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Leading for Gold: Social Identity Leadership Processes at the London 2012 Olympic Games

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Abstract

This paper adopted a social identity approach to explore the media data of leadership figures at the London 2012 Olympic Games. Media data in the form of interviews, speeches/team announcements, and blog posts from leaders integral to the London 2012 Olympic Games were analysed from one-hundred days prior to, during, and for thirty days following, the Olympic Games. Leaders included Lord Seb Coe, Andy Hunt, and performance directors of TeamGB athletics (Charles van Commenee), cycling (Sir David Brailsford), rowing (David Tanner), and swimming (Michael Scott). An inductive and deductive thematic analysis identified five higher order themes: creation of team identities, team values, team vision, performance consequences, and "we" achieved. The analysis makes a contribution to extant leadership literature by highlighting novel contextually relevant themes surrounding leadership at the London 2012 Olympic Games. Thus, opportunities for future research and application are outlined.

Keywords: qualitative inquiry, media data, group dynamics, leaders, peak performance

Leading for Gold: Social Identity Leadership Processes at the London 2012 Olympic Games

In many ways the Olympic Games are the pinnacle sporting competition for athletes (Wylleman and Johnson 2012). Leaders play an integral role in facilitating optimum performance in elite sport and arguably, together with the athletes, face their ultimate test at an Olympic Games to prepare athletes to perform and organisationally. Until recently, many organisational psychology concepts have been relatively unexplored in elite sport (Fletcher and Wagstaff 2009). One pertinent organisational influence on elite athletic performance is leadership, and researchers (e.g., Fletcher and Arnold 2011, Arnold *et al.* 2012) have begun to illuminate the multifaceted nature of leadership in elite sport. Despite these advancements further research is warranted to deepen our understanding of leadership, indeed, Fletcher and Arnold (2011, p. 237) conclude future inquiry should investigate "what leaders do in terms of their behaviors and communication in specific contexts and situations". With these opportunities in mind, the current study adopted a social identity lens to explore the media data of leaders at the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Leadership refers to "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse 2010, p.3). Defined in this way, leadership is an influential process that is enacted within social contexts to enlist the abilities and efforts of group members to achieve common goals. A theoretical approach that focuses on the influential processes and contextual factors encompassed within leadership is the social identity analysis (Hogg, 2001, Haslam *et al.* 2011). Despite limited attention in sport (see Slater *et al.* 2013; Slater *et al.* in press) the social identity analysis in organisational settings has led to an enhanced

understanding of the social psychological processes that provide the foundation for effective leadership (van Knippenberg and Hogg 2003). In this way, the social identity analysis of leadership has the potential to contribute to the field of sport leadership because it explains the social psychological mechanisms that underpin how individuals influence and motivate others to achieve group targets. Such mechanisms are individuals' social identities (Haslam *et al.* 2011).

Individuals have a range of personal and social identities they can draw upon that, in turn, direct cognitions, emotions, and behaviour (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Personal identity explains an individual's perception of themselves to be distinct and different from other people in a particular environment. Alternatively, social identity refers to an "individual's knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional value and significance to him [or her] of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292). Social identities occur when individuals identify with groups and the specific group membership(s) becomes an important part of who they are as people (Haslam 2004). Social identity is a multidimensional construct comprised of three aspects: (i) the importance of being a group member (cognitive centrality), (ii) the positive emotions associated with one's group membership (in-group affect), and (iii) the strength of connection and belonging with the group (in-group ties; Cameron 2004). In a leadership context, social identification reflects the degree to which leaders and group members define themselves as a unified entity and are motivated to achieve collective targets. To outline the process of social identification, we draw on the similarities to athletic identity (Brewer *et al.* 1993, Brewer *et al.* 2010). Athletic identity refers to the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role, which in turn contributes to individuals' sense of self as a person (Brewer *et al.* 1993). Similarly, social identities involve an identification

process but are distinguishable from athletic identities because social identification occurs with a group(s). Accordingly, just as individuals derive a sense of who they are from their athletic identity, individuals derive a sense of who they are from their group membership(s) (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

Social identity processes have been evidenced in sport. To illustrate, sport fan behaviour research has suggested that fans who feel a strong identification with their sport team are more likely to encourage (Wann *et al.* 2001) and exhibit in-group (i.e., the group to which they identify) bias compared to out-groups (i.e., other group(s) in a particular context; Wann and Grieve 2010). In one of few studies of social identity with sport participants (Bruner *et al.* 2014), social identity has been associated with prosocial and antisocial behaviour towards teammates and opposition in youth sport. Results revealed those children who felt a stronger identification with their sport team reported engaging in more frequent prosocial behaviour (e.g., verbal encouragement) towards teammates. These findings are consistent with social identity theory in that group identification motivates group-orientated behaviour (e.g., encouraging teammates) because group memberships are internalised as part of the self, and thus, are a means to enhance one's self-worth (Slater *et al.* 2013, Bruner *et al.* 2014). From a leadership perspective, a key point to emerge from the burgeoning social identity literature in sport is that internalisation of social identity forms a strong allegiance with the group that, in turn, motivates individuals to advance the group's interests. Accordingly, if leaders are able to create a shared identity then all group members, including the leader, will reflect a unified team or group motivated to achieve collective targets (Haslam *et al.* 2011).

