussanu & Al-Yaaribi, 2019). Antisocial behaviour in sport refers to voluntary behaviour
138 intended to harm or disadvantage another individual (Kavussanu et al., 2006; Sage et al., 2006), as
139 for example intentionally fouling or injuring an opponent. Researchers have also distinguished
140 between antisocial behaviours directed towards teammates and opponents (Kavussanu & Boardley,
141 2009). The behaviours directed towards teammates are mostly verbal ones, while those directed
142 towards opponents are verbal and physical acts (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009).

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

150 Research has also consistently shown how both personal (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu,
151 2010; Nicholls, 1989) and social environmental factors, in the form of coaching, parental and peer
152 influences (e.g., Benson & Bruner, 2018; Danioni & Barni, 2019b; Hodge & Gucciardi, 2015), may
153 be related to the extent to which young athletes act in an antisocial manner. Among others, the role
154 of performance oriented motivational climate has been considered. Having its theoretical roots in
155 the achievement goal theory (Ames, 1992), the situational goal structure labelled as motivational
156 climate can be performance or mastery oriented. In a performance climate there is emphasis on
157 normative success and outperforming others, whereas in a mastery climate the emphasis of the
158 context is instead on participation.

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

171 **The Present Study**

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

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

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

193 ***Method***

194 *Participants and Procedure*

195 One hundred and seventy-two¹ adolescents (51.7% female) practicing team sports took part
196 to the present study. All the participants were high school students, ranging from 13 to 19 years of
197 age ($M = 15.41$, $SD = 1.73$) and living in Northern or Central Italy. Most of them played volleyball
198 (60.4%), followed by soccer (19.8%), basketball (12.2%) and rugby (7.6%); they trained with their
199 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].

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

210 *Measures*

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

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

226 We carried out a Confirmatory Factor Analysis with a one factor solution on our adaptation
 227 of the scale using maximum likelihood estimation with AMOS program. Since the theoretically
 228 expected solution was not completely satisfactory ($\chi^2/df = 2.02$; CFI = .86; RMSEA = .08) we
 229 deleted item 2 (“How many teammates in your team sport think that it is okay to tell small lies
 230 because they don’t really do any harm?”) and item 10 (“How many teammates in your team sport
 231 think that it is alright to fight when your team’s reputation is threatened?”) because they both had a
 232 weak loading on the factor. This resulted in an improved model that reached acceptable fit indices,
 233 $\chi^2/df = 1.88$; CFI = .90; RMSEA = .07 (Bentler, 1990; Brown & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler,
 234 1999). We therefore used a 15 items version of the CMD scale.

235 *Performance climate.* We used the Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire-
 236 12 (PMCSQ-12; Bortoli & Robazza, 2004) to measure adolescents’ perception of the performance
 237 motivational climate in their team. The scale was derived from the work of Newton et al. (2000)
 238 and tested on Italian male and female adolescent team sport players (Bortoli et al., 2009).
 239 Participants were asked to respond on a 5-point scale (from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly
 240 agree) referring to the extent to which they perceived the climate described within their sport team.
 241 The subscale measuring performance climate is composed of 6 items (item example: “On this team,
 242 only the top players ‘get noticed’ by the coach”).

243 *Antisocial behaviour.* We measured antisocial behaviours towards both teammates and
 244 opponents using the two relevant subscales of the Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Sport Scale
 245 (PABSS)² (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009). Adolescents were asked to rate the frequency with which
 246 they engaged in each behaviour described on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1= never to 5= very
 247 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)

248 (6 item, antisocial behaviour towards an opponent) and “While playing sport this season, I verbally
249 abused a teammate” (5 item, antisocial behaviour towards a teammate).

