

An Ethnographic Study of Cohesiveness in a College Soccer Team Over a Season

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Based on an ethnographic study of a collegiate soccer team over an eight-month season, the purpose of this paper is to identify and examine the factors that contributed to team cohesion. Data were collected via participant observation, formal and informal interviews, documentary sources, a field diary, and a reflexive journal. The description-analysis-interpretation approach recommended by Wolcott (1994) framed the data analysis. Four key themes that influenced cohesion were clear and meaningful roles, selfishness/personal sacrifices, communication, and team goals. The fluctuating nature of these themes are discussed in relation to the multidimensional heuristic for cohesion presented by Cota, Evans, Dion, Kilik, and Longman (1995).

Social influences are significant mediators of individual behavior and performance in sport (Widmeyer, Brawley, & Carron, 1990) and should be considered in terms of their interaction with psychological processes (Brustad & Ritter-Taylor, 1997). A number of social factors may influence psychological processes, individual behavior, and performance in sport, but it has been suggested that cohesion is the most important group property (Prapavessis, Carron, & Spink, 1996). Coaches and athletes often talk of the importance of team spirit, unity, and bonding,

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and researchers have linked cohesion to successful team functioning and performance enhancement (e.g., Carron & Hausenblas, 1998; Widmeyer & Williams, 1991). Furthermore, with higher levels of cohesiveness, team social and task interactions are enhanced, group members feel less anxiety, show greater trust, have more feelings of security and willingness to change, and share responsibilities for group outcomes (Carron, 1988; Carron & Spink, 1993).

According to Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1999), cohesion is "a dynamic process reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member's affective needs" (p. 213). The frame of reference originally developed by Carron (1982) has been widely used as the conceptual framework for investigations into cohesion in sport psychology. However, a new heuristic for cohesion has recently been put forward by group dynamics theoreticians. The multidimensional approach presented by Cota, Evans, Dion, Kilik, and Longman (1995) incorporates Carron and associates' work, but the new heuristic provides a broader view of cohesion as a multidimensional construct with primary and secondary dimensions. Primary dimensions are applicable to describing the cohesiveness of all or most types of groups, whereas secondary dimensions are applicable to describing the cohesiveness of specific types of groups (e.g., sport groups). Their approach to cohesion "draws on the work of others who have suggested that dimensions of cohesion seem to vary in usefulness in predicting important group outcomes and group processes" (Cota et al., 1995, p. 576).

Cota et al. (1995) suggested four primary dimensions of cohesion. The first two dimensions, individual attractions-group integration and social cohesion-task cohesion, are based on Carron's (1982, 1988) conceptual approach. Group integration refers to each individual's perceptions of the closeness, similarity, bonding, and degree of unification of the group as a unit. Individual attractions to the group represent each person's perceptions about personal motivations acting to retain him or her in the group and personal feelings about the group. It is assumed individual attractions and group integration are represented in two principle ways: in relation to the group's task (task cohesion) and in relation to social aspects of the group (social cohesion). Social cohesion reflects the degree of individual attraction between members of a team, and task cohesion is the degree to which members of a team work together to achieve a specific and identifiable task. The third primary dimension of cohesion is represented by normative views of group members, specifically, the consensus among members about values and / or behavioral rules (Feldman, 1968; Yukelson, Weinberg, & Jackson, 1984). The fourth primary dimension included in the heuristic presented by Cota et al. is the resistance of a group to disruptive forces (Brawley, Carron, & Widmeyer, 1988).

Secondary dimensions of cohesion, that will not necessarily be relevant across more than one type of group, include risk-taking (Stokes, 1983a, 1983b), a vertical dimension of cohesion for military units (Griffith, 1988), and, for sport teams where roles are not easily interchangeable, valued roles (Yukelson et al., 1984). Cota et al. (1995) proposed that other promising candidates may exist as possible secondary components, but they have yet to be presented from an empirical perspective.

In a review of the sport psychology literature on the cohesion-performance outcome relationship, Widmeyer, Carron, and Brawley (1993) reported that 83% of investigations reflected a positive relationship between cohesion and performance. However, a recent meta-analysis in the group dynamics literature by Gully,

Devine, and Whitney (1995) revealed that current research of cohesion and performance has been in conflict. The group dynamics literature to date acknowledges the apparent link between cohesion and performance, especially for groups like sport teams (Mullen & Copper, 1994). But the relationship between cohesion and performance is believed to be moderated by other factors (Henderson et al., 1998), such as self-handicapping (Hausenblas & Carron, 1996); competitive aspects of the group, the nature of the group, affect, and competitive state anxiety (Prapavessis & Carron, 1996); work output (Prapavessis & Carron, 1997); and sport type (Williams & Widmeyer, 1991).

There has been speculation that the type of sport influences the cohesion-performance outcome relationship. For example, it was supposed that the cohesion-performance outcome relationship is positive in interactive teams, but negative in coacting teams (Carron, 1988). However, Matheson, Mathes, and Murray (1995) examined differences between cohesion for interacting and coacting sports in a season-long study, but failed to establish significant effects for cohesion influences in the different sport types. In fact, cohesion has been shown to be an important factor in coacting sports (Widmeyer & Williams, 1991). Taken together, though, research has typically supported the positive cohesion-performance outcome relationship in highly interactive sport teams and other groups (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998; Mullen & Copper, 1994).

Previous investigations of cohesion in a coacting sport (golf) have served to revise Carron's cohesion model. Widmeyer and Williams (1991) found that similarity of experience (attitudes, aspirations, ability, and commitments) did not correlate with cohesion. Furthermore, they suggested the most important personal factor associated with the development of both task and social cohesion in sport teams was individual satisfaction. But as Cox (1998) pointed out, this research was with female collegiate golfers, and it is not known if personal satisfaction is an important influence on performance in interdependent sports (like soccer).