Evidence indicates individuals' social identities influence leadership effectiveness (Haslam *et al.* 2011). In particular, leaders who are able to create

shared social identification between themselves and group members are more likely to be supported (van Dijke and De Cremer 2010), perceived as trustworthy (Geissner and van Knippenberg 2008), influential (Subasic *et al.* 2011), and effective (van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg 2005). Thus, the unified group is more likely to work together towards collective targets. In a flagship investigation, the BBC Prison Study (Reicher and Haslam 2006, Haslam and Reicher 2007) exposed participants to a two week experimental study in a simulated prison. The study created two groups of unequal power, with participants randomly assigned to prisoners (low power) or guards (high power) while the authors examined leadership processes. In the first few days of the experiment a social system of antagonism between the guards and prisoners prevailed. On day five a new participant was introduced to the study and they encouraged fellow participants to view themselves regarding a new set of values within a broader identity of 'participants' (including both prisoners and guards). The results suggested the leader was able to re-define identity to encompass all the participants who then came together, felt a greater sense of belonging, and challenged the experimenters (Haslam and Reicher 2007). In particular, the prisoners and guards behaved more closely aligned to the values associated with being a 'participant' rather than in-line with their identity as a prisoner or guard. Accordingly, from a leadership perspective defining group values may be important given that group behaviour appears to be governed by the defining attributes of the group in social contexts. In the social identity approach (Tajfel and Turner 1979, Turner 1999) the defining values of groups are referred to as contents of identity. Despite this conceptualisation, Haslam *et al.* (2011) note contents of identity remain unexplored in leadership research comparative to broader concepts such as identification.

Evidence has found that shared identification between leaders and group members gives rise to positive perceptions of leadership because when individuals identify with a group their cognitions and behaviours attune to that particular group membership (Adarves-Yorno *et al.* 2006). Using British Cycling as a case example Slater *et al.* (2013) reflected on how as leader, Sir David Brailsford, developed a social identity and created group values that facilitated performance at the London 2012 Olympic Games. First, the authors proposed that the leader promoted attractiveness to the group by emphasising how British Cycling was unique comparative to out-groups in a manner that strengthened team identity. Second, specific meaning(s) or value(s) were associated with British Cycling's identity (e.g., attention to detail) that functioned to make the group distinct and, when athletes categorised themselves as part of the group (Turner, 1999), to motivate athletes to embody these values in their attitudes and behaviours. Slater *et al's* (2013) reflective account outlined the value of social identity principles to further understanding of leadership, which the current paper intends to build upon by analysing leaders' media data to offer an empirically grounded example. Indeed, Slater *et al's* (2013) reflections imply that leaders are well placed to develop team identities and define group value(s) that may, contextually, govern thoughts and actions.

In addition to calls by Fletcher and Arnold (2011) to explore the communication of elite leaders in specific contexts, the present study moved beyond group members' self-reported perceptions of leader effectiveness as advocated by Subasic *et al.* (2011). This development is pertinent given that leadership is defined by its social, contextual, and influential nature (Northouse 2010). Accordingly, an examination of leaders' media communication within the context of the London 2012 Olympic Games would extend knowledge. To achieve this advancement, the

current study analysed media data from leaders at the London 2012 Olympic Games through a social identity lens. Emerging sport and exercise psychology literature has utilised media data to better understand athletes' identities in sporting contexts (e.g., McGannon *et al.* 2012, Schinke *et al.* 2012, Cosh *et al.* 2013). Through newsprint articles McGannon *et al.* (2012) advanced understanding of the negative team cancer role by presenting how the role emerged depended upon two discourses that were underpinned by the socio-cultural context of the sport. In a further analysis of newsprint data, Cosh *et al.* (2013) explored transition processes of retirement (from and back into sport) and found athletes return to competition was characterised by a compelling drive and passion, felt as a natural and mostly necessary decision. Cosh *et al's* (2013) analysis of media data over time afforded the dynamic nature of identities to be captured and led to new understandings of athlete identity in retirement and when transitioning back into sport. In addition, Schinke and colleagues (2012) examined adaptation processes of professional boxers during the Showtime Super Six Boxing Classic through data collected from twelve documentary television episodes. Thematic analysis indicated the temporal processes of adaptation prior to the Super Six tournament and then following successful and unsuccessful performances. Media data allowed for enhanced understanding of successful temporal adaptation, revealing the key themes of self-focus and a multi-dimensional view (i.e., multiple identities) of the self including spirituality and integrity (Schinke *et al.* 2012). Bringing this contemporary enquiry that has focused on media data together it becomes clear that investigating media data can lead to different and advanced understandings of knowledge, and thus, provides the focus of the present analysis.

The media data in the current study most closely aligns with Schinke *et al.* (2012) by focusing on what leaders said during media presentations rather than how the media constructed leaders, for example, via newsprint articles as analysed by Cosh *et al.* (2013) and McGannon *et al.* (2012). Building on Schinke *et al's* (2012) exploration, the present study will incorporate speeches and team announcements delivered and blogs written by leaders as underused, yet fruitful data sources (Sparkes and Smith, 2014) that will extend sport and exercise psychology and social identity leadership literature. The following research questions guided the study: (i) to expand understanding of leadership by exploring leaders' media data (i.e., interviews, speeches and team announcements, and blogs) at the London 2012 Olympic Games from a social identity perspective, and (ii) to explore temporal changes in leaders' media communication from one-hundred days prior to the Olympics, to during and following the Games.

