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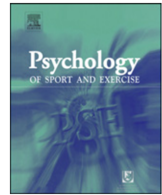

A media analysis of a sport celebrity: Understanding an informal "team cancer" role as a socio-cultural construction

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Negative informal roles in sport such as a "team cancer" warrant further attention because of the association with athletes' negative psychological experiences, impaired team processes, and reduced performance. The purpose of the current study is to extend understandings of the team cancer role by analyzing the socio-cultural context (i.e., sport media narratives surrounding a sport celebrity and key media incident) within which one "team cancer" was constituted in a professional sport context.
Method: National Hockey League (NHL) star Sean Avery was the sport celebrity of interest. The key media incident was the "sloppy seconds" comment made by Avery regarding his former girlfriend. The comment was an attack towards the opposing team's defenseman, who was dating her. Newspaper representations of the comment ($n = 62$) were explored via ethnographic content analysis (see Altheide, 1996).
Results: It was found that the depiction of the team cancer emerged differently depending on two paradoxical discourses found within the media: a hockey moral code as truth vs. a hockey moral code as hypocrisy. This paradox surrounding the morality of sport was exemplified within the two hockey moral code discourses surrounding the personification of Avery's team cancer identity and the "sloppy seconds incident".
Conclusions: This study adds to our understanding regarding how the media influences the construction of an informal team cancer role from one professional sport incident. This focus opens up a window of new understandings and possibilities for research and application beyond current theories and understandings of negative informal team roles in sport psychology.
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The presence of group roles is well documented in organizational psychology (Hare, 1994; Homans, 1950; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Mabry & Barnes, 1980) and sport psychology (Carron, Hausenblas, & Eys, 2005; Eys, Carron, Beauchamp, & Bray, 2005). Sport psychology researchers interested in team roles and group dynamics have focused on formal roles, which are expected patterns of behaviours known by formal prescription (e.g., team captain) (see Eys, Schinke, & Jeffery, 2008). Limited work has explored informal team roles which evolve out of group interactions not formally prescribed and their implications for athletes and team dynamics. Sport psychology authors (e.g., Carron et al., 2005; Eys et al., 2008) have noted that the lack of research on informal roles is not reflective of their impact upon teams and wider sport contexts. Narrowing further, negative informal roles warrant our attention due to their influence upon athletes' psychological experiences (e.g., distress, dissatisfaction), impaired team processes (e.g., reduced task cohesion) and reduced athletic performance (e.g., athlete attrition/drop-out) (Cope, Eys, Beauchamps, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011; Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2010; Eys et al., 2008).

Athletes exemplifying particular negative characteristics (e.g., manipulative, narcissistic, distracting) have been labeled as "team cancers". The specific meaning of a team cancer has emerged as a role characterized by negative emotions and behaviors that spread destructively throughout a team, harming the team's dynamics and outcomes (see Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011; Cope et al., 2010). Only once (i.e., Cope et al., 2010) have researchers explored the team cancer and her/his potential impact on the team. Cope and colleagues suggested that the characteristics of team cancers are negative (e.g., manipulative, narcissistic) and can lead to decreased team performance, yet may also provide opportunities for coaches to reinforce proper behaviours with their athletes. Furthermore, the meaning and consequence of a team cancer has been shown to change depending on the cultural context of the sport (Cope et al., 2011). Finally, researchers have yet to explore the psychological,

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career/performance, and personal/social consequences for athletes labeled as a team cancer in professional sport. Since sport psychologists have a vested interest in the psychological and performance consequences of their athletes, this latter point is particularly important. Not only is it critical to explore the repercussions of a team cancer on her/his team and broader sport context, it is necessary to consider the complex meanings of a team cancer and how those meanings may influence the individual who occupies the role.

Cultural sport psychology: Extending the meaning of a team cancer

How might we begin to capture the complex meanings of a team cancer identity? A useful starting point is to employ a cultural studies approach. Cultural studies perspectives highlight the psyche, self and identity as *simultaneously* cultural and social rather than reducing them to mechanisms and cognitions within the mind, as with mainstream approaches in sport psychology (see McGannon & Mauws, 2000; Smith, 2010). Sport psychology researchers have recently focused attention onto the topic of culture in a similar manner to facilitate a more contextualized understanding of marginalized voices and cultural identities (Blodgett, Schinke, Smith, Peltier, & Pheasant, 2011; Ryba, Schinke & Tennenbaum, 2010; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009; Schinke, McGannon, Parham, & Lane, in press; Smith & Sparkes, 2011). Known as *cultural sport psychology*, scholars within this burgeoning genre of research critically examine how sport psychology is (re)presented via a cultural studies lens, challenging mainstream sport psychology's assumptions, particularly where conceptions and meanings of cultural identities are concerned (Blodgett et al., 2011; McGannon & Spence, 2010; Smith, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2008, 2009).

Using cultural sport psychology allows us to advocate for a conception and exploration of a team cancer identity role as a *socio-cultural construction*. From a cultural sport psychology perspective, a team cancer identity does not exist solely "inside the head" as a mediator or cause of behavior and/or as a function of "bad athlete character" as believed with current conceptions. Instead a team cancer identity is regarded as the product of individual, social and cultural narratives which interact to create particular meanings concerning this cultural identity (McGannon & Mauws, 2000; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Conceptualizing a team cancer in this manner allows for novel insights into the meanings and functions of this negative informal role within the cultural context of sport as a politically and economically charged arena (Birrell & McDonald, 2000). Moreover, conceptualizing and studying a team cancer identity as a socio-cultural construction opens up an additional window of understanding and the possibility for further research and application beyond current theories and understandings of negative informal team roles in sport psychology.