Cohesion has mainly been investigated using quantitative methodologies based on Carron's (1982) conceptual framework and the highly influential measurement instrument developed in conjunction with that framework, the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ; Widmeyer, Brawley & Carron, 1985). Despite numerous studies considering variables that mediate the cohesion-performance relationship, there are still unanswered questions about cohesion itself, such as the specific factors that contribute to cohesion and how they can be manipulated to influence the dynamic nature of cohesion.

Widmeyer et al. (1993) highlighted some of the research pitfalls that may have constrained the progress of investigations into cohesion in sport, some of which are addressed by the present study. First, they lamented the failure to use or develop theory in cohesion research in a systematic way. Indeed, Carron's (1982) approach is not strictly a theory, but a conceptual framework, and the extension of that framework presented by Cota et al. (1995) was intended as a heuristic for guiding investigation, rather than the comprehensive set of definitions and predictions that characterize a theory (cf. Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1999). Therefore, the uncovering of new knowledge has the potential to contribute to future theoretical developments. Second, they criticized single-time-point "snapshot" research, and argued that if cohesion research is to advance, studies should be conducted over a season or several seasons. They also encouraged the use of a variety of methodological approaches in order to provide both qualitatively and

quantitatively rich data. Finally, as Brawley (1990) suggested, the guiding question for examining the cohesion-performance relationship should not be whether cohesion causes performance, but instead, what processes build team cohesion and simultaneously contribute to group performance.

Our own study adopts an ethnographic approach in order to understand better the dynamic nature of cohesion and performance, and the factors that influence it over time within the subculture of one soccer team. Therefore, the purposes of this paper are to (a) identify the individual and group processes that affected cohesion and simultaneously contributed to performance; and (b) examine the transitory, dynamic nature of cohesion over a season.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were members of the first XI football (soccer) team at a university in England. The team had 13 regular players from a university club with 60 members. The average age was 21.9 years (range 18–27 years). The average number of years on the team was 2.8, with three rookies and four final year players. The team was characterized by a sense of transience, as graduating players moved on and new students arrived, but there were typically 8–9 players each year that formed the core of the team. The captain (Scott) was elected by a club committee consisting entirely of current players before the start of the season. He was ultimately responsible for team selection and training, so he had a formal role as a player-coach. However, there was also a team coach who was a full professor at the university. He voluntarily attended all games, gave team talks, and liaised with Scott about team selection but left final decisions to the club committee and captain.

The team competed in the national British University Sports Association (BUSA) competition and a local county (i.e., province/state) amateur premier division. The BUSA competition is highly prestigious for inter-university sport, pitting universities against each other first on a regional basis and then, for those who are successful, at a national level. The local league provided regular weekly competition but was seen as less prestigious.

Ethnography

According to Atkinson and Hammersley (1994), defining the term ethnography has been subject to controversy. They note a range of positions between the following two extremes. For some, it refers to a philosophical paradigm to which one makes a total commitment. In contrast, for others, it designates a method that one uses as and when appropriate. Adopting a traditional, discipline-orientated viewpoint that offers a "purist" perspective, Wolcott (1995) notes that it is possible for qualitative researchers to borrow ethnographic techniques but still not be doing ethnography.

For Wolcott (1999) ethnography finds its "orienting and overarching purpose in an underlying concern with cultural interpretation" (p. 68). That is, it is the intent behind a study that makes it ethnographic and not just the techniques used. Thus, Holloway (1997) defines ethnography as the "direct description of a culture or subculture" (p. 59), and Cresswell (1998) defines it as "a description and

interpretation of a cultural or social group or system. . . . The researcher studies the meanings of behavior, language, and interactions of the culture-sharing group" (p. 58).

To realize our ethnographic intentions in the current study of cohesiveness within the culture-sharing group of a college soccer team, I (Nick Holt, the first author) undertook an extended period of fieldwork lasting eight months. Wolcott (1995) makes an important distinction between fieldwork as opposed to just being in the field. Once again, he suggests that the essence of fieldwork is revealed in the intent behind it, rather than the label itself: "Fieldwork is a form of inquiry in which one is immersed personally in the ongoing social activities of some individual or group for the purposes of research" (p. 66). This involves intimate, long-term acquaintance and a wholehearted commitment to achieving some depth of human understanding about the social world of others.

The role adopted for the study was that of overt participant observer (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Wolcott, 1995). Initially, in gaining access to the research setting, I joined the university football club second XI at the start of the academic year as a new graduate student. As the season progressed, I was promoted to the first XI. Furthermore, due to my qualifications and experience, I was asked to help coach at three training sessions per week for the team. At this stage, after a game, I announced to the team that I would like to focus on them exploring the fluctuating nature of individual and team peak performances over a season. This announcement reflected the general nature of the research problem at the time, before the specific focus (i.e., cohesion) had been selected. My research role and data gathering techniques were then explained. For example, it was made clear that I would be keeping a field diary containing my observations and thoughts and that I would seek both formal and informal interviews with players at various points in the season. The confidentiality of all data sources was assured in terms of me not discussing information provided by one team member with other team members and in terms of team members remaining anonymous in the writing of my dissertation and in future publications. I stressed that at the end of the study, I would share my interpretations with those team members who wished me to do so, and their views would be taken into consideration. All the members of the team agreed that my research could proceed.