Method

The leaders

Six prominent leaders were identified as integral to the London 2012 Olympic Games in various capacities: Lord Sebastian Coe (LC; Chairman of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games), Andy Hunt (AH; leader of TeamGB), Charles van Commenee (CvC; performance director of UK athletics), Sir David Brailsford (DB; performance director of British cycling), David Tanner (DT; performance director of British rowing), and Michael Scott (MS; performance director of British swimming). Leaders had a mean age of 55.4 years, ranging from 48 to 65 years, and had been in their position for, on average, 6.75 years. The role of the four performance directors was to lead their sports to optimum performance and medal attainments. The four leaders were chosen a priori based on

athletics, cycling, rowing, and swimming representing Great Britain's top four recipients of UK Sport funding for London 2012 (approximate total £103 million, UK Sport 2012). Lord Coe and Andy Hunt were chosen a priori as they were the leaders of the Olympics and TeamGB respectively, encompassing a more broad role at London 2012. These high-level leaders were selected on the basis of their roles and the high likelihood that they would be required to complete media interviews (television and radio), and deliver speeches and team announcements to the British media to provide varied and substantial data to be analysed.

Data collection

Data collection focused on leaders' communication in interviews, speeches/team announcements, and blog posts from television, radio, and online outlets. Given the impractical nature of continuous monitoring of television channels and the sometimes impromptu nature of media representations, all data was obtained online. Specifically, data were collected from face-to-face interviews (often aired on television or radio and then uploaded online), speeches (e.g., the opening ceremony), and team announcements posted online, together with blogs written by the leaders. Aligned with the research questions of the current study, Sparkes and Smith (2014) note that blog data collection offers a valuable resource to explore "social processes over time" (p. 113) and provide repeated access to populations that otherwise would not be possible (e.g., Andy Hunt, TeamGB leader). In sum, the combination of interviews, speeches/team announcements, and blogs sought to gain new insights into leadership surrounding an Olympic Games.

The British Broadcasting Corporation's (www.bbc.co.uk) and TeamGB's (www.teamgb.com) websites were identified as the official and regulated sources for media coverage of London 2012. We intended to collect all available data through

daily monitoring of these two websites, together with checks on social media (i.e., twitter) and television to ensure media coverage of the leaders was not missed. The data collection process was informed by emerging sport and exercise psychology literature (e.g., McGannon *et al.* 2012, Schinke *et al.* 2012, Cosh *et al.* 2013) that has outlined how studying media data can be crucial to further understand identities in various sport contexts. In particular, media data collection in the current study afforded the authors opportunity to capture new themes within specific contexts (i.e., an Olympic Games) that contribute to knowledge gained through insights not detailed in previous literature (for an example see Cosh *et al.* 2013).

As the study intended to examine leaders' communication in the media over time, data was collected daily from one-hundred days prior to the opening ceremony, throughout the sixteen days of the Games, and for thirty days following the closing ceremony. The data collection period from 17th April – 11th September garnered forty-eight interviews (40 from BBC; 8 from TeamGB), sixteen speeches (e.g., opening ceremony) or team announcements (7 from BBC and 9 from TeamGB), and three blogs (all by AH via TeamGB), resulting in ninety-two pages of transcribed text. To be clear, solely the leaders' communicated words were of interest and not the media's interpretation of what was said. Data were transcribed verbatim, while the medals won were recorded as indicators of performance.

Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis (see Braun and Clarke 2006) incorporating inductive and deductive elements was adopted to analyse leaders' media data. In thematic analysis Braun and Clarke (2006) propose an inductive approach involves diverse coding of data related to the research question but not prescribed categories or the researchers' theoretical approach, whereas a deductive or theoretical approach is driven by the

researchers' theoretical interest (i.e., social identity leadership). Accordingly, in the current study, inductive analysis allowed for the generation of novel data themes not accounted for in previous social identity literature, while deductive analysis was used to detail patterns in the data that related specifically to social identity leadership principles.

Although there is no standard procedure of thematic analysis, analyses were characterised by a number of flexible phases, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, the inductive stage of the analysis involved the first author immersing themselves in the transcripts and detailing initial analytic reflective statements of the data (e.g., "the leader is using the nation's flag to motivate public support"). These initial observation procedures have been utilised in previous identity-related media studies (McGannon *et al.* 2012, Schinke *et al.* 2012) and functioned to facilitate initial inductive coding but also to aid theme and category refinement as analysis progressed. Initial coding involved attaching words or labels to the data relevant to the research questions. In the next theoretical (i.e., deductive) stage, via a recursive process and through a social identity lens, codes were interpreted into lower-order themes. To facilitate the creation of themes a thematic map (Sparkes and Smith 2014) detailing a handwritten visual representation of emerging themes was used. As advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006), the emerging patterns in the data were constantly compared with one another leading to the amendment of theme titles and collapsing of emerging themes. Constant comparison and the thematic map allowed for grouping of lower order themes into higher order themes.