Sport media: understanding negative informal roles in socio-cultural context

To further understand and begin to capture the meanings of a team cancer in professional sport contexts from a cultural sport psychology perspective, it is advantageous to direct attention towards sport media. While analyzing media narratives has typically been the domain of sport sociologists with a few exceptions (e.g., Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011; Schinke, Battochio, Dubuc, Swords, Appoloni, & Tenenbaum, 2008; Schinke, Gauthier, Dubuc, & Crowder, 2007), sport psychologists interested in team identity roles could benefit from research adopting a cultural sport psychology approach via focusing on sport media. Through a cultural studies approach and data derived from media sources, one might consider not only how the athlete's identity is constituted, but also how that constitution consequently affects the athlete and those he or she must train and compete alongside. In-line with the cultural sport psychology views presented earlier, a rich history of cultural studies scholarship has pointed out that the media "constructs" athletic identities, and therefore influences the way(s) in which particular athletes are perceived by society and the ways athletes perceive themselves (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; McDonald & Birrell, 1999; Whannel, 2002). Analyzing sport celebrities is a complex process. Today's athlete is a product of the media whose identity(ies) emerge in particular ways (e.g., team cancer) as a result of the narratives/storylines and discourses that frame them (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Birrell & McDonald, 2000). It is through careful analysis that we see how identities as found in the media are constructed and narrated (Birrell & McDonald, 2000). From such analyses, the reader is able to recognize the taken for granted meanings feeding into and constructing those identities. Birrell and McDonald have suggested that the media frames sport narratives that privilege one identity and yet "the necessary dynamism of the celebrity complex" (Andrews & Jackson, 2001, p. 2) indicate no meaning or designation is ever fixed, as many athletes move from hero to bad boy within a media nanosecond. Other sport media researchers have highlighted the complexity of such portrayals and the socio-cultural significance of analyzing them (see LaFrance & Rail, 2001; Kusz, 2007; Whannel, 2002). For example, Dennis Rodman's "bad boy" identity did not reflect the complexity of his identity (LaFrance & Rail, 2001). Despite Rodman's cross-dressing and tattoos, his "badness" was economically productive. Considered disruptive to many, Rodman won the National Basketball Association (NBA) sixth man award and also led the league in rebounding while being sponsored by corporations. Kusz found similar complexities in the representation of tennis player Andre Agassi as the "rebel" athlete of the 1990s. Agassi had multiple representations as a winner, slacker and rebel throughout his career. It is in the complexity of Agassi's representation that we can "read" him as a map of cultural narratives around race and Generation X during the 1990s (Kusz, 2007). Studying sport celebrities who are labeled as deviant —or in the case of our study, labeled as team cancers—allows us to better understand how the media influences how athletes are perceived, within a contextual moment, and the consequences that can result (e.g., social stereotypes, racial stereotypes, gender stereotype resistance) (Birrell & McDonald, 2000).

Theoretical perspectives used to study informal roles in sport psychology such as the "bad apple phenomenon" by Felps, Mitchell, and Byington (2006) or the role episode model (see Eys et al., 2005 as adapted for sport) do not allow for full consideration of the contextual and cultural factors discussed above and as outlined by cultural sport psychology. While more research on informal roles from such perspectives is warranted, exploring sport media celebrities holds great potential toward teasing out the complexity of meanings of informal roles such as a team cancer and how the socio-cultural context contributes to such meanings. Studying particular cultural figures in sport using innovative qualitative methodologies is also useful because such approaches allow us to capture the complexity of meanings surrounding celebrity identities, which can shift over time (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). Moreover, the cultural context (i.e., the media) in which sport celebrities play, and are portrayed, can influence the way(s) that their identities are written and the consequences that may result.

Through this study, we sought to extend the literature in cultural sport psychology into the negative informal team role and group dynamics literatures found in sport psychology. Our intent was to extend understandings and meanings of the negative informal role of a team cancer identity by qualitatively analyzing media representations of a sport celebrity positioned by the media as embodying the characteristics of a team cancer (e.g., narcissistic,

manipulative, negative, distraction) (see Cope et al., 2010). The following research questions guided the study: (1) how is a team cancer identity of a sport celebrity developed, maintained and/or contested within sport media narratives? and (2) what are the implications for the celebrity athlete (e.g., behavioural) occupying the cancer identity role?

Methodology

Sport celebrity and key media incident

To answer the research questions above, a prominent and controversial sport celebrity, Sean Avery formerly of the NHL's Dallas Stars, was our focus due to the personification of his identity as a "team cancer" by the media and fans alike during his 11-year career. Avery is also an interesting focus as he has remained in professional sport and been productive (e.g., scoring, high salaries, coming back into the NHL to play with the New York Rangers) despite numerous suspensions, trades and an abundance of negative publicity linked to his team cancer identity.

A key media incident surrounding Avery's most controversial team conflict, subsequent suspension and trade—"the sloppy seconds incident" – was explored. As it would be impossible to analyze all media incidents that have fed into Avery being constructed as a team cancer with a cultural studies sensibility, this incident was chosen as it coincides with the team cancer characteristics and associated negative effects for the athlete and team, as recently identified by Cope et al. (2010). As well, Birrell and McDonald (2000) recommended focusing on recent controversial incidents as entrees for analysis because these are often contained in relevant time frames, leading to an efficient, in-depth and focused data collection.

The "sloppy seconds incident" occurred on December 2, 2008, when after practice, Avery sought out the media and made a statement regarding his ex-girlfriend, Hollywood actress Elisha Cuthbert. As Avery's team was playing the Calgary Flames that night, the comment was an attack towards then Flames' defenseman Dion Phaneuf, who was dating Cuthbert:

> I'm just going to say one thing. I'm really happy to be back in Calgary; I love Canada. I just want to comment on how it's become like a common thing in the NHL for guys to fall in love with my sloppy seconds. I don't know what that's about, but enjoy the game tonight. (The Dallas Morning News, 'Tippett: Hard to take Avery back… 04/12/08)

Avery was given an indefinite game suspension within hours of the comment by the Stars, a discharge from the Dallas Stars on December 14, 2008, and public condemnation by the Stars' organization, other NHL players, and the NHL. Avery was also required to publicly apologize, seek medical attention and attend anger management for his unacceptable behaviour.

Data collection

Media accounts were gathered from the Lexis-Nexis Academic database, which was comprised of articles from North American newspapers (e.g., Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, USA Today). One hundred and fifty articles were retrieved via the key words "Sean Avery sloppy seconds" of which 62 articles were analyzed due to their in-depth discussion of the incident in relation to Avery and his team.

Ethnographic content analysis

Ethnographic content analysis (see Altheide, 1987, 1996) is a form of media analysis oriented toward understanding the communication of meaning and is concerned with verifying prior theoretical relationships as well as with the emergence of new theories and concepts. The criteria for judging the quality of ethnographic content analysis is less rigid than traditional forms of qualitative inquiry (e.g., content analysis), with criteria positioned as *characterizing traits* (see Sparkes & Smith, 2009). In this sense a "good" ethnographic content analysis aims to be "systematic and analytic but not rigid. Categories and variables initially guide the study, but others are allowed to and expected to emerge throughout the study, including an orientation toward *constant discovery* and *constant comparison*" (Altheide, 1996, p.16). Thus, the researcher strives to be reflexive and interactive as opposed to applying foundational "set in stone" rules that ensure trustworthiness and truth, with the goal being toward concept development and emergent data analysis. What follows is a description of the process and steps we took in our study in order to meet the criteria of a good piece of ethnographic content analysis research.