Inhabiting my multiple roles as researcher, first team player, and coaching assistant meant I was involved in every team setting over the season, both formal (training, matches, team meetings) and informal (social settings, players' houses, the bar). Consequently, I was able to spend time with the soccer team simultaneously observing their behaviors, actions, interactions, special events, and crises as well as taking part in all of this so as to better understand the experiences and meanings constructed within this subculture. This personal immersion generated primary data in the form of field notes and a reflexive journal that, in turn, provided a starting point for the generation of secondary data via formal and informal interviews and documentary sources. As Holloway (1997) notes, "Ethnographers take part in the life of people. They listen to their informants' interpretations of their actions. In essence, this involves a partnership between the investigator and the informant" (p. 62).

The notion of partnership revolves around issues of reciprocity, rapport, and trusting relationships (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Sparkes, 1994, 1998a). According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), it is inconceivable that researchers can

learn anything of consequence from anyone without rapport. For them, "rapport is tantamount to trust, and trust is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make" (p. 79). With regard to establishing rapport, my extended contact with the players was important. Likewise, my insider status as a soccer player of proven worth was useful. That is, I was recognizable to my team members as one of "them," and given my background in this sport, I knew how to act in culturally appropriate ways. As a white, 25 year-old male, I was slightly older than most of the other team members, but the age gap was minimal. The racial composition of the team was homogeneous as all the players were Caucasian. Consequently, it is unlikely that issues of age or race negatively influenced relationships. In short, my appearance, speech, and behaviors were acceptable to my team members.

Being a member of the culture that one is researching also brings its own problems. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that an important requirement of ethnography is that researchers suspend a wide range of common-sense and theoretical knowledge in order to minimize the danger of taking on misleading preconceptions about the setting and the people in it. They note that researching "strange" or "exotic" settings "quickly demolishes the ethnographer's faith in his or her preconceptions" (p. 101). In contrast, "In researching settings that are more familiar, it can be much more difficult to suspend one's preconceptions, whether these derive from social science or from everyday knowledge. One reason for this is that one finds it so obvious" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 103). Likewise, Holloway (1997) comments, "It is difficult to examine one's own group and become a 'cultural stranger,' questioning the assumptions of the familiar culture whose rules and norms have been internalized" (p. 65). Therefore, while the ethnographic outsider has the problem of making the strange seem familiar, the ethnographic insider has the task of making the familiar seem strange in order to maintain analytical distance.

To assist in maintaining analytical distance and challenging preconceptions, I maintained a reflexive journal that provided an ongoing account of the pathways and decisions I took during the research, and it also included my insights and reflections over time. This journal encouraged me to refer back and critically examine my own assumptions and actions in a self-conscious and self-aware manner. It acted as a reflexive resource for "making notes on notes," enabling me to couple my emerging analysis with my observations throughout the study and thereby remain attentive to my own processes as researcher as instrument (see Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Wolcott, 1995). Therefore, I engaged in a monitoring process that included reflections about the reactions of team members in the setting, my relationships with them, how I felt at various stages of the research process, the effects I was having on the setting, and any surprises that emerged to change my thinking. According to Holloway (1997), this reflexivity "is essential for qualitative research because the researcher is the main research tool; he or she 'uses the self as an instrument'" (p. 136).

In ethnography, the subjectivity of the researcher is seen as a resource for understanding the problematic world they are investigating in the very same ways that participants learn about the world they take for granted (Sparkes, 1992; Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999). Monitoring their own subjectivity can sensitize researchers to events and help them empathize and build relationships with the participants. Therefore, rather than try to remove their subjectivity, qualitative researchers attempt to

embrace it so that it can be used as a valuable analytical tool. As Glesne and Peshkin (1992) state, "Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than exorcise" (p. 104).

According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), "The voice of subjectivity takes an I, the first-person singular, the attestation that a particular person was in a particular place for a particular purpose" (p. 101). In order for researchers to become more aware of their subjectivity and to monitor how it shapes their understanding, Glesne and Peshkin suggest they named their subjective "I's" within any one investigation. Having named the various "I's," the researcher then reflects upon how each of these interact to influence the process of inquiry. Accordingly, in the current study a number of subjective "I's" associated with various roles were identified and monitored through the use of detailed notes in my reflexive journal and through discussions with the second author (Andrew Sparkes). He acted as a "critical friend," or "devil's advocate," and throughout the project, he asked hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations (Faulkner & Sparkes, 1999). Specifically, my roles as nonresearcher team member, newcomer, researcher, and interviewer were identified and reflected upon.

For example, as the nonresearcher "I," I reflected upon the roles ascribed to me as a member of the group (e.g., teammate, friend) and how these influenced the research process. Likewise, as the researching "I," I monitored my interpretations and personal reactions to team events (e.g., losses, victories, and disputes). This role enabled me to empathize with the feelings of my teammates toward these events and to better understand the meanings associated with them. However, my monitoring of this "I" also made me recognize the importance of looking beyond the immediacy of personal feelings about events to consider the wider influence of events on the team as a cultural phenomenon. As a consequence, even though it is impossible for researchers to become aware of all their situational subjectivities within any given project, I found the attempt to monitor my own subjectivity within this study a productive undertaking.

Observations

According to Wolcott (1995), the observation element of the participant-observation role always faces the problem of what to look at, what to look for, "and the never-ending tension between taking a closer look at something versus taking a broader look at everything" (p. 96). The current study, therefore, started by taking a broad look at the team in relation to the foreshadowed research problem that revolved around understanding more about peak individual and team performances in a college soccer team. Initial observations included descriptions of settings and environments, game reports, portraits of players, and notes on informal interviews with them. In keeping with the principles of emergent research design, the focus of the observations gradually changed as the study progressed. For example, as the season went on, it became apparent that both the participants and myself (as player and researcher) felt that cohesion was the most important mediator of individual and team peak performance. Accordingly, observations began to focus on preparation strategies, individual conflicts, and different interpretations of particular situations by players. Finally, toward the end of the season, the observational lens narrowed further still to focus on individuals' perceptions of the group and their role in it, relationship networks, key incidents, and game situations. All observations, along with notes on the informal interviews conducted throughout the season,

were recorded in a field diary and systematically reflected upon. This data were supplemented by documentary material, such as match reports in local newspapers, minutes of club meetings, and photographs from various media sources.