In the next stage, theme refinement included the amendment of theme names and was assisted by a reflective journal (Etherington 2004). In-line with Braun and

Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedures the first author used the journal to aid the development of each lower and higher order theme and to form the basis of reflective discussions with co-authors. For example, throughout the thematic analysis discussions were held between the first and second author to reflect and elaborate upon emerging themes with a view to promote critical reflections. As used by qualitative research (e.g., Way *et al.* 2012) the second author served as a 'critical friend' in this iterative process stimulating debate through critical insight and providing alternative explanations of the data. Aligned with recent inquiry of leadership (Fletcher and Arnold 2011, Arnold *et al.* 2012) we intended for our analysis to provide evidence-based recommendations for leaders planning for Rio 2016. Finally, as advocated by McGannon et al (2012), in the theoretical phase of analysis we were informed by and continued to consult social identity literature to compare emerging themes and literature. In turn, the results and discussion are presented together.

Results and Discussion

Five higher order themes emerged from the analysis: creation of team identities, team values, team vision, performance consequences, and "we" achieved. We draw on social identity literature and discuss the results to illustrate linkages between themes, while providing relevant quotes. Alongside each quote we identify which leader the quote relates to, the media type, and the media source (e.g., DT, interview, BBC).

Theme 1: Creation of team identities

A compelling pattern interpreted from the media data was the way in which leaders' aimed to create team identities. Leaders spoke of how the team kit

(clothing/uniform such as tracksuits) provided commonalty across TeamGB and helped to bind the team together. The team connection went beyond the athletes to include coaches and support staff, while leaders detailed the influence of the emotive team kit: "While speaking to the athletes yesterday morning, they expressed their pride in the collective identity brought about by the kit and the importance of being seen as members of a singular, one TeamGB" (AH, blog, TeamGB). In addition to providing evidence for the presence of the affective dimension of social identity (in-group affect, Cameron 2004) in that positive emotions (i.e., pride) were felt as a result of belonging to TeamGB, this result points to the linkages between team kit and identity. Specifically, the unified team kit played an important antecedent role in the creation of TeamGB's identity. Social identity research may begin to illuminate these findings. TeamGB kit may have been perceived to strengthen team identity by demonstrating commonality between athletes and staff. Evidence has indicated the creation of team identity is more likely when similarities between group members are emphasised (Postmes *et al.* 2005) and thus, present data suggests the artefact of team kit may display commonality, which in turn, is one way TeamGB's identity was created.

As well as illustrating the commonality between TeamGB athletes and staff across sports, TeamGB's kit emphasised TeamGB's distinctiveness: "We knew at a home Games that our athletes had to stand out from other teams [...] the look and feel is tremendously original" (AH, blog, TeamGB). According to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and reflections from elite sport (Slater *et al.* 2013) athletes are likely to seek memberships to groups that are unique and positively contribute to their self-worth. According to social identity principles (Haslam 2004), to experience benefits to self-esteem, group members will strive to see their in-group

(i.e., TeamGB) as distinct from, and better than, other groups (e.g., TeamUSA). Analysis suggested the "original" team kit that would "stand out from other teams" (AH, blog, TeamGB) may have helped to provide such distinctiveness.

Further, leaders' defined the boundaries within team identities. For example, Sir David Brailsford (team announcement, BBC) challenged the cyclists to pull together under the Union Jack:

> this [team] actually feels more like a family [...] you know a family unit pulls it together because it cares... it's more important, and I think in this Games, being the home nation and the home team, I think it's important [...] we do come together under the Union Jack and make this country proud of the way we perform.

This extract highlights a sense of belonging that aligns with the in-group ties dimension of social identity (Cameron 2004). To explain, the leader may be attempting to increase his athletes' connection to British cycling and challenge them to come together to make the country proud at London 2012. In addition, the quote suggests the leader is speaking directly to his cycling team to mobilise their efforts (cf. Reicher and Hopkins 2001) for the Olympic Games. By using the national flag the leader vividly challenges his athletes by saying let's do this for our country, while simultaneously suggesting, as a nation, we are in this together.

Leaders' media data demonstrated a focus on group interests, a crucial notion in social identity leadership (Haslam *et al.* 2011), when decision making:

> One thing we heard loud and clear from the athletes was this: they wanted kit that enables them to perform at their very best and [...] feel proud in the kit

they have worked so hard to earn the right to wear at London 2012 (AH, blog, TeamGB).

The account above illustrates an example of how the leader of TeamGB sought to understand and act in line with the TeamGB's interests. Accordingly, to ensure a performance-focus, decisions about the TeamGB kit were made following "performance first tests" (AH, blog, TeamGB). To explain, social identity literature has indicated that, in comparison to when leaders act in a self-benefiting way, when leaders put the group first group members report increased levels of self-esteem (De Cremer *et al.* 2006). Thus, by listening to and putting into practice the interests of the group regarding team kit the leader is acting for the group and not themselves as an individual. This practice aligns with additional social identity research that has suggested leaders that represent the group's value(s) are perceived as more trustworthy and effective than those leaders that do not (for reviews see van Knippenberg 2011, Slater et al. in press). The principle of advancing the interests of the group is well summarised by Andy Hunt (blog, TeamGB): "our commitment to the TeamGB athletes and sports is to be the best prepared British Olympic team ever."