Following Altheide's (1996) suggestions for analyzing news media, all news articles were initially catalogued using a protocol sheet which included team cancer categories identified by Cope et al. (2010) (e.g., 'narcissistic' as defined as being boastful and disinterested in the well being of others). A reflective segment to accommodate researchers' notes/comments about how categories were similar to, or different from, each other and how such categories had particular implications for social action and interaction, was also included (Altheide, 1996). These notes aided in the initial coding and the refinement of existing categories and identification of new categories as analysis proceeded. Protocol sheets guided the reading and analysis of each news article, with data consisting of story headlines and direct quotations and narrative segments within the stories. Each protocol sheet was recorded electronically in Microsoft Word for ease of incorporation into a larger database of eventual in-depth coding and analysis.

While systematic categories were generated based on existing team cancer characteristics identified from previous research (e.g., 'manipulative', 'negative'), categories were flexible to allow for new categories and novel connections between and within existing and new categories (Altheide, 1987, 1996). For example, a new team cancer category of 'classless idiot' was identified (e.g., "In referring to his exes – presumably actress Elisha Cuthbert and model Rachel Hunter – as "sloppy seconds," Avery set a new standard for classless behaviour", The Toronto Sun, 07/12/08), and then linked to an 'other identities' category (e.g., "misogynist") of Avery. Both of these categories were linked as they not only reinforced Avery's identity and associated behaviours as cancerous, but all of these categories/sub-layers ultimately fed into a broader theme/discourse of a taken for granted moral code of hockey (which will be outlined shortly). Analysis proceeded by making direct comparisons and contrasts (i.e., using the constant comparative method) between and within categories for each media source as well as modifying/adding key words and concepts throughout the coding procedure (Altheide, 1996).

All levels of analysis were initially done by the first and second authors of the study, who consulted with the study's third author (a sport media and cultural studies researcher) as categories were refined during the constant comparative method/stage. Additionally, relevant literature in sport psychology and cultural studies of sport also informed the researchers during the constant comparative and final stages of analysis. This step is an important aspect of critical interpretation and refinement of both existing and newly emergent themes resulting from our media analysis (Altheide, 1996; Birrell & McDonald, 2000). The decision to present the results and discussion together in the next section is reflective of this last step, and is consistent with the presentation of sport media studies/research from a cultural studies perspective.

Results and discussion

The results and discussion are presented under a central theme: a hockey moral code discourse. Discourse is a broad concept used to refer to various ways of constituting meaning specific to particular groups, cultures, and historical contexts (Foucault, 1978; Weedon, 1997). Discourses further provide the meanings that constitute people's everyday practices and are the resources that people draw upon to give meaning to who they are; discourses actively shape, enable, and/or constrain particular identities and behavioural practices (Markula, Burns, & Riley, 2008; McGannon & Spence, 2010; Weedon, 1997). The potential of focusing on discourse and the narratives within them for understanding the complexity of the self and identity, as well as entrees for behaviour change, has been effectively argued in sport and exercise psychology (see McGannon & Mauws, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010; Smith, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Discussing the findings under this central theme thus allows for the illustration of how the media narratives were layered and connected, with sub-themes feeding into the social construction of a team cancer identity in specific, yet complex and contradictory ways. Further, by focusing on the discourse(s) and the narratives within them, we may begin to entertain novel approaches to intervention and change concerning problematic identities for athletes. This point will be brought forward again in our conclusions section.

A hockey moral code discourse emerged in two paradoxical ways within the current study: (a) a hockey moral code as truth which guides hockey player conduct on and off the ice, and (b) a hockey moral code that is exposed as an illusion and hypocrisy. The paradox of morality in sport has been discussed by sport sociologists, arguing on the one hand that sport is a subculture priding itself on moral values, fair play and ethical structure. While on the other hand, the notion that sport builds moral character has been rejected and is an illusion, with sport promoting disrespect towards opponents and emphasizing winning (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Simon, 2003; Whannel, 2002). While sport psychology researchers have not attended to this paradox and its contribution to specific athlete identities, researchers have demonstrated the importance of understanding how shifting values in sport contexts impact upon athletes' moral reasoning and behaviours in particular ways (Bredemeier, Shields, & Horn, 2003).

The foregoing paradox was exemplified within the two specific and contradictory hockey moral code discourses within which various personifications of Avery's team cancer identity emerged. Depending on how the hockey moral code was invoked the meanings of Avery's team cancer role and the "sloppy seconds" incident, as well as the implications for Avery emerged differently. Each of these hockey moral code discourses as it relates to the characteristics of Avery's team cancer identity is discussed in relation to the implications for Avery and his team.

Upholding a hockey moral code as truth: Bad boy gone wild

A hockey moral code as truth discourse means that particular ideas regarding what a moral code "is" become taken for granted as factual when people talk about a hockey moral code being present within the sport. As alluded to above, a hockey moral code as truth discourse feeds into notions that sport builds character, "real men" behave as gentlemen, and that hockey players have a responsibility to their team and the sport organization, to conduct themselves honorably (Bernstein, 2006; Smith, 1979; Whannel, 2002). While rarely discussed publicly by players, the parameters of the hockey moral code within the NHL can be shown through Bernstein's (2006) interviews with 50 current and former NHL players, coaches and media personalities. The hockey moral code as truth discourse is summed up in Bernstein's (2006) book by former defense/right winger veteran NHL player Marty McSorley:

> As for the code, to me, it was what we, as hockey players lived by. The code was a living, breathing thing, among us. It changed and evolved as the rules changed and evolved, and it took on a life of its own…The most important aspects of the code bar none, are honesty and respect. Because without that it's the Wild West out there, which is no good for anybody. If players don't play honestly and with respect, then there is a price to pay in this game. That's just the way it is. Hockey is a game that polices itself, and there is a lot of honor behind that. (p. x)