250 *Data Analysis*

251 After calculating descriptive statistics and bivariate Pearson correlations between the study
252 variables, we tested the relation between CMD and antisocial behaviours in sport and the
253 moderating role of performance climate in this relation through two hierarchical regression models,
254 one for each type of antisocial behaviour (i.e., towards teammates and towards opponents). In
255 considering this relation, we controlled for adolescents’ sex because of their well-known influence
256 on IMD in sport (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007, 2009). In Step 1 adolescents’ sex (0 = male, 1
257 = female) was entered in the model to control for its effect on antisocial behaviours. In Step 2 the
258 role of CMD and performance climate was examined, whereas in Step 3 the interaction term
259 between these two predictors was added. CMD and performance climate were mean-centred before
260 computing the interaction terms to avoid multicollinearity and for easier interpretation of model
261 coefficients (Aiken & West, 1991). Simple slope analysis was performed to probe any significant
262 interaction effect. The simple slopes were tested at ± 1 SD of performance climate scores. All
263 analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) version 24 (IBM,
264 2016).

265 **Results**

266 *Preliminary Analysis*

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

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

276 *Main Analysis*

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

279 [Table 1 near here]

280 Based on cut off guidelines from previous literature (e.g., Loewenthal, 2004; Williams,
281 1988), Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated good-to-very-good reliability for all scale scores,
282 ranging from .71 for performance climate to .89 for CMD. Adolescents showed moderate levels of
283 both CMD and performance climate. They reported to sometimes engage in antisocial behaviours
284 towards teammates and only slightly more frequently in antisocial behaviours towards opponents.
285 CMD was positively associated with both performance climate and antisocial behaviour towards
286 teammates and opponents. Males reported more frequent antisocial behaviours and higher levels of
287 CMD compared to their female counterparts.

288 In Table 2 we present the hierarchical regression analyses results.

289 [Table 2 near here]

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

299 [Figure 1 about here]

Discussion

300
301 Peer group morality is a relevant variable to consider in order to gain a comprehensive
302 understanding of morality in sport. However, moral disengagement, which is the self-regulatory
303 process which allows the cognitive restructuring of an antisocial behaviour, has been studied solely
304 at the individual level in the sport psychology literature (e.g., Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007, 2011).
305 A few studies carried out in the school context have shown how also interpersonal and social
306 factors, especially the social groups people belong to, may play a key role in moral disengagement
307 process (e.g., Gini et al., 2020; Thornberg et al., 2018).

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

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

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

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

327 An interesting finding of the current study is that performance climate augmented the
328 relationship between CMD and antisocial behaviours towards teammates, partially supporting our
329 third hypothesis (H3). Specifically, CMD predicted antisocial behaviour towards teammates more
330 strongly when adolescents perceived a high performance-oriented climate in their team. The
331 perception of a morally disengaged team may legitimize the adoption of antisocial behaviours
332 towards teammates especially when the coach puts great emphasis on winning. The relationship of
333 CMD with antisocial behaviours towards teammates - the “ingroup” - depends on the motivational
334 climate within the team. Previous literature (e.g., Kavussanu et al., 2013; Kavussanu & Stanger,
335 2017) indicates that individuals tend to respond differently to others in terms of morality in sport
336 contexts depending on whether they are members of their own group (the in-group), which is in this
337 case the team, or members of a different group (the out-group), in this case, the opponents.

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

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

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

354 **Practical Implications**

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

368 **Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research**

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

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

387 Finally, social identity, namely the self-concept deriving from the fact of being a member of
388 a specific social group as a team sport, may influence young athletes' behaviour (e.g., Bruner et al.,
389 2014), especially towards teammates (e.g., Bruner et al., 2017). The effect of CMD on moral
390 behaviours in youth sport may become stronger if the team assumes relevance for the young
391 athletes' self-concept; indeed, further research should test if this moderates the existing relation
392 between CMD and moral behaviour in sport.