Analysis revealed leaders discussed TeamGB athletes that had been successful in previous Olympic Games or world championships. Examples from athletics included Olympic champion Christine Ohuruogu and world champions Mo Farah and Dai Greene. Other examples included British rowers, where leaders believed "we" traditionally perform well at Olympic Games. In such media displays leaders may be highlighting successful teammates who represent what the leader wants the group to achieve (i.e., Olympic champions). Such media communication could be interpreted to challenge and motivate TeamGB athletes to make British

Olympic history, but also to outline that these successful athletes are part of this same team–TeamGB. In-line with Slater et al's (2013) postulations, current analysis indicated such portrayals of athlete success, from within the same team, aimed to create team identity by highlighting the attractiveness to TeamGB.

Theme 2: Team values

To varying degrees, leaders' media data indicated a portrayal of team values that were unique to their sport. In social identity terms, team values refer to the content of social identity (Postmes and Spears 1998, Turner 1999). As described by Slater et al. (2013), when athletes categorise themselves as part of a group (e.g., TeamGB) they will be encouraged to think and behave in-line with the values associated with their group membership. Current analysis indicated each sport had different values despite coming under the identity of TeamGB. For example, Sir David Brailsford stated (team announcement, TeamGB):

> I think we'd like people to be proud of us... these guys [riders selected] are fantastic athletes, they are brilliant role models, they are not multi-million pound athletes that you can't get close to, they're open, they're transparent, they're very engaging and you know, I think we should be proud of the crazy attention to detail that this team will go to in preparation for the Games, for the innovation that we will try and show and when we are really really under pressure and the guys have got their backs against the wall, they'll come out with that true British spirit and fight.

The extract above documents the values that define British cycling: attention to detail and preparation, innovation, and British spirit. Analysis indicated team values were multiple, which provides a further perspective from Schinke *et al's*

(2012) findings. Schinke *et al.* (2012) interpreted that professional boxers displayed multiple identities in their media data, whereas the present analysis reveals that numerous values were associated with one social identity (e.g., as a TeamGB cyclist). In addition, team values outlined by the leaders at London 2012 may have influenced TeamGBs' attitudes and behaviours. From a social identity perspective (Haslam *et al.* 2011), team values (i.e., contents) provide the cognitive schema to govern British cyclists' behaviour (i.e., TeamGB cyclists will be attentive to detail and prepared, innovative, and display British spirit). As found during the St. Pauls' Riots (Reicher 1984), TeamGB athletes' may align their thoughts and behaviour with the group's values because group members embrace courses of action based on the norms and values of their group. Evidence has indicated that when individuals identify with groups, their cognitions and behaviour are group-orientated and directed by the definition of the group (Reicher 1984, Adarves-Yorno *et al.* 2006, Livingstone and Haslam 2008). In sum, current data taken together with previous research (e.g., Reicher 1984) implies leaders may benefit from motivating group members to adopt values that align with the leader's values.

Following the Olympic Games leaders reflected on long-term plans for peak performance at London 2012, that alongside team resources and aptitude, they felt facilitated peak performance. As Sir David Brailsford illustrated following British cycling's success (interview, BBC):

> I think it's all down to good planning really. Certainly in track cycling the Olympics is the pinnacle and [...] four years is a long time to try to sustain the same intensity, the same level of performance so we quite deliberately come down after an Olympic Games and then build back up towards the Olympics

and try to peak for the 5 days that really really matter which has been here in London.

Here the heralded nature of the Olympics becomes apparent (Wylleman and Johnson 2012) as leaders are willing to dedicate four years of organising, training, and competing in a way that provides the best opportunity for peak performance "when it matters". The values communicated after British cycling's success appeared to be consistent to those disclosed prior to the Olympics that highlighted attention to detail and preparation as values that defined British cycling. Aligned with team values, Sir David Brailsford (interview, BBC) outlined British cycling's marginal gains philosophy:

> The whole principle came from the idea that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike, and then improved it by 1%, you will get a significant increase when you put them all together. There's fitness and conditioning, of course, but there are other things that might seem on the periphery [...] they're tiny things but if you clump them together it makes a big difference.

The extract above suggests how the social identity contents (i.e., team values; Postmes and Spears 1998) were consistent across the two phases of the study within British cycling. Remaining consistent to the team's values emerged as a prominent pattern in the data during the Games and this finding enhances understanding of leadership practice by documenting how leaders' communicated team values over time.

In the lead up to the Games athletics leader Charles van Commenee (TeamGB, interview) detailed "our collective philosophy since Beijing has been one

of raising the bar as we work towards London 2012". The leader articulated how their team sought to achieve performance excellence through the team value of accountability; where all athletes and staff are responsible for performing to their best. The leader believed accountability would enhance athlete performance and was a value he embraced too (interview, BBC), "If athletes don't perform and suffer the consequences, I have to lead by example [...] If I hold athletes and coaches accountable every day, how could I possibly work in the next four years if I'm not held accountable?" Similarly, during the Olympics leaders aimed to inspire athletes to achieve their best by drawing on previous successful Olympians. For example, speaking after Mo Farah won the 5,000 metres, Lord Coe discussed Dame Kelly Holmes' double gold-winning triumph in Athens 2004 and suggested Farah could emulate Holmes' feat by additionally winning the 10,000 metres at London 2012. These findings add to our understanding of the contextual nature of leadership (Haslam *et al.* 2011) by indicating how leaders drew upon the Olympic context to motivate peak performance.

Finally, the value(s) within British rowing reflected the tradition and heritage of the sport and its history of performance excellence, while in contrast the team value(s) within British swimming were not articulated within the media data. In sum, support for the importance of defining team values for mobilisation of team behaviour was found and may be beneficial for leaders in order to direct attitudes and behaviours of athletes and staff.