Recently, ESPN the Magazine's column, *Player X*, explored trash talking in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the notion of "acceptable" verbal aggression in sport as a form of taken for granted truth about sport that players abide by as a moral code. Player X writes, "the on-court chatter is bad (for the NBA) because it's a good way to get in an opponent's head and rattle him… Trash talk can go too far fast, though, so there is a code. Off-limit topics; moms, wives, girlfriends, kids. And health." Verbally aggressive behavior is acceptable within a particular context and within a particular moral standard (Player X, ESPN Magazine, p. 10). The passage below from the "sloppy seconds incident" data exemplifies the foregoing:

> Here's a refresher course from page 2, article 2 (e), in which Avery agreed- among other things- "to conduct himself on and off the rink according to the highest standards of honesty, morality, fair play and sportsmanship, and to refrain from conduct detrimental to the best interest of the Club, the League or professional hockey." ….pretty much everyone agreed that his words crossed the line. It was tasteless, uncouth, potty-mouthed, ignorant and generally demeaning toward women. (The Globe and Mail, 'Did Avery breach contract with his outburst?' 3/12/08)

Against the backdrop of the hockey moral code discussed within this passage, Avery is personified as an athlete that does not conduct himself appropriately within the moral boundaries of the NHL as shown by the terminology used to describe him (e.g., "it was tasteless, uncouth, potty-mouthed, ignorant and generally demeaning toward women"). The passage further reveals that within the hockey moral code as truth discourse, there is consensus within hockey circles that athletes can (and even should) adopt a particular role on the ice and invoke retaliatory or hurtful behaviours considered acceptable (Bernstein, 2006; Bredemeier et al., 2003; Gee & Leith, 2007). However, players cannot verbally "cross a line", on or off the ice, which would be ungentlemanly and disrespectful, bad for the organization, and perhaps even detrimental to individual and/or team performance (Bernstein, 2006; Gee & Leith, 2007).

In hockey the use of verbally aggressive behaviour on the ice, although potentially problematic (e.g., penalties incurred for unsportsmanlike conduct), is a generally accepted part of hockey culture (Bernstein, 2006; Bredemeier et al., 2003; Gee & Leith, 2007; Smith, 1978; Tenenbaum, Stewart, Singer, & Duda 1997; Visek & Watson, 2005). The hockey moral code as truth discourse prevalent in the news narratives surrounding the sloppy seconds comment revealed that particular forms of aggressive behavior (on the ice) were acceptable, but that disparaging remarks made off the ice by Avery were disrespectful and thus reflective of his team cancer identity. As Bernstein found in his interviews, Avery's behaviour exemplifies that the hockey moral code is much bigger than any one individual or team; players simply do not breach the rules of the code, and if they do, there is hell to pay (Bernstein,

2006). In the case of Avery the "hell" he endured included suspension from the Stars and NHL and counseling/anger management. While Cope et al. (2010) identified multiple ways in which a team cancer might be managed (e.g., direct communication, toleration), because Avery breached the hockey moral code one primary form of cancer management was used: punishment. Thus, when drawing upon this discourse, the media overall concluded that the Stars and the NHL were (rightfully) rid of an athlete who was both a team and a league cancer.

Team cancer characteristics

Within a hockey moral code as truth discourse, the meanings and components of Avery's team cancer identity (e.g., negative, manipulative, narcissistic), as well as the consequences of that identity emerged similar to those outlined in the sport psychology literature (Cope et al., 2011). For example, by positioning Avery as narcissistic within this discourse, there were consequences for Avery, his team, and his coach. For Avery's team, the sloppy seconds comment emerged as not only a behaviour that distracted from the game and team unity, but his coach became empowered, unifying the team to get rid of the team cancer (i.e., Avery). The consequence for Avery's sloppy seconds comment was a team suspension and ban from the NHL.

Avery's team cancer identity emerged as a character flaw which directs his bad behaviour and therefore must be punished and/or fixed via medical solutions. Media narratives legitimated such punishments by invoking statements of people in power positions within the Stars organization and/or the NHL. In particular, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman was often quoted when discussing Avery's punishments:

> "Sean had been warned he was getting close to the line too many times," Bettman said. "In the final analysis, you have to do what you think is right - and that's what I did here." In the end, the suspension may be less important than the counselling, if Avery legitimately wants to get his life back on track and once and for all end a sideshow that grew tiresome a long time ago. (The Globe and Mail, 'Avery suspended six games; Winger agrees to anger-management evaluation after comments about ex-girlfriends', 6/12/08)

Further, quotes from the Stars' current co-general manager and former teammate of Avery's, Brett Hull, were also invoked when discussing such solutions: "Who cares about (Avery) the hockey player?" Hull said. "There could be bigger problems here… He does not have a filter. We might have to get some medical people to look at this situation" (The Toronto Sun, 'Fallen Star; Dallas may not want Avery back', 04/12/08). A story that appeared eleven days later revealed that the entire NHL organization, as well as Hull, were unified that the problem and blame lay mainly within Avery's flawed team cancer identity. Ultimately, Avery had to be removed for his own safety and to ultimately preserve team and game ideals:

> According to Hull, Avery is in a 10-day voluntary program set up by the NHL players association seeking treatment to deal with anger issues, a stay that could be extended if needed. "We don't want to ruin Sean or his career," Hull said. "The team needs to move on and start winning and he needs to take care of himself." As a hockey player, I think there is no question he can be an asset. That said, he has got to fix the demons he has. It becomes such a huge distraction that it almost takes away from his ability to play the game." (The Toronto Sun, 'Stars sever ties with foul-mouthed Avery', 15/12/08).

Against the backdrop of a hockey moral code as truth discourse, such solutions further legitimize the aforementioned punishments/team cancer management strategies Avery received, as well as his team cancer identity being a problematic flaw within him. However, within the hockey moral code paradox, such punishments alone may not be warranted and/or effective when the athlete's behaviour is common place, sanctioned and encouraged within the sport's culture (Gee & Leith, 2007). The team cancer identity does not lie solely within Avery, but is also socially and culturally constructed. When constructed within the hockey moral code discourse, all of the blame is reduced to Avery's problematic team cancer identity. Such blame results in a rather one-dimensional view of how Avery's cancer identity might be changed (e.g., anger management and counseling) and dealt with (e.g., suspension and barring from the NHL).