Formal Interviews

Following a pilot interview with a fringe member of the squad, 10 players were formally interviewed to gain insights into their perceptions of personal and team experiences (two further players declined to be interviewed). These interviews were conducted in a two-week period at the end of the season, and each lasted between one and two hours. Informed consent was gained from each player for the interview to be tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. An interview guide was used, as this provided a framework for interaction but still allowed both interviewer and the interviewee the freedom to pursue areas of mutual interest as they arose.

Interview questions were developed from the analytical themes related to individual and team performances as they emerged over the season. The following were the main questions asked: (a) Describe your peak performance this season with the team. How did other players influence this performance? (b) Describe the peak team performance of the season. How did you and other players influence this performance? (c) Describe the worst team performance this season. How did you and other players influence this performance? Interview probes were used throughout to tease out the participants' perceptions of the influence of other players on their experiences, performances, and feelings of cohesion.

Analysis

The qualitative data generated in this ethnographic study were transformed by drawing upon the description, analysis, and interpretation approach advocated by Wolcott (1994). He suggests that description addresses the question, "What is going on here?" Analysis addresses the identification of essential features and patterned regularities in the data and the systematic description of interrelationships among them, in short, how things work. Finally, Wolcott asserts that interpretation addresses processual questions of meanings and context: "What does it all mean?" "What is to be made of it all?"

In terms of analysis, as the study progressed, the data generated were continually reflected upon. That is, analysis was ongoing throughout the study. For example, the posture of indwelling as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) was adopted at various points in the data collection. This entailed sifting through the data several times in order to immerse myself in it and understand the participants' point of view from an empathetic position (Sparkes, 1998b). As part of this sifting process, emerging themes and categories were noted. Analytical memos were also used as I made preliminary and tentative connections to various theoretical concepts that I thought were emerging from the study and could help explain events. This process, in turn, informed the progressive focussing of the fieldwork in the study.

At the end of the season, the whole data set was subjected to further intense scrutiny. Inductive analysis was used to identify, code, and organize the central themes. Field work observations, quotations from interviews, and extracts from the reflexive journal served as units of meaning for this process (Coffey & Atkinson,

1996). The ability of the central themes to explain events was explored by utilizing intracase comparisons within the team and extracase comparisons with existing theory. This latter move signals a shift toward interpretation, where the researcher moves beyond the data to speculate on what it all means.

Goodness Criteria

With regard to how our ethnographic study might be judged, we advocate the use of nonfoundational criteria in the form of lists as proposed by Smith (1993), Smith and Deemer (2000), and Sparkes, (1995, 1998c, 2000). The nonfoundational view suggests that criteria can be seen as characterizing traits that influence our judgments, and that any particular traits that might be put forward as characteristics of good research will be constantly subject to interpretation and reinterpretation as times and conditions change. Characterizing traits have a list-like quality that can be added to or taken away from depending on the context and the purposes of a particular study (Sparkes, 2000). Lists are flexible features that characterize good versus bad inquiry at any given time and place (Smith & Deemer, 2000).

Accordingly, drawing on various sources (e.g., Cresswell, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1995), a number of criteria were selected and appropriate actions taken to enhance the "goodness" (Strean, 1998) of our study. For example, with regard to the process of inquiry and our desire to generate a plausible interpretation of events, we felt the following were important. Prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, and "being there" long enough to observe the cycle of a full soccer season were deemed important for building rapport and trusting relationships and contextualizing events and meanings over time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Wolcott, 1995). Likewise, it was deemed important that the subjectivity of the researcher be monitored in order to be aware of how this was shaping the study, and so a reflexive journal was kept and regular discussions took place with a critical friend (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Wolcott, 1995). This monitoring process was useful in ensuring the inductive nature of the enterprise. Here, the emphasis was on allowing concepts and categories to emerge in situ as the study developed and then integrating these with relevant theory to provide explanations rather than defining these prior to the study and imposing them on the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data produced by different collection techniques were incorporated into the study as a means of shedding light on and checking emerging themes, perspectives, and interpretations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 1998). That is, technique triangulation was used. Member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were deemed important to ensure the accuracy of the findings in terms of reporting what happened, that the reality portrayed was recognizable to those living in it, and that the participants felt they were represented fairly. This technique was also seen as useful for exploring the reactions of the participants to researcher interpretations of their world. These reactions were taken as a further opportunity for reflexive elaboration by those involved and formed another valuable source of data and insight. Therefore, participants were contacted in person, by telephone, or e-mail at various points throughout the study to seek their views on emerging researcher interpretations and to check on the accuracy of data.

The product of this ethnographic study, that is, the presentation of its findings, takes the form of a "realist tale" (Sparkes, 1995). Accordingly, readers might

like to ask the following questions of the text: Is enough evidence, in the form of "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), provided to enable the reader to judge the researchers' interpretations? Are there sufficient quotations from the participants, and are their perspectives and voices represented in a fair and balanced manner? A related question here might be, does our analysis make explicit what is implicit and tacit to the participants? Questions of coherence might also be asked in terms of whether the different parts of our interpretation create a complete and meaningful picture. Coherence can be evaluated both internally, in terms of how the parts of the account fit together, and externally, in terms of how it connects to existing theories and previous research. With regard to authenticity, readers might ask if the text has enabled them to experience, however briefly, moments from the life of this college soccer team, and has it enabled them to come away with a better understanding of this group of people and how they understand their world. Finally, of course, readers might ask if this study has made a contribution to our understanding of team cohesion, and does it raise questions for future research in this area of sport psychology.