Theme 3: Team vision

The vision leaders portrayed focused on performance. The most explicit attempt to outline the performance vision reflected medal targets and reflects previous evidence of an overriding culture of high performance in elite sport

(Douglas and Carless 2009). Douglas and Carless' (2009) narrative approach illustrated the problems associated with a single-minded performance focus in elite sport, nevertheless, interpretation of the leaders' data suggests an overriding performance focus. For instance, athletics had been set a target of five to eight medals, but Charles van Commenee set his target at the upper end of this range–eight medals, noting: "I think we can [achieve the target of 8 medals], we have about 15 athletes including relays that are in what I call the medal zone" (interview, BBC). Given previous research in elite sport (e.g., Arnold *et al.* 2012) it is unsurprising leaders portrayed a vision centred upon performance at London 2012. Indeed, Fletcher and Arnold (2011) interpreted vision as a general dimension from interviews with national performance directors, where underlying themes detailed the importance of developing a vision that is shared, disseminated clearly, and managed in terms of expectations. We find evidence for similar processes in the leaders' media data at London 2012. Further, links between theme 2 (team values) and this theme (team vision) enhances understanding of leadership. Namely, analysis revealed that at London 2012 it was the value(s) of the team that underpinned the team performance vision. It may be that team value(s) provide contextually relevant cognitive schemas for group members to progress towards the collective vision.

Leaders behaved in-line with the performance vision of TeamGB in various ways. Team selection provided one example, Sir David Brailsford's selection process was consistent with the performance vision by selecting the fastest riders. In addition, Charles van Commenee selected a team captain that he felt reflected the performance vision he wanted the team to fulfil. Sir David Brailsford selected Sir Chris Hoy (team announcement, TeamGB):

Sir Chris needs no introduction, he's blazed the trail for us for many many years, embodies everything that you need to as an Olympic athlete, he really is the living epitome of everything, all the Olympic ideals all rolled into one.

From a social identity perspective leaders may have drawn attention to certain athletes because they demonstrate the values and behaviours leaders sought to promote in the in-group (Slater *et al.* 2013). In social identity terms athletes such as Sir Chris Hoy are prototypical of their group's identity (Hogg 2001). Previous evidence has suggested prototypical individuals are a strong centre of influence as they represent the group and thus fellow group members trust them to advance the group (e.g., Geissner and van Knippenberg 2008). In this way, analysis indicated leaders are acting as entrepreneurs of identity (Reicher and Hopkins 2001), by highlighting the group ideal detailed in previous investigations (i.e., Steffens *et al.* 2013) – not only what the group is now, but what it aspires to become.

The performance vision was additionally drawn on by Lord Coe. Two days before the opening ceremony Lord Coe focused on "athlete-focused" preparations and he challenged athletes to create a positive atmosphere at London 2012 (interview, BBC):

Work all our teams have done has been on behalf of the athletes [...] so it's then over to them... I don't think we've left any stone unturned in giving them the best possible platform to compete but, you know, we want TeamGB to perform at the very highest level and actually if you get athlete-led atmosphere, which is what you will get when the best athletes of the generation compete, that then tends to slip and slide out of the stadium and into the streets, so really the athletes create the atmosphere at a games.

An additional pattern in the data reflected how leaders had a vision to motivate the British public to support TeamGB. The leaders drew on British Royal events and figures that resonate with the British public. To illustrate, leaders used the example of The Duchess of Cambridge wearing a TeamGB scarf when she met the TeamGB hockey squads to demonstrate that she would be supporting TeamGB. In addition, The Diamond Jubilee was celebrated in the lead up to the Olympics:

> The support shown by the British public for Her Majesty The Queen was breathtaking and I was truly impressed by the level of patriotism on show. It fills me with pride and excitement to know we are in the process of delivering another large-scale event which promises to unite the UK in such a special way. London wholeheartedly embraced the Jubilee celebrations, and I know it will do the same with the Olympics (AH, blog, TeamGB).

From a social identity perspective (Haslam *et al.* 2011), leaders drew upon one of the core values of the British public−British Royalty−to perhaps mobilise the British public, that identify with the Royal family, to support TeamGB. Such a rhetorical construction was interpreted to motivate support from members of the British public that perhaps were less interested in the Olympics but felt an attachment (in-group ties, Cameron 2004) to the Royal family. Indeed, leaders believed the support of the British public could add a "psychological boost and hopefully push them [athletes] on to glory" (AH, team announcement, TeamGB). As also reported by Arnold et al. (2012), our analysis indicates that contextual awareness, together with an understanding individuals' social identities of whom they seek to influence and motivate, may be pertinent for effective leadership.

Theme 4: Performance consequences

During the Olympics certain events required leaders' attention. One incident was TeamGB's lower than expected medal count after the first few days. Andy Hunt answered this question in a way that portrayed solidarity, confidence, and challenged TeamGB athletes. In particular, the leader highlighted his expectations for traditional sports that TeamGB typically excel in to lead the way. One traditional sport is rowing and on race day, David Tanner (interview, BBC) noted his athletes were determined to achieve that success: "they [the rowers] were in a great place last evening when I saw them... they're good to go, no holds barred, absolutely determined to win that gold medal." As the Games unfolded TeamGB exceeded expectations:

> We came here wanting to win more medals in more sports than over a century, so [the target was] 48 medals from 12 sports and we aspired to maintain fourth place in the medal table, but of course, we've completely blown that away, absolutely blown that away and that's through just extraordinary performances by the athletes and the incredible support of the British public (AH, interview, BBC).