Team cancer characteristics including being negative, manipulative, and narcissistic (Cope et al., 2010) were most often used to describe and/or make sense of Avery's behaviour as it related to breaching the hockey moral code (i.e., disgracing team mates and the NHL, being disparaging and disrespectful to women). Cope et al. posited that the team cancer characteristic of negativity could be described as a lack of constructiveness, cooperation and helpfulness from an athlete. Avery was often portrayed as a player that did not constructively contribute to his team or to the sport in general. This is exemplified in a story where Avery's coach discussed the sloppy seconds incident and the irreparable damage such behaviour had on team dynamics:

> From a coach's standpoint, I try to build a team that has an atmosphere where players care about each other and play with each other and play with continuity, and I find it hard to believe that Sean could come back in that dressing room and we could find that continuity again. (The Dallas Morning News, 'Tippett: Hard to take Avery back…', 04/12/08)

With respect to manipulation, Cope et al. posited that a team cancer skillfully influences and manipulates a coach/teammate. The following quotation exemplifies this, showing how Avery was positioned as purposely deceiving his coach when he spoke to the media:

> Dallas head coach Dave Tippett was stunned by Avery's remarks…The coach, just 10 min before the comments, had praised Avery to reporters and even asked his player if he was going to talk to the media (Avery said no). Avery then walked through the Stars' dressing room, reportedly telling his teammates to "watch this…" as he sought out the media and made the Cuthbert reference. (The Toronto Star, 'Stars fade on Avery…', 05/12/08)

Within this quote we also see that Avery's coach was tolerating his cancerous identity due to him having talent and making positive task contributions to the team (Cope et al.). When exploring this quote critically, one must further wonder what was Avery's intent? Giulianotti and Gerrard (2001) suggested that the "postmodern "star" is one whose public meaning is much more reversible or founded upon notoriety" (p. 131). The intent of Avery's verbal aggression in this incident appeared to be to create a "media buzz." But his breaching of the hockey moral code has the effect of drawing attention to the role of the media in creating the myth of sport as a moral and safe space. Also, it has the effect of challenging the "all for one" notion that team sport participants are to aspire. In this incident, Avery is not only positioned as a team cancer but as a league cancer, as he reveals the role of media in (re)producing the hockey moral code.

Support for the third team cancer characteristic, narcissism, was also found within the hockey moral code as truth discourse. Cope et al. described narcissism as the act of being selfish and boastful as well as displaying an indifference towards the well-being of other people. In the case of Avery, there was again a particular disregard

and disrespect for women as he put his own needs before the needs of the team, thus breaching the hockey moral code. Some media narratives explicitly discussed the effects of Avery's narcissism on his teammates, further reinforcing the unacceptability of the sloppy seconds comment: "Mr. Avery's own colleagues are clearly appalled at his purposefully ugly, deliberately public remarks. "It's unacceptable," said star forward Mike Modano. "It's a slap in the face," said netminder Marty Turco" (The Dallas Morning News, 'No one signed up to see this offensive move', 04/12/08). This particular story further discussed the effects of Avery's narcissism on Modano and Turco's emotional well-being and overall team loyalty and solidarity:

> They're also angry because Mr. Avery, who already had a reputation as a self-serving showboat who values his own notoriety over team solidarity, violated a basic hockey code. Hockey players, like other professional athletes, make some pretty off-color remarks during games to nettle opponents…But even the most toothless goon in the game knows that in public interviews, remarks about other players' wives, girlfriends…are strictly off-limits… (The Dallas Morning News, 'No one signed up to see this offensive move', 04/12/08)

The above passage illustrates that while hockey players make "off-colour remarks" or engage in unsportsmanlike behaviours (see Bernstein, 2006; Gee & Leith, 2007; Tenenbaum et al., 1997) while on the ice when occupying other informal roles (e.g., "toothless goon"), such behaviours are unacceptable when made off-ice toward other players' wives or girlfriends (a breaching of the hockey moral code). In this sense, Avery's cancer identity emerges as that of a hockey player whose narcissistic tendencies directed him to breach the "idealized" level of gentlemanly conduct accepted in the NHL.

In addition to the above team cancer characteristics, a new cancer identity characteristic emerged within the hockey moral code discourse: "classless idiot". This characteristic portrayed Avery as a person lacking class and intelligence, reinforcing his lack of moral character: It was classless of Avery – in what was clearly a premeditated shot, in an off-ice verbal mauling – to twit Calgary's Dion Phaneuf for romancing his "sloppy seconds," Canadian actress Elisha Cuthbert (The Toronto Star, 'Vilify Avery…', 15/12/08).

By constructing Avery's identity within a hockey moral code as truth discourse, the media narratives again further legitimized Avery's punishment and the league's team cancer management tactics (e.g., discharge from Dallas Stars, NHL suspension, forced counseling and anger management). Avery's cancer identity was ultimately constructed as extremely problematic within this discourse, with the effects on his reputation and career and team being extensive, as media personalities demanded his exoneration from his team and the NHL: "Sean Avery's latest offense…provoked TSN analyst John Tortorella to say: "He's a selfish ass… He's embarrassed himself, he's embarrassed his organization, more importantly, he's embarrassed his teammates…send him home. He doesn't belong in the league" (The Globe and Mail, 'Viewership increases sharply…', 04/12/08).

Other people's identities and the construction of the team cancer

Other people's identities (e.g., other athletes) were often invoked in the stories, further reinforcing the characteristics of Avery's cancerous identity and the fact that he breached the hockey moral code. This category emerged in two similar, yet different ways. In one sense, Avery's team cancer identity was compared and contrasted with people whose personas were exemplars of upholding a moral code in sport. The following quotation illustrates how Avery's identity was constructed as a team cancer by comparing his behaviour to "ideal" hockey players who, while tough on the ice, ultimately live by the hockey moral code:

> This isn't about being an "agitator," a player who's not afraid to mix it up with an opponent. I'm a big fan of genuine Stars tough guys like Steve Ott, Krys Barch or alumni Aaron Downey and Derian Hatcher. And I'm confident that none of those guys would dream of publicly saying what Sean Avery said. (The Dallas Morning News, 'No one signed up to see this offensive move', 04/12/08)

In contrast, the similarities between Avery and other "problem athletes" (see Ogilvie & Tutko, 1966) who breached the hockey moral code, were often mentioned, which also served to reinforce the characteristics of Avery's team cancer identity (i.e., negative, manipulative, narcissistic) as problematic:

> His choreographed outburst, delivered without the benefit of a question beforehand, was reminiscent of the appalling public comments by former Atlanta Braves pitcher John Rocker eight years ago when, during spring training, he lashed out at a variety of ethnic and racial groups, homosexuals and just about any other minority group he could dream up… Avery knew he was going too far, but in his own bizarre expression of intense self-interest, did it anyway. (The Toronto Star, 'Vile Avery trash-talking himself out of the game', 03/12/08)

