

Running Head: A SOCIAL IDENTITY APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP IN SPORT

Promoting Shared Meanings in Group Memberships: A Social Identity Approach to Leadership  
in Sport

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### Abstract

The purpose of this review is to demonstrate the applicability of a social identity approach to leadership in sporting contexts. A social identity approach to leadership contends that leaders and group members are connected through feeling a sense of *belonging* and *emotional attachment* to their group. The present review (a) outlines the theoretical underpinnings of social identity theory, (b) reflects on the four principles of social identity leadership and applies them to sport, (c) contrasts social identity leadership with current leadership theories, and (d) provides suggestions for future research investigating a social identity approach to leadership in sport. Accordingly, the review illustrates how an appreciation of the social context and group members' values allow leaders to *mobilise*—enlist the motivation and abilities of—athletes to achieve the leader's vision. A social identity approach to leadership has the potential to extend understanding of leadership in sport by emphasising the role of groups and context in leadership.

*Keywords:* social identity theory, self-categorisation theory, coaching, group dynamics, vision.

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In sport, leaders play a crucial role in determining the fulfillment of groups' goals. Anecdotally, the positive influence of British Cycling's performance director Sir David Brailsford has been widely recognised in light of his leadership skills that have produced unprecedented results (e.g., 8 Gold, 2 Silver, and 2 Bronze medals at the London 2012 Olympic Games). On reflection, Sir David Brailsford's leadership was enacted through a unified, distinct group—British Cycling, and the success of Brailsford's leadership has been posited to be due to the identification created within British Cycling (Slater, Evans, & Barker, 2013). In particular, Sir David Brailsford, his support staff, and the athletes he leads share an emotional attachment to one another (i.e., by being part of British Cycling), and to the group, which perhaps mobilised members to further the group's interests. A social identity approach to leadership (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011; Hogg, 2001) contends it is the shared connection between leader and group that forms the foundation of successful leadership. In particular, the social identity analysis offers an original contribution to knowledge by providing an explanation of the group-level psychosocial processes that underpin leadership (i.e., leaders' and group members' social identities). Accordingly, the present review draws on empirical evidence from social psychology and reflections from professional sport to demonstrate the potential value and applicability of social identity leadership in sport. The review, first, outlines the theoretical principles of social identity theory that underpin social identity leadership; second, reflects on the four principles of social identity leadership and applies them to sport; third, contrasts social identity leadership with current leadership theories, and finally, provides suggestions for future research investigating a social identity approach to leadership in sport.

### **Social identity theory**

Social identity theory emphasises the importance of group processes in understanding individual and group behaviour (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Addressing Mayo's (1949) proposal that the psychology of an individual is a product of their social identities, the social identity approach contends that in social contexts people can define themselves as individuals ('I' and 'me') *and* as group members ('we' and 'us'). Personal identity explains an individual's perception of themselves to be distinct and different from other people in a particular environment. Alternatively, social identity refers to an "individual's knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional value and significance to him [or her] of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292). In other words, social identity is the extent to which an individual feels they belong to a group. Accordingly, social identities occur throughout life including academic identity (Sheridan, 2013) and athletic identity (Brewer, van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Brewer et al. (1993) referred to athletic identity as the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role, and in a similar manner to social identities, individuals derive a sense of who they are as people from their athletic role. Social identification involves an identification process but is distinct from athletic identity because the connection is with a group(s). As such, individuals derive a sense of who they are from their group memberships (e.g., from being part of their local football team, or being part of the Rugby Football League governing body, or being "English"). Thus, in sport individuals derive a sense of who they are as a person from their psychological connection to groups, which in turn, positively contributes to their self-worth.

Understanding the role of social identities for leadership is important for a number of reasons. First, in any situation an individual can think and behave in-line with their personal or