Results

Following a brief description of social aspects of team membership and the story of the season, results will be presented across two time periods (mid-, and late-season). Key themes that characterized the nature of cohesion over the season will be identified and presented, wherever possible, using the voice of the participants to convey their opinions. Extracts from field notes are used mainly to provide descriptions in the prose and occasionally as direct quotes to express certain concepts.

The Context: The Team and the Season

It was prestigious to be a member of the university soccer first team, and players wore their team emblems frequently as a symbol of their pride in team membership. The team members lived in close proximity to each other as ten players shared accommodation in a university hall of residence, so they all saw each other socially on most days. Most players were also in the same faculty, taking the same courses, so there was a sense of collegiality and friendship, especially among returning players, from the start of the season.

In the early season, the team qualified from the regional round of the BUSA competition and generally performed well. From October 10th to December 19th, their BUSA record was 3-1-2 (win-loss-tie), and 8-2-1 in the local league, enough to ensure first place. Both losses occurred before the start of the university term with a makeshift team. By contrast, the mid-season period (January 11th–March 22nd) was turbulent. The team lost to a lesser skilled but harder working team in the first round of the BUSA playoffs. The opposition also had a player ejected from the game, which underlines the ineptitude of the performance.

An early exit from the BUSA competition was viewed with cynicism by the student body at the university in question because almost all of the other first teams regularly qualify for the final stages of their respective tournaments. One final year player commented in the changing room after the playoff loss: "Well, there's next year for you lot, but that's it for me." This comment reflects how some players thought the season was over, even though there were many weeks of the

local league season still to play. The morale of the team was severely damaged as some of the players demonstrated in the college bar after the game. The bar was packed, and that day, every other university first team had won their BUSA game, with soccer being the only team to lose. The players' feelings of sadness and despair were emphasized when I walked to the middle of the room to find four players huddled, arms around each other, with tears in their eyes, saying nothing. They knew they were displaying their despair to the rest of the student-athletes. After the playoff loss, the team went into further decline with a series of poor results in the local league and a record of 8-3-1. The three defeats occurred in consecutive games with the following scores: 1-0, 1-4, 0-3. The last two games were both at home, breaking the unbeaten record there. As another senior player said after the first home loss, "I don't care about the league anyway."

During the finale of the season (April 26th–May 8th), six local league games were played in 12 days, all away from home because of university scheduling complications. Two of these games were against the top teams in the league, and despite the standard of the league being lower than intercollegiate competition, the demanding schedule and impending exam pressure added to the challenge. Additionally, Scott, the team captain, decided to have a two-week break from university to go home for personal reasons. The overall record of the university team during this time was 6-0-0, and the highest league finish for six years was recorded. An overview of the findings from this study is provided in Table 1, highlighting how the dynamic nature of cohesion was mediated over the season through the themes of clear and meaningful roles, selfishness/ personal sacrifices, communication, and team goals.

Mid-Season Influences on Cohesion

Clear and Meaningful Roles

The mid-season period could be characterized by mismatches between individual role and team demands. Low role acceptance was especially prevalent in the midfield area, where a number of players wanted recognition for attacking prowess without being accountable for their defensive responsibilities. Dave was often perceived by the other players to be neglecting his defensive responsibilities. Fred said, "Dave might just want to go and get lost [on the field], but at the end of the day he knows that I am going to be in the middle of the field covering for him." Even though Fred covered for Dave, he was unhappy that he had to sacrifice the attacking parts of his game to allow Dave to avoid his defensive responsibilities. Matty also had a defensive role in the midfield, which restricted his attacking play. By adopting this defensive role, he also felt he gave Dave opportunities to attack more. Therefore, of the three regular midfield players, two of them felt they made sacrifices for Dave that they did not want to make. Notes from the field diary revealed that Matty often indicated his responsibility to the team conflicted with his personal agenda: "I don't want to spend all day mopping up [other players'] mistakes." Interestingly, he perceived his best performance of the season to be against possibly the worst team in the local league, when he felt "no pressure, they were bottom of the league. I set up the first two goals and scored the last two after going up front. It was the sort of performance that showed the ability I have got." By having

Table 1 Results and Interpretations

Theme	Descriptors	Dimensions of cohesion affected
Mid-Season		
Clear and meaningful roles	Low role acceptance Mismatches between individual agendas and team demands	Low consensus about behavioral values and rules Low value of roles Low individual attraction to the group task Low group integration toward task Reduced task cohesion
Team goals	Two competitions No overtly stated team or individual goals	Low group integration toward task Reduced task cohesion
Selfishness / personal sacrifices	Selfish social and performance behavior	Low group integration toward task Low social group integration Low individual attraction to group task Low individual attraction to group social Low consensus about behavioral values and rules Low resistance to disruption Reduced task cohesion Reduced social cohesion
Communication	Negative interactions and frequent on-field arguments	Low group integration toward task Low resistance to disruption Reduced task cohesion

Clear and meaningful roles	Increased role acceptance Defensive roles emphasized	High consensus about behavioral values and rules High value of roles Medium individual attraction to the group task High group integration toward task Increased task cohesion
Team goals	Singular team outcome goals stated, monitored, and adhered to	High group integration toward task High consensus about behavioral values and rules Increased task cohesion
Selfishness / personal sacrifices	Willingness to sacrifice personal performance goals for the team	High group integration toward task High social group integration High individual attraction to group task High individual attraction to group social High consensus about behavioral values and rules High resistance to disruption Increased task cohesion Increased social cohesion
Communication	Positive communication and encouragement	High group integration toward task High resistance to disruption Increased task cohesion

more freedom and less defensive responsibility, he enjoyed the experience more, even though the opposition was poor. Within the culture of the team, his normal responsibilities meant his role was less obvious to others and less meaningful to him. When given a more offensive role, he made more recognizable contributions to the team, received more praise, and accepted his role.