Corresponding with the TeamGB performance vision outlined prior to the Olympics, each sport was judged on their medal success. In sum, cycling and rowing exceeded medal expectations, athletics met their allocated medal expectations (but fell two medals short of their leader's target), and swimming did not meet the medal target. The leader of British swimming reflected on the Games:

> There's not a mechanism, they [British swimmers] have never stood in front of a crowd like this before. We can do all the training and all of the preparation, but the first time they get to experience it is when they walk out

here. Sometimes it's broader than the crowd, it's the public expectation, but

our swimmers need to learn how to cope with that (MS, interview, BBC).

In the quote above the leader indicates a contributing factor to his team's

performance was outside of their control. Despite this attributional attempt to

perhaps maintain group esteem, stating the swimmers "need to learn how to learn to

cope" may shift the responsibility onto the athletes, rather than communicating a

collective responsibility. From a social identity perspective, it is interesting how the

leader refers to British swimmers as "they", which implies distance between leader

and athletes. In social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) using the term "they"

often refers to an out-group and is in contrast to other Olympic leaders in the study

who used group-orientated language (i.e., "we") in their communication. Aligned

with the social identity approach, using group-orientated language is one way leaders

can highlight that they are acting in the group's interests (De Cremer *et al.* 2006).

Following the Olympics, Michael Scott resigned after a performance review. In

addition, aligned with the previously discussed team value of accountability van

Commenee portrayed, he resigned from his role following the Games, stating the

interests of British athletics directed his decision. Further, in keeping with the

performance vision of TeamGB, Andy Hunt directed a performance review to be

undertaken by each sport.

Theme 5: "We" achieved

Leaders bestowed the medal achievements of TeamGB on the team, the

volunteers, the organisers, and the British public. In accordance with the team focus,

Andy Hunt reflected on an historical event at London 2012 with the public in mind:

What unfolded over the course of a single day ["Super Saturday" where TeamGB athletics won three gold medals] has been years in the making. It is a day unlike any that has been seen in the modern history of British Olympic sport and it is a day our country will never forget. Most importantly, it is a day for the athletes–the Olympic champions, and the millions of supporters throughout our country who have lifted them on their shoulders and helped make this possible (AH, interview, BBC).

Thus, leaders guided the success of TeamGB and the individual sports to be interpreted as a group success. From a social identity perspective, bestowing success on the group re-affirms and strengthens the bond within the group as leaders are more likely to be perceived as acting for the group, rather than themselves (Haslam and Reicher 2007). Further, leaders paid special attention to the success of the athletes, for example:

Oh... unbelievably proud I think for people in my position and the coaches and all the backroom staff we're there to support but ultimately we don't win medals it's the riders who have to ride, they have to perform on the day, they have to be the best that they can on the day and every single rider that's stepped up and performed to the best of their ability... they've broke world record after world record when it really mattered and I think that's credit to them (DB, interview, BBC).

The athlete-focus evident above had been previously outlined by Lord Coe in the opening ceremony. Coe's vision was for London 2012 to be an athlete-focused Games and at the closing ceremony it was believed that London 2012 had "been a Games for the athletes" (speech, BBC). Additionally Lord Coe aimed to connect

with the audience by articulating how individuals from the organising team to the public have contributed to the Olympics. In this way, the public may feel they have played their part in London 2012; "Thank you to the tens of thousands of volunteers... [crowd cheers for 20 seconds], volunteers... volunteers who gave their time, their boundless enthusiasm and their goodwill and who have the right to say; tonight I made London 2012" (LC, speech, BBC).

Moreover, leaders emphasised the need to build on TeamGB's performance in the future. The previous themes of team vision and team values were discussed again in the leaders' media data, but now in the future tense: "We trained for this [London 2012] and I think the way we have managed the last few weeks has been exceptional. But there is work to be done−it doesn't stop today. We can build on this [medal attainment] in Rio" (DT, interview, BBC). The above extract illustrates David Tanner feels a strong emotional affiliation (in-group tie; Cameron 2004) with British rowing. The leader did not speak in "I" or "me" terms, rather the focus was on "we" and "us". Using inclusive language exhibits a solidarity and closeness within the group that highlights group-focused and contextual leadership, key principles of the social identity approach to leadership (Hogg 2001, Haslam *et al.* 2011).