393 **Conclusion**

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

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607

608 Table 1

609

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

	α	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	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

611

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

613

614

615 Table 2

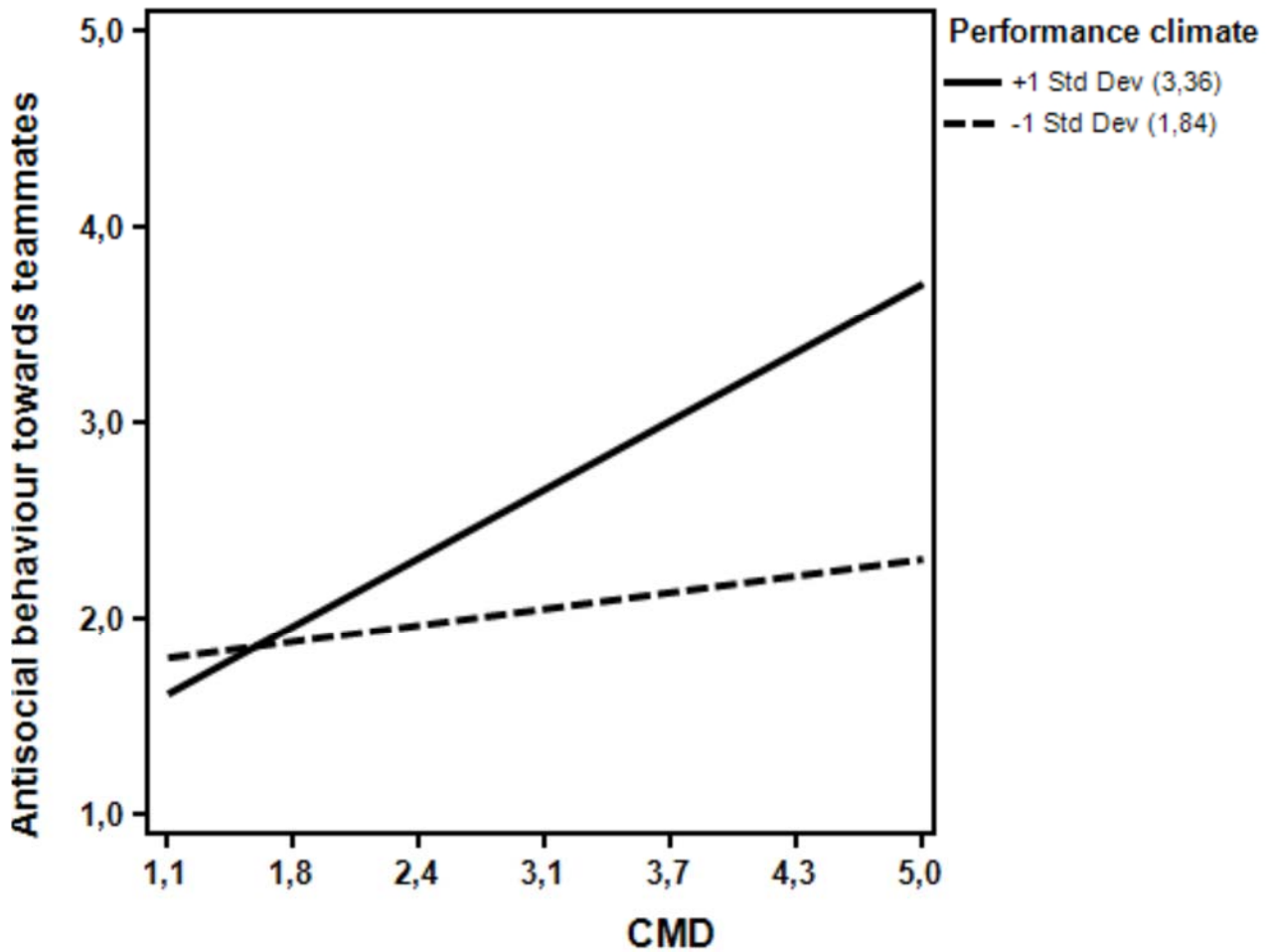
616 *Moderation Analysis Results*

Predictor	<i>b</i>	β	95% <i>CI</i>	<i>b</i>	β	95% <i>CI</i>
	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]

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

618

619



620

621 Figure 1

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

624 Note. CMD = Collective Moral Disengagement. Range of response: 1-5.
 625
 626