The examples provided above reflect how an individual sought recognizable rewards for his performance (i.e., scoring goals) rather than acknowledgement of a sound defensive contribution. There was not consensus among team members about values or roles, which lowered interpersonal attractions to the group task as well group integration toward the task. The members of the team were not united in trying to reach the team goals for performance. Scott summed up his perception of how players accepted their roles on the team: "I think that maybe in our team, we have got a couple of players who are more interested in what they can do rather than what the team can do together, and that's not good for the team."

Team Goals

Team goals were vague and unstated at the midpoint of the season. Although the BUSA and local league tables were published in the college and city newspapers, they were rarely put on the team notice board. Team statistics were not discussed, and the goals for the BUSA season or local league were never verbalized at team meetings. When the team was addressed in training or before games, the purposes were to announce the team to travel, make travel arrangements, or inform them of the starting eleven. Although the players realized the BUSA competition was most prestigious, no formal performance or outcome goals were established to confirm this. The captain explained to me that he thought overtly stating goals would "put too much pressure on the players, and they would worry too much." However, the absence of clear goals reflected reduced group integration to the task because the players did not really understand the aims of the team. This made it difficult to acknowledge the contribution of individual roles toward the overall team purpose.

Selfishness

During the mid-season, some players were constantly accusing each other of selfishness. For example, Dave always wanted to be picked up en route to away games, rather than come to the agreed meeting point, despite the fact that he lived in the university residence with the other players. This type of behavior reduced the closeness or the social group integration of the team. The issue of selfishness was a disruptive force that the group was not particularly resistant to at the midpoint of the season.

In addition to such social dilemmas that affected overall social cohesion, there were specific performance implications arising from selfishness on the field. For example, "There's been times when I've had the ball, and I've seen a central midfield player, and I think, 'oh, he's in a good position, but if I give him the ball, he's going to take someone on [selfishly] and lose it'" (Luke). Gary experienced frustration because he would often be open in a game, and certain players would not pass to him: "A lot of the time they try to take three or four players on and score themselves, even though I might be in a better position." Matty went a step further describing the selfishness that pervaded the team: "The university team is basically 11 arrogant players who think they are the best." Selfishness on the field had

a direct influence of the integration of the group toward performance tasks and reduced the effectiveness by which tasks were completed. Again, the members of the team were not united in trying to reach their goals. Selfishness off the field reduced individual attraction to the group in both a task and social sense and reflected that there was confusion rather than consensus regarding team values and behavioral rules.

Communication

Communication was often very negative, as Matty described a typical incident: "When I tell Brian to run back and mark someone I want him to do it. It's just a simple thing. I can't stand it when someone turns around to me and says, 'f— off, what are you shouting about?' when I'm looking at their man running past them." Geoff, the oldest player (27 years), felt his reaction to these situations should be calming: "I should be, like shut up lads, lets just play and don't worry about it, c'mon, lets go again." Luke, on the other hand, responded very badly to criticism: "So that's simple, if you moan at me, I am not going to give you the ball." Matty reflected on the selfish players who he felt were constantly involved in the negative on-field communication: "There have been occasions this year when I said something to the creative players, and rather than them react to it [positively], they've turned around and given me a mouthful back." The word "creative" became the euphemism for selfish throughout the culture of the team.

Many field notes described players arguing with each other while the ball was in play. I recorded one instance where two teammates exchanged verbal insults as their opponents rushed by toward our goal! When individual players argued with each other, a virus seemed to spread around the team, and "the discipline of the whole team sort of goes, even those who are quite placid start shouting at someone" (Geoff). This undoubtedly influenced individual performances, for example, "My attitude is I am the first person to know if I have made a mistake, and I don't need anyone to tell me two or three times. All I do then is resent that person" (Luke). Ironically, the players who engaged in the most negative on-field communication were best of friends off the field and were neighbors in the accommodation block. Negative communication reduced group integration to the task, and interpersonal attractions to the group task, possibly because the group had low resistance to disruptions at this stage because few people really cared about the performance of the team or the results. However, social aspects of team membership were less affected as players still had their best friends on the team and took pride in their position as a team member within the cultural milieu of the university.

Late-Season Influences on Cohesion

Clear and Meaningful Roles

Fred had his best performance during a 2-1 league win: "I had a couple of attempts on goal, then, as a midfielder, I had a particular role to defend hard then get the ball forward, because the goal was going to come from a pass from midfield, which it did." This quote describes how Fred's personal role complemented the team agenda and that he was happy to play a supporting role, rather than score a goal himself. Earlier in the season, team play had been dominated by certain individuals frequently going on solo runs and losing the ball, which caused other players to stop

passing to them. Also, when the ball was lost, players did not readily make long defensive covering runs for each other. However, this trend was reversed by the end of the season, reflecting increased group integration to the task. For example, Luke said, "Because of the process of battling, being together, and getting results, the team spirit just grew, there was bonding there. Everyone was working for each other and not working for themselves."