Conclusions

Current findings contribute to leadership knowledge through an exploration of leaders' media data at the London 2012 Olympic Games from a social identity perspective. In particular, five higher order themes were interpreted from leaders' media communication: creation of team identities, team values, team vision, performance consequences, and "we" achieved. In short, the findings resonate with

the influential and contextual nature of leadership (Northouse 2010) that is central to the social identity analysis of leadership. The study offers new contextually relevant themes and makes a novel contribution to our understanding of social identity leadership (Hogg, 2001, Haslam *et al.* 2011) within the context of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

The current study builds on previous examinations of media data in sport (e.g., McGannon *et al.* 2012, Schinke *et al.* 2012, Cosh *et al.* 2013) and sheds new light on the topic of leadership and social identity through its temporal analysis of media data. Specifically, present findings have enhanced our understanding of social identity leadership by indicating leaders aim to create distinctive team values (i.e., contents of social identity; Postmes and Spears 1998) within multidimensional (Cameron 2004), and constantly evolving (McGannon *et al.* 2012) team identities. This finding is important for two reasons. First, thematic analysis revealed interconnections between team values and vision in that team values underpinned TeamGB's and the individuals sport's vision (cf. Fletcher and Arnold 2011), which was centred upon performance. Douglas and Carless (2009) highlight the problems for retiring athletes when the sole focus of elite sport is performance, and building on this evidence current analysis has shown a performance vision was communicated in the media by leaders at the London 2012 Olympic Games. Further, the creation of a team identity (i.e., TeamGB) was interpreted as a higher order theme in the current analysis, but references to leaders' or athletes' additional identities remained unsaid.

Second, team values may have been outlined by leaders to inspire the attitudes and behaviours of athletes, although how these messages were perceived by athletes remains unknown. Taking the former result first, beyond team vision leaders emphasised distinctive values (e.g., attention to detail) that made their group (e.g.,

British cycling) unique and acted as mechanisms through which the group aimed to achieve their vision. Second, precisely how the construction of team values was conducive to achieving the performance vision emerged from the analysis. Leaders communicating team values may have been to provide the cognitive schema to govern TeamGB athletes' behaviour when athletes categorise themselves as part of the group (Slater *et al.* 2013). Thus, team values were outlined to inspire athletes' behaviours (e.g., British cyclists will be attentive to detail) that mobilised the team towards the performance vision.

Leaders outlining team value(s) in the media could be due to the psychological implications for group members. To explain, intergroup comparisons are made on group characteristics, and it is likely these characteristics reflect the group values inherent within the group (Boen *et al.* 2008). By advancing the group towards the values leaders can increase the likelihood of positive comparisons and, in turn, the motivation, self-worth, and well-being of group members (Amiot *et al.* 2010). At London 2012 data suggested that leaders organised events (e.g., performance tests for team kit), provided support (e.g., long-term planning), and communicated team values in the media to increase the likelihood of achieving the performance vision. These findings build on Slater *et al's* (2013) case study of Sir David Brailsford by providing an empirically grounded example that at London 2012 leaders communicated to the media through interviews, speeches/team announcements, and blogs, in a manner that implies they organised events to facilitate a high performance environment. In sum, current analysis supports the complex (Fletcher and Arnold 2011) and demonstrates the continual and proactive nature of leadership encompassing psychosocial and contextual influences. It follows

that leadership theories account for all of these, an exciting opportunity for future research.

Turning to future research, the social identity analysis of leadership (Haslam *et al.* 2011) may warrant further investigation. As found in the present analysis, the social identity approach makes a contribution to sport leadership through its theoretical explanation of the psychosocial mechanisms (e.g., team identities and values) that underpin leaders' influence and mobilisation of group members towards the team's vision. Amongst other findings, current data emphasises the continuous and sometimes unforeseen nature of leadership. For example, despite coming within the TeamGB target of five to eight medals by achieving six medals (including four gold medals), British athletics leader Charles van Commenee resigned following the Olympics. Thus, current data highlights the importance researching leadership over time, for example, investigating leadership for the duration of a season may enhance our understanding of leadership. To build on the present study's focus on male leaders a further opportunity for researchers is to explore the media data of women leaders. Comparing similarities and differences across male and women leaders would offer a novel contribution to knowledge in light of the known inequalities between males and women in leadership (e.g., the glass cliff, Ryan and Haslam 2005).

In relation to applied practice, current findings have practical significance. For instance, sport psychology consultants working with leaders that are involved with the media may wish to apply current results to ensure leaders are using their media representations in the best way possible. Optimising perceptions of leaders in the media may be particular worthwhile in light of the impression formation literature (Manley *et al.* 2008). For example, a number of strategies were displayed

that sought to create a team identity at London 2012. Given the benefits of developing a shared team identity in sport (e.g., Slater *et al.* 2013), leaders may adopt inclusive language (e.g., "we" or "us") that exhibits group solidarity and closeness, or highlight athletes that portray the group ideal. Further, communicating to the nation in a manner that connects with the British public (e.g., British Royalty) may help to motivate public support. These implications may be particularly prudent given that current data suggested it may be maladaptive for leaders not to encourage team identities or values in the media. The present findings can only tentatively associate leaders' media representations to athlete performance, but the impact of how athletes performed at London 2012 is substantial. Following London 2012, UK Sport funding for athletics increased by 6.6%, cycling increased by 17.5%, rowing increased by 19.5%, and swimming decreased by 14.9%. Evidence has indicated leadership has an organisational influence on elite performance (Fletcher and Arnold 2011, Arnold *et al.* 2012), however, it must be noted that a myriad of factors can influence athletic performance, particularly at an Olympic Games. For example, Balmer *et al's* (2003) evidence indicates home nations typically benefit from home advantage. Nevertheless, the influential and contextual processes of leadership may have played a small part in the success of each sport's athletes. Ahead of Rio 2016, leaders may benefit from understanding the values of their athletes' social identities in order to propose and establish team values that resonate with athletes and are conducive to fulfil the collective vision.

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