social identity. When individuals feel a meaningful attachment to a group their thought processes and actions may attune to their social identity (Adarves-Yorno, Postmes, & Haslam, 2006). A group that an individual feels a part of is termed an in-group (e.g., our university, a fan's association with Barcelona). In contrast, any group that an individual does not associate themself with can be defined as an out-group (e.g., a different university, a different soccer club). Second, social identities occur at multiple levels as individuals are members of numerous groups from specific associations with sports groups (e.g., sport fan behaviour; Wann, Hunter, Ryan, & Wright, 2001), through business organisations (e.g., De Cremer et al., 2006), to broad attachments to nations (e.g., Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Third, the stronger the identification with a particular group, the more an individual sees the self in terms of that group membership (van Knippenberg, 2011). This notion has been demonstrated in substantial literature that has explored social identities and sport fan behaviour (e.g., Wann et al., 2001). Fans who feel a strong identity with their sport team are more likely to encourage their athletes (Wann et al., 2001). These behaviours arise because individuals' lives as a sport fan are central to them and so they have the most to gain (or lose) from their teams' performances. In sum, research evidence has suggested social identities are prominent in sport and when individuals feel an allegiance to a group they are motivated to advance their group's interests.

The internalisation and psychological significance associated with belonging to a group results in an individual categorising themselves as part of the group (Turner et al., 1987). Accordingly, the similarities with in-group members and differences with out-groups are emphasised to provide a foundation for group behaviour (Turner et al., 1987). The process of categorisation in sport has been explained recently (Slater et al., 2013) and fundamentally permits effective group functioning because by acting in their own interests, individuals *also* act

in their group's interests because their own and the group's values are congruent. In turn, as group members see the fate of the group as their own, they are motivated to ensure one's own in-group is unique compared to out-groups (Haslam, 2004). A longitudinal study examined group identification and work-related outcomes in two theatre production teams (Haslam, Jetten, & Waghorn, 2009). Path analysis indicated that strong group identification predicted higher levels of citizenship (i.e., engaging in activities beyond the call of duty), pride (i.e., taking pleasure in the group's achievements), and work satisfaction, together with a reduced likelihood to burnout. Similarly in sport, through a qualitative design Morgan, Fletcher, and Sarkar (2013) identified group identity as a characteristic of resilient teams, which helped to guard against the potentially negative effects of stressors. Accordingly, categorisation provides the foundation for group functioning because members feel the group's success and failures as their own, while group identification appears to protect individuals from stressors they may encounter.

#### **Four principles of a social identity approach to leadership and applications to sport**

Research in the social identity tradition has sought to understand the processes that enable individuals to influence one another, be perceived as effective, and motivate the group in their leadership role. Recently, in social psychology, Haslam et al. (2011, p. 74) synthesised four principles of effective social identity leadership: (i) leaders as in-group prototypes, (ii) leaders as in-group champions, (iii) leaders as entrepreneurs of identity, and (iv) leaders as embedders of identity. A brief synthesis of this framework will now be applied to sport.

##### ***Leaders as in-group prototypes***

Research has explored the importance of beliefs and behaviours that emphasise leaders' similarity with their group. In social identity terms, leaders that represent group values are

defined as *prototypical* of their group's identity (Hogg, 2001). Initial experimental research found prototypical leaders were endorsed more by participants, and this support was maintained regardless of whether leaders acted in an in-group favouring, out-group favouring, or fair manner (Platow & van Knippenberg, 2001). Additional research across laboratory and organisational settings (e.g., van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005) has further indicated that prototypical leaders are perceived to be more effective and group-orientated than less prototypical leaders. Accordingly, leaders' ability to represent the group may motivate support from group members and increase perceptions of leadership effectiveness.

Extending the research on leader prototypicality Van Dijke and De Cremer (2010) investigated the mediating role of social identification in the relationship between leader prototypicality and support for the leader. In a field study with business employees and a laboratory experiment data suggested leader prototypicality increased perceptions of charisma and support for the leader among strongly identifying participants. As expected, social identification with the organisation or laboratory group mediated the relationship between leader prototypicality and support for the leader, suggesting that it is only when group members feel a strong connection to their group that leaders' prototypicality increases support for their leadership. Bringing the leader prototypical research together, evidence suggests that being perceived to represent the group (i.e., high prototypicality) gains support and endorsement from group members and results in higher perceptions of effectiveness and charisma. This evidence has been qualified in a recent review (van Knippenberg, 2011).