The senior players, captain, and "coach" stressed the importance of defensive responsibilities, and as individual roles became more accepted, the team performed better. Comments from players revealed that they accepted their roles, even though they did not always fully commit to them, suggesting individual attraction to the group task had improved. That is, they began to care about the league and performances again. For example, in the penultimate game, Kirk was initially told he was starting the game in defense. Thirty minutes before kick-off, Scott arrived, and Kirk was told he was now substitute. Scott was injured during the game, so Kirk replaced Scott for the last 20 minutes of play. Kirk, though he was not pleased about being substitute, was prepared to accept a nonstarting role, then performed well when the team required him. He provided vocal encouragement from the bench and in the changing room. He said, "I knew it was better for the team for Scott to start, but I knew that I could do the job if called upon." The adoption of such roles sometimes required sacrifices of personal performance goals by the players, but this reflected increased individual attraction to the group task. Generally, there was greater consensus as to the importance of the less glamorous roles on the team.

Team Goals

Elimination from the BUSA tournament served to focus the team goal onto the local league, and it was clearly stated in team meetings that the goal for the season finale was to win all the remaining games to finish in second place. During this period, all fixtures and results, league standings, and player statistics were posted on the team notice board, and the team members were frequently updated about the goals through announcements at games and training sessions. There was a singular team outcome goal, and progress toward this outcome was monitored.

Increased commitment to the league goal was reflected by the behavioral norms of the players' social activity. During the midseason period, nearly all the players went to the college bar to drink alcohol on a Friday night before the Saturday league games. In fact, this behavior was the subject of a story in the local media under the headline, "Students can win league title if they can avoid hangovers!" Scott was quoted as saying, "Very rarely do we have all the players sober on a Saturday morning. They might be hungover from the night before." However, by the end of the season, this trend was reversed as players placed more importance on the league goals. Before the penultimate game of the season, I went to the college bar for half an hour in my researcher role to see if the players were drinking. I noted that only three players were actually there, when previously everybody had been there, and the three players present were drinking soft drinks.

Players discussed how they found it easier to focus on one goal, rather than having priorities split between the BUSA competition and the local league. Art said, "When we were still in BUSA, I didn't care about the league, but now I really want to win all the league games." After elimination from BUSA, the league took on extra significance. No individual performance goals were set, however, but the

establishment of clear team goals improved group integration to the task and was related to better acceptance of individual roles that benefited the stated aim of team. Indeed, in a member checking interview, Kirk discussed how the team won the local league the next year, having set winning every home game as a pre-season outcome goal.

Personal Sacrifices

During the season finale, the team was together every other day, despite exam pressures. The sacrifices made to be there for every game were emphasized when team captain Scott unexpectedly took a three-hour train ride to play in the final game. At this time, two of the key figures in the arguments about selfishness decided they were unable to sacrifice the time to play in every game. The other players did not react to this decision with much surprise, and as one player said at the first game without the selfish pair, it was "typical of their attitude." Without them, the team did not lose, and the arguments that had been commonplace before seemed to subside.

When the selfish players did return to the team, they were not as disruptive as they had been before, because the commitment of the other players to make personal sacrifices for the team had increased the team's resistance to disruption. For example, Kirk, recalling a game during the late season period, said, "If anyone did anything wrong, somebody else was running back to cover for them, that kind of thing was happening all the time." Luke had described how earlier in the season, he would sometimes not make the best pass in a game if it was to one of the selfish players. By the end of the season, though, Luke's approach to passing the ball changed "because we played so well and we worked together and everyone was doing what I considered to be the right thing with the ball, then I played the best pass, and it worked for us because everybody did the same thing."

The willingness to make personal sacrifices improved individual satisfaction regarding membership of the team and group integration toward performance tasks. The development of a team ethos at the expense of individual glory came through clearly at this stage of the season. During the penultimate game of the season my field notes revealed, "Everyone ran and sacrificed. When Kenny couldn't run any more, after about 60 minutes, he gave the signal to come off. He sacrificed aspects of his personal game for the good of the team." Kenny ran himself to exhaustion because he was completing his defensive tasks, which contributed to the successful performance. Individual performances represented the reconciliation between individual and collective agendas and the predisposition to work harder to cover for teammates. Bill remembered that during one of the important games, "everyone worked hard for each other, and that was personally satisfying and collectively satisfying for the team." Fred felt similarly about another game: "I personally felt that was a good team performance, and I had a good individual performance." Many players told me that if these individuals had been shaped into a team earlier in the season, and been willing to make personal sacrifices on the field, the team would have performed better more often.

The theme of reduced selfishness and willingness to make personal sacrifices to the team was very important in describing the change from a less cohesive to a more cohesive team by the end of the season. Making personal sacrifices reflected increased consensus about individual values coordinating with team values, and this improved both the integration of the group to the task as well as individual

attraction to the task. The willingness to make personal sacrifices also showed consensus between members over team values and behavioral rules.

Communication

A positive environment was facilitated by constructive on-field communication. Art enjoyed playing with "encouraging individuals, people who are constructive with whatever they are saying." Kirk described the attitude of the players on the field during the game he selected as the best team performance of the season: "Everyone came together, and there was a good feeling on the pitch at the time and in the changing room afterwards. There was no moaning at each other on the pitch if anybody did anything wrong." This extract indicates that increased positive communication was also related to acceptance of roles for the good of the team. Gary explained he felt it was easier to perform in a positive team atmosphere and felt that "positive communication can help you to focus, otherwise you start to worry about what other people think of you." Overall, positive communication improved group integration to the task.