Other identities of Avery and the construction of a team cancer

A final theme that constructed Avery's team cancer identity was an "other identities of Avery" category (e.g., fashionista, superpest, most hated man in the NHL). These "other identities" continued to be positioned by the media as problematic within a hockey moral code as truth discourse. For example, an identity that emerged involved Avery's interest in the fashion industry:

> The speedy, trash-talking skater is beloved among New York fashionistas both for his jutting-jaw machismo and his eagerness to hold forth on how oversized Gucci bags can make a woman look good. When he worked as a Vogue intern last summer – surely an NHL first – he not only got to pen a diary in which he revealed the contents of his closet… (The Globe and Mail, 'How a fighting fashionista took the trash talk too far', 16/12/08)

By invoking "unacceptable" identities (i.e., "fashionista") for an athlete to occupy within hockey culture, Avery's image as a problem athlete was solidified as a player who lacks commitment to hockey and his team due to his interest in fashion. Sport celebrity soccer player David Beckham has received similar humiliation and criticism from the media for his interest in fashion. Whannel (2002) stated that Beckham is portrayed as "un-masculine" due to his choice of "adventurous" clothing. Furthermore, media narratives surrounding Beckham suggested that his wife actually picked out his wardrobe, portraying him as a male incapable of making decisions and therefore not "bright".

Overall, the other identities category contributed toward Avery's negative identity as a team cancer, as such identities were used in the narratives to demonstrate how Avery's identity and behaviours (e.g., interning at vogue, being interested in fashion) do not meet the requirements of a "typical" hockey player upholding the hockey moral code. In turn, Avery was positioned as cancerous to his team and the NHL because he simply was not committed to the sport; he does not live and breathe the hockey code as "real men" are more interested in hockey and conduct themselves off the ice accordingly (Bernstein, 2006; Connell, 1990; Loy, 1995; Pringle & Hickey, 2010; Whannel, 2002).

Hockey moral code as hypocrisy: Team cancer qualities as resistance

In contrast to upholding the hockey moral code as truth, an opposing discourse emerged when discussing the sloppy seconds incident: the hockey moral code as an illusion and hypocrisy. In these media narratives it was suggested that given the actual practices within the sport such as misogyny, sanctioned aggression and unsportsmanlike trash talk on the ice (Gee & Leith, 2007) it was ridiculous to position Avery's actions as unthinkable. As previously mentioned, sport sociology researchers have posited that sport is assumed to be a protected domain bound by moral and ethical values, but that belief is an illusion and myth (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Whannel, 2002). The illusion and myth of sport is important to acknowledge because it allows us to attend to what goes unspoken or is marginalized in sport psychology discourse (e.g., sexism, racism, particular cultural identities). Cultural sport psychology researchers have emphasized the importance of attending to the sport context in this manner, as further attention can be drawn to moral, ethical and social justice issues (see Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009). In turn, marginalized voices and/or cultural identities may be heard and we can further entertain additional forms of research and practice in sport psychology to enhance sport participation and psychological outcomes (Ryba et al., 2010; Schinke et al., in press). The hockey moral code as a hypocrisy was invoked in different ways, which positioned Avery's sloppy seconds comment as similar to typical acts of physical aggression within the NHL (Bernstein, 2006; Tenenbaum et al., 1997). For example, the length of Avery's suspension for this incident was frequently compared to physical behaviours that would receive comparable suspensions, but would lead to much worse consequences:

> The NHL stepped in for what they described as his "crude" comments and suspended him for six games. Yes, that's right. Six games (which is what he might have received if he'd split somebody's skull open with his hockey stick). Maybe it's just me, but I'm glad football doesn't have a "morality" police like the NHL. (The Times [London], 'NHL's misplaced morality; And another thing…', 08/12/08)

Within the hockey moral code as hypocrisy discourse, media narratives consistently resisted the notion that Avery's comments were deserving of such harsh consequences (i.e., suspension, discharge, anger management) by acknowledging violence in the NHL and so-called hockey moral code: "But that's just hockey, a world where acts of violence such as deliberate hits to the head get only half of what Avery received – and no one even mentions anger management" (The Globe and Mail, 'Crosby leads by example…', 08/12/08).

Aside from comparisons between the sloppy seconds incident and seemingly worse physical behaviours of NHL players, media narratives referenced the fact that sexism and particular forms of masculinity have always existed within hockey circles. In this sense, Avery was portrayed as a player simply taking part in behaviour that is typical of hockey culture (Bernstein, 2006), although unpleasant. In turn, media narratives downplayed the severity of Avery's actions and/or resisted the notion that his personality is "cancerous" to his team and the NHL, drawing attention instead to the hypocrisy of the NHL:

> The NHL, for the record, doesn't punish the kind of talk nobody hears. …"I said 10 times worse on the ice," said Matthew Barnaby, a former player… By itself, the Avery case is symbolic of the worst side of hockey…There has long been an underbelly of sexism, insensitivity, arrogance and a total lack of judgment in hockey at the highest and most competitive levels. (The Toronto Sun, 'Worst side of hockey…', 04/12/08)

The social construction of masculinity has been at the centre of decades of research in sport studies, with scholars suggesting that the cultural dominance of sport and its discursive linkages promote some forms of masculinities over others (Connell, 1990; Hickey, 2008; Messner, 1990; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Pringle & Hickey, 2010; Whannel, 2002). As a result, male athletes often feed into certain versions of hegemonic masculinity, which may include the subordination of women, the association of masculinity with toughness and the relegation of gay men (Connell, 1990; Loy, 1995; Messner et al., 2000; Pringle & Hickey, 2010).

Viewed through this critical lens, the meaning of Avery's cancer identity emerges as part and product of broader sport culture that constructs male hockey players to behave in particular ways, rather than simply as a personality flaw directing behaviour. This again begs the question as to whether or not individually-focused forms of team cancer management identified in the sport psychology literature (see Cope et al., 2010), including the punishments that Avery received, are managing a team cancer effectively or perhaps even contributing to socio-emotional ambiguity (i.e., uncertainty an athlete experiences about role consequences for himself, the team or the organization, which can result in distress or decreased performance for the athlete) (Carron et al., 2005). Given that sport can also be understood as competing discourses that produce a diversity of masculinities, the hypocrisy discourse allows us to draw further attention to ethical dilemmas and identity tensions that may make development of fulfilling narratives of self for Avery difficult (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Understanding Avery's team cancer as socially and discursively constructed thus opens up further possibilities for intervention and change. This notion will again be discussed further in our conclusions section.

