

Putting the boot in! Sports scientists look into antisocial behaviour on and off the pitch

Posted on Wednesday 9th October 2013

Athletes participating in a team sport like football, rugby, or hockey, who behave in an anti-social way on the pitch, are also antisocial in their interactions with other students at university, according to research published by University of Birmingham sports scientists in the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*.

The researchers also found that team players behaved in a 'pro-social' way towards teammates – encouraging and helping others on the team – and that this was greater in sport than in their interactions with other students.

The research team asked over 700 members of sports teams from three English universities about their feelings and actions while on the pitch, compared to their interactions with their peers at university.

The findings show that being part of a team engenders a sense of 'team spirit' in the form of positive and encouraging behaviour towards one's teammates, but at the same time, it can bring about a negative attitude towards one's opponents. Antisocial behaviours such as breaking the rules and physical intimidation were more frequent toward opponents in sport than toward other students at university.

The researchers also looked at why team sport athletes may increase their antisocial behaviour when playing sport. In the study they found that athletes have a higher 'ego orientation' in sport – they tend to define success as performing better than others - and secondly that they score higher in 'moral disengagement' - they use justifications that make them feel less guilty when behaving badly towards other athletes. It may, in part, be due to these attributes that we observe higher antisocial behavior in sport compared to other contexts.

Dr Maria Kavussanu, lead investigator from the University of Birmingham's School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences, said: '*Although antisocial behavior is higher on than off the pitch, those players who are more antisocial while playing sport tend to also be more antisocial in their interactions with other students. Importantly, being part of a sport team leads one to act positively toward the members of the group.*'

Ends

Notes to Editors

The University of Birmingham's School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences was ranked first in the UK among the Sport and Exercise Sciences Institutes in the latest Research Assessment Exercise.

For further information

Kate Chapple, Press Office, University of Birmingham, tel 0121 414 2772 or 07789 921164, email: k.h.chapple@bham.ac.uk (<mailto:k.h.chapple@bham.ac.uk>)

[Privacy](#) | [Legal](#) | [Cookies and cookie policy](#) | [Accessibility](#) | [Site map](#) | [Website feedback](#) | [Charitable information](#)

© University of Birmingham 2015