Discussion

A number of processes were identified in this study that affected cohesion and contributed to performance. The dynamic nature of cohesion was emphasized by the changes that occurred from the mid- to late-season periods. Some of the themes we identified are not discussed extensively in Carron's (1982, 1988) conceptual framework for cohesion. There are references to each of the four main themes identified in our study in the existing literature, but they have not been widely acknowledged. Although some of the themes can be integrated with the individual-group and social-task (primary) dimensions of cohesion, they provide support for all four primary dimensions for cohesion included in the broader heuristic suggested by Cota et al. (1995). For example, the consensus about values and behavioral norms was a component of task and social cohesion contributing to improved performance. We also demonstrated support for changes in the group's resistance to disruption in facilitating cohesion. In terms of secondary dimensions, our finding demonstrated the importance of valued roles as a crucial dimension of cohesion for a sport team (cf. Cota et al., 1995; Yukelson et al., 1984). Finally, we presented themes of selfishness and communication that are not explicitly included in the Cota et al.'s (1995) heuristic.

Role clarity, acceptance, and performance have been associated with increased task cohesion in sport teams (Brawley, Carron, & Widmeyer, 1987; Yukelson et al., 1984). During the late season, players were not confused by the dual goal ambiguity of the mid-season, and they committed to the singular team goal, suggesting team goal setting can improve role clarity and acceptance (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998). Players who did not accept their roles were not satisfied with their contribution to the team. It is important for each individual in the team to be aware of the role they must fulfill in order to help the team function well and that role to be acknowledged by teammates and coaches (Carron, 1988). By late season, more players on the team accepted their roles, and senior team members endorsed the importance of less observable roles. Some players still may not have fully merged their personal agenda with their ascribed role, but because they could

link the importance of their role with the task the team had to perform, the integration of the group, and ultimately task cohesion, improved. It has been suggested that team cohesion will reciprocally influence athletes' self-efficacy for performing role-related functions; however, in a recent investigation, group cohesion did not moderate role efficacy for members of interdependent teams (Bray & Brawley, 2000). There may be reciprocity between the increased acceptance of roles and increased cohesion because as roles become more accepted, cohesion may increase, and as cohesion increases, roles may become more accepted, but more evidence is needed to confirm this speculation.

Willingness to make personal sacrifices influenced individual attraction to the group in a social sense and group integration to the task. Individual satisfaction has been suggested as the most important factor associated with the development of task and social cohesion in a coaching sport (Widmeyer & Williams, 1991). In our study, individual satisfaction was an important issue in the improvement of task and social cohesion in the late-season. Recently, Spink and Odnokon (2000) demonstrated that task satisfaction was predicted by task cohesion, and social satisfaction was predicted by social cohesion for male ice hockey players. Though these elements were not specifically distinguished in our study, the importance of task satisfaction in particular was emphasized. For example, when sacrifices were made on the field in the late-season, the group became more effective in performing tasks and more attractive for the members. Making sacrifices was associated with committing to the team ethos and thus contributed to enhanced group integration and social and task cohesion. Another example of improved member satisfaction is reflected in the increased consensus over behavioral rules and values regarding drinking alcohol the night before a game. Our findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that team social norms in the form of behavior at social functions can influence team cohesion (Colman & Carron, 2000). Again, an element of reciprocity may influence these relationships because as cohesion increases, more willingness to make sacrifices may emerge, further strengthening the cohesive bond of the team.

Although communication has been associated with increased group cohesiveness and performance, it has not been dealt with widely in cohesion research. As players made task-related sacrifices, on-field communication also became more positive. Specifically, constructive information, encouragement, and support from players during games helped contribute to a more positive atmosphere that was associated with increased task cohesion and performance. It has been suggested that individuals who are in close proximity to each other have a greater tendency to bond (Carron, 1988; Carron & Dennis, 1998). This does not always ensure cohesion but provides more opportunities for interaction and communication. However, in our study, it was apparent that the midfield players, who were closest on and off the field, perhaps had the least task-oriented bonding of all the team. This was problematic, because the midfield players were highly dependent on each other for performance.

The four themes highlighted principally improved task cohesion, which was related to improved performance. In future, researchers may wish to expand previous perspectives and specifically consider the themes of having clear and singular goals, valuing individual roles, making personal sacrifices, and maintaining positive patterns of communication as candidates for secondary dimensions of cohesion in sport teams. Addressing such questions in the future may provide further

understanding of the directional effect between dimensions and outcomes of cohesion. Regardless of the initial directionality of any relationships, practitioners seeking to improve performance would be well advised to use the themes identified here as starting points to improve aspects of task cohesion in sport teams.

However, the issue of whether or not cohesion leads to performance or performance leads to cohesion will remain a troubling question for researchers in this area. There may be greater evidence for the performance to cohesion relationship, but our study indicated that task cohesion also contributed to performance outcomes. However, factors that characterized the dynamic, reciprocal, mutually shaping nature of dimensions of cohesion, cohesive outcomes, and performance were also emphasized. For example, making personal sacrifices improved task cohesion and was, at least in part, the result of increased individual satisfaction, but team performance success may also contribute to increased member satisfaction (Widmeyer et al., 1993).

Our findings provide a number of challenges to the conceptual framework presented by Carron (1982), suggesting there is need to further develop his work in this area. The heuristic for cohesion presented by Cota et al. (1995), that includes the valuable contribution made by Carron, but provides a broader conceptual approach to understanding cohesion in a variety of groups, would seem to provide a fruitful way forward. As part of this endeavor, researchers need to follow teams in different sports for the entire season, or a number of seasons, in order to better understand how the dimensions of cohesion interact with performance and to be able to consider the applicability of secondary dimensions of cohesion to different sports teams. Given that these are dynamic processes that develop over time, we suggest that ethnographic research has the potential to contribute to theory development and add to our understanding of this complex area in the future.

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Note

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