Team cancer characteristics

Within a hockey moral code as hypocrisy discourse, in contrast to Avery's identity emerging as problematic and placing him solely at the centre of blame as with the hockey moral code as truth discourse, Avery's team cancer characteristics (negative, narcissistic and manipulative) took on different and even positive meanings. This finding was different from Cope et al. (2010) who found that coaches viewed a team cancer as positive because the team was uniting against the cancer within the team. Within the hypocrisy discourse, Avery's identity was thus partially viewed as a positive characteristic:

> "I see what's missing on the ice, and he's that extra fireplug," Duguay said at an Ice Hockey in Harlem fund-raiser held at the ESPN Zone in Times Square. "He energizes the team, whether you like him or you don't like him." (Daily News New York, 'DOOGS: BRING BACK AVERY', 07/1/09)

The above quotation also portrays Avery as having the capability to utilize his energy to positively impact his team. It also suggests that Avery's positive qualities are unobservable as the general dislike for Avery from opponents and/or the media may overpower and conceal his positive attributes. In this sense, Avery's trash-talking on and off the ice was portrayed as having the ability to entice his opponents to take penalties, thus benefiting his own team. These positive characteristics were not found by Cope et al. (2010) and therefore extend our understanding of the team cancer. However, it is worth noting that Cope et al. acknowledged that coaches may tolerate and even accept a team cancer if he or she is a good player, as is evident in the above quote about Avery (e.g., Duguay noted that "he's that extra fireplug"). The notion that

the foregoing behaviours can be positive for one's team was also found in Bernstein's (2006) interviews exploring the hockey moral code. In-line with this notion, Avery's ability to manipulate an opponent was framed in this next quote as funny and productive for his team, rather than as cancerous or problematic: "He can win games by himself if the other team gets frustrated with him," said Fredrick Sjostrom. "And some of the stuff he does is pretty funny" (The Toronto Sun, 'Do not disturb; When it comes to Sean Avery, your best bet is to ignore the shift disturber', 21/10/10).

Within the hockey moral code as hypocrisy discourse when Avery was portrayed as manipulative and narcissistic in a destructive sense, media narratives acknowledged Avery's negative qualities yet also downplayed them. The following quotation shows how Avery's behaviours were positioned as manipulative (i.e., his actions were pre-planned) and narcissistic (i.e., he did it in front of a camera) on the one hand, but also emerged as acts/behaviours that occurred all the time on the ice in the NHL, and therefore not a big deal (i.e., downplayed):

> This is nothing new for hockey, except this time there was a camera running and the player was just dumb enough to think he was being cute instead of inappropriate. And this time around, this wasn't an emotional response. This bit of verbal garbage was actually thought out. The truth is, on-ice exchanges happen all the time. You just don't hear about them. That is hockey trash talk. (The Toronto Sun, 'Worst side of hockey…', 04/12/08)

As with the hockey moral code as truth discourse, the team cancer characteristic of "classless idiot" also was identified within the hockey moral code as hypocrisy discourse, but with the meanings of Avery's behaviour emerging differently. Despite that Avery was portrayed as a classless idiot, the media criticized the negative consequences that he endured, questioned the hypocrisy of the NHL, and downplayed the severity of Avery's behaviour:

> Of course his reference to "sloppy seconds", this in relation to an ex-girlfriend now dating another National Hockey League player, was vile. Of course he has a piggie mouth and a history of unleashing it upon the unsuspecting and undeserving. But I for one remain troubled that the NHL handed him a six-game suspension and sentenced him to re-education. It mirrors what I think is a growing preoccupation with punishing people for what they say, as opposed to what they do. (The Globe and Mail, 'Running for off-ice…', 27/12/08)

Overall Avery's personification of, and effects as, a team cancer were viewed as less harmful to himself and to others, when made sense of within a hockey moral code of hypocrisy discourse. This again raises the issue as to how a team cancer might be managed and/or what punishments might be received. Moreover, from a team dynamics standpoint, when positioned with a hypocrisy discourse, Avery's informal cancer identity role appears to be serving himself and his team well on some level. While not always desirable, Avery's behaviour also appears to be being reinforced and sanctioned through the wider cultural practices of the sport (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

These findings also again allow us to draw attention to the role of discourse in the construction of a cultural athletic identity such as a team cancer. Specifically, as the hypocrisy discourse runs in opposition to a hockey moral code as truth discourse, counter narratives (i.e., narratives of resistance) were ultimately drawn upon in the construction of Avery's team cancer identity. In turn the meaning of Avery's identity emerged as positive and productive, resisting personifications of Avery as a bad boy with "character flaws" in need of fixing. Such discourses also drew attention to the cultural practices within the sport of hockey as being partially responsible for Avery's persona and sloppy seconds comment. Similarly, Phoenix and Smith (2011) recently demonstrated the potential of such "counterstories" as potential avenues for further understanding the ways in which dominant "bad news" stories of aging might be diluted with stories of "good news". Such counterstories hold great potential for individual and social change to more positively impact the lives and physical activity experiences of older adults.

Other people's identities and the hypocrisy of the hockey moral code

In contrast to the hockey moral code as truth discourse, which used other athlete's problematic identities and behaviours to reinforce Avery as a negative team cancer, Avery's behaviour was frequently compared to far more dangerous actions of other athletes as a way to continue to downplay the seriousness of his behaviour:

> Let me get this straight: Imitating Howard Stern (Sean Avery's sloppy seconds comment) gets a six-game suspension, but imitating Mike Tyson (Jarko Ruutu's biting another player) gets only two? Garry Bettman, you should be ashamed of yourself… (The Toronto Sun, 'In Yer Face', 13/1/09)

Media narratives, such as the one above, continue to resist the notion that the punishment Avery received for the sloppy seconds incident was justified, instead drawing attention to the hypocrisy of the hockey moral code. In this sense, the media acts as a truth-telling barometer, calling attention to the ways in which the NHL and other professional organizations utilize control of their players and the media to manage a mythos of sport as a utopian society (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). In another sense, the hypocrisy discourse by the media invoked other team cancer identities to demonstrate that athletes similar to Avery (e.g., Plaxico Burress, Mike Tyson, Terrell Owens) are present throughout professional sports. Therefore, Avery's team cancer identity and associated behaviours were portrayed as common (and again downplayed) due to the number of athletes that conduct themselves similarly: "Sean Avery is a misanthrope more than a misogynist. The annals of sports are littered with such borderline sociopaths, from Ty Cobb to Latrell Sprewell to Mike Tyson" (The Toronto Star, 'Vilify Avery…', 15/12/08).

Although unpleasant, this hockey moral code as hypocrisy discourse clearly illustrated that sport is not immune to destructive personalities. Avery's negative team cancer identity emerged as either commonplace, or "no big deal", due to the number of players exhibiting such negative characteristics. Interpreting this latter point within the context of both paradoxical hockey moral code discourses further reveals that the punishments Avery received were justified in one sense, but unjustified in another sense, due to such personalities and associated behaviours being part and product of hockey culture. This is ironic, since the discourse of hockey morality is ultimately invoked to construct Avery as inherently cancerous to himself and his team, yet that same cultural discourse may also be contributing to the construction of Avery's cancerous identity and so-called undesirable behaviours in the first place.

Conclusions

Through the current study we sought to extend understandings of the negative informal role of a team cancer through a cultural sport psychology perspective, qualitatively analyzing media representations of a sport celebrity positioned by the media as embodying the characteristics of a team cancer. Ethnographic content analysis revealed that while meanings of a team cancer

were consistent with previous research by Cope et al. (2010), the cancer role also emerged differently depending upon the hockey moral code discourse invoked (i.e., hockey moral code as truth vs. hockey moral code as hypocrisy). In turn, the meanings and implications of the team cancer characteristics identified depended upon the socio-cultural context (i.e., media narrative/discourse) within which the team cancer identity arose.

For example, within media narratives that upheld the hockey moral code, Avery was portrayed as a player who breached the morals and ethics of the game, negatively impacting his team and the NHL, and should therefore be punished. At the same time, a new team cancer category was identified (i.e., classless idiot), which also reinforced Avery's punishments as necessary and justified. However, within the media narratives that invoked a hockey moral code as hypocrisy discourse, Avery was portrayed as a player that was unfairly criticized due to the behaviours that "typically" occur within hockey (e.g., subordination of women, sanctioned aggression on the ice) which go unpunished, and should therefore not be punished, or at the very least, punished less-severely. Moreover, Avery's team cancer characteristics were also viewed as an inherent part and product of a hockey culture that sanctions and rewards such behaviours (Bernstein, 2006), and therefore not entirely Avery's fault.

That the meanings of a team cancer can change depending on the discourse and culture of the sport is an important finding as it allows us to highlight that the meanings of a team cancer are complex as has been previously suggested in the sport psychology literature (Cope et al., 2010, 2011). The present findings extend understandings of that complexity by revealing that sport media and broader discourses can contribute to the personification of a team cancer role in particular ways, with particular effects resulting for the athlete cast in the team cancer role. Because the meanings and implications of a team cancer role change depending on the discourse, it can be further suggested that the team cancer is not simply a character flaw within the individual that always functions in a negative manner (see the bad apple phenomenon, Felps et al., 2006). Nor is a team cancer role solely the resultant breakdown in communication between role sender and role recipient and/or the result of role pressure created by such interactions (see role episode model, Eys et al., 2005) as with group-role theories used in sport psychology.

In-line with previous work in cultural sport psychology (e.g., McGannon & Spence, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2008, 2009) what we also see is that to understand the meanings and functions of a team cancer identity, it is important to attend to the discourse and culture within which taken for granted athletic identities are constructed, as these shape identity meanings and associated behaviours in particular ways (Andrews & Jackson, 2001; Birrell & McDonald, 2000; McGannon & Spence, 2010). It would seem that coaches, teammates and opposing teammates attended to the media's constitution of Avery's identity. Arguably, such responses might be derived in part from the supposed cancerous athlete, and perhaps also in part from how the athlete is portrayed, selectively through media sources and media discourses.

Hence, from an applied perspective, sport psychology consultants must consider the pressures and emotions associated with inheriting a team cancer role as such roles have particular effects for athletes and sport contexts depending upon the discourse(s) within which they are constructed. Given this latter point, sport psychology consultants should consider the possibility that a team cancer identity role may not always be personified and embodied by athletes as bad and/or may be resisted in various ways by coaches, athletes and teammates to achieve positive effects for the athlete and the team. Sport psychology consultant Cal Botterill (2004) noted the importance of understanding the subculture and "hockey code" of the NHL before implementing interventions. Equally, applied sport psychologists must balance their knowledge of a sport's "code" with the behaviours of their athletes, apart from how their athletes are portrayed through the media. Given the influence of media and taken for granted discourses on the perspectives of coaching staff and teammates, a further consideration might be how to buffer a team's membership from undue influence.

One potential way to buffer undue influence is to attend more closely to the narratives (i.e., what is said and how it is said) within particular discourses employed by the media as well as by various people in the sport context (e.g., coaches, teammates, individual athletes labeled with the team cancer identity) (Faulkner & Finlay, 2002; Locke, 2008; McGannon & Spence, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Researchers in sport and exercise psychology have effectively argued for this approach to focusing on "every day micro-talk" as a pathway to changing self-related reviews and enhancing physical activity participation experiences (Faulkner & Finlay, 2002; Locke, 2008; McGannon & Spence, 2010; Smith, 2010; Smith & Sparkes, 2011). Thus, identifying new narratives and stories of resistance that athletes, coaches and other members within the sport organization may use that run counter to less productive narratives surrounding a team cancer identity may prove useful. As Phoenix and Smith (2011) recently pointed out, viewing narratives and the stories people tell about themselves and each other on a continuum of resistance ranging from more individualistic to more social and collective resistance—may prove advantageous in providing individuals with the tools to access self-identity narratives that run counter to less productive or oppressive narratives.

Although it is necessary to further understand the socio-cultural context of sports beyond hockey, few studies in sport psychology have analyzed these factors (e.g., influence of media). Sport researchers might explore socio-cultural influences (e.g., the media, taken for granted cultural and social norms in sport) that impact informal roles, and the individual experiences of them, in various sport contexts, including those derived by the targeted person and also others within their performance context. Qualitative methodologies such as ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1996) or discourse analysis (see McGannon & Spence, 2010), which focus on social and discursive construction of athletic identities in various sport contexts, would add further understandings in this regard.

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