In this way the social identity approach to leadership draws similarities with person-centered counseling popularised by Carl Rogers (1980) that is evident in applied sport psychology (Katz & Hemmings, 2009). Rogers outlined the importance of establishing a strong

working alliance between counselor and client brought about through empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence (or genuineness). Paralleled with the person-centred approach, being prototypical of the group's identity emphasises the need for leaders to understand their group to develop a connection between leader and group members. Putting the client's needs first in person-centred therapy aligns with social identity leadership research where group members have reported higher levels of self-esteem when the leader was self-sacrificial, as opposed to self-benefiting (De Cremer, van Dijke, van Knippenberg, & Bos, 2006). The implications of these findings suggest that understanding group values and attending to group members' needs is integral for leaders to increase members self-esteem, which is in accordance with Carl Rogers' person-centred counseling.

Anecdotally, leaders work to demonstrate their prototypicality. For example, English Premier League football managers have worn a club scarf during matches to perhaps symbolise that they represent the team, the club, and its values. Further, leadership in sport includes formal and informal roles (Loughead, Hardy, & Eys, 2006) and although sport leadership research has typically focused on coaches (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011), the principle of prototypicality effects all leadership situations. For example, England soccer team manager, Roy Hodgson disclosed his reasons for appointing Steven Gerrard as captain (BBC Sport, 2012):

In my opinion he's the man who merits this distinction [captain]. I know him, of course, as a player, I know him as a person. I know how committed he is to the England cause and he was delighted last night when I told him of my decision.

On reflection, Hodgson believed Gerrard epitomised what he wanted England to embody (i.e., to be committed)—Gerrard represents it and thus this may have contributed to Hodgson's



decision to select him as captain. To summarise, leadership appears bound up in group processes, with research evidence suggesting leaders are more likely to be effective if group members' perceive the leader to represent the group's identity (i.e., prototypical of the group).

### *Leaders as in-group champions*

The second principle of social identity leadership involves leaders being perceived to behave in ways that advance the interests of the group (Haslam et al., 2011). In short, successful leaders work to progress the group and act for 'us'. Supporting evidence of the need for leaders to progress the group has investigated the notion of fairness. In one study examining presidential elections in the United States, data indicated greater levels of support for leaders that were perceived to behave more fairly (Kershaw & Alexander, 2003). The construct of fairness becomes increasingly relevant from a social identity perspective in situations where in-groups compete against out-groups (i.e., intergroup settings). In a laboratory experiment Turner (1975) asked participants to distribute money to themselves and a fellow in-group member, or themselves and an out-group member. The findings revealed participants were fairer in their distribution of money between themselves and in-group members, demonstrating the application of fairness in an intergroup setting is governed by shared group memberships. To summarise leadership research examining fairness, the findings imply that leaders who are fair to the in-group and unfair to the out-group are supported and endorsed more. Importantly, acting fairly seeks to promote group interests.

Further research supports the importance of leaders advancing their group's interests in a contextually specific manner. During the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, Platow, Nolan, and Anderson (2003) asked Australian citizens to indicate their support for leaders that favoured the

in-group over the out-group, or treated both groups equally. The results suggested that in the Olympic context of inclusivity and fairness the leader who favoured the in-group over the out-group was endorsed less than the leader who treated both groups equally. Accordingly, it may not always be the case that acting fairly to the in-group and unfairly to the out-group will be beneficial. Whether acting fairly is in leaders' interests is dependent upon how the in-group is defined. Advancing the group's interests involves enriching group values, and if the values of group identity portray fairness then leaders are more likely to be supported if they act fairly. Similarly, qualitative research has indicated that under TeamGB's performance vision at London 2012, decisions were made (e.g., regarding team kit) that sought to optimise peak performance (Slater, Barker, Coffee, & Jones, under review).

The established in-group bond and internalisation of social identities motivates group members to intrinsically enhance their group membership (Haslam, 2004). Subsequently, the likelihood of close scrutiny or punishments being effective leadership strategies is reduced. Research has sought to examine the effect of in and out-group leaders using surveillance and punishments on leader influence (Subasic, Reynolds, Turner, Veenstra, & Haslam, 2011). Without surveillance, data from two experiments indicated in-group leaders were perceived as more influential than out-group leaders. When in-group leaders did employ surveillance their ability to influence group members reduced, while in contrast, out-group leaders' influence was a function of their surveillance with little influence under no surveillance. An implication from these results is that in-group leaders will lose influence under conditions of surveillance or punishment. Such power over strategies as outlined by Turner (2005) typically reflect traditional leadership theory and perhaps reduce trust between leader and group members, thus in-group leaders may wish to avoid strategies that indicate they are not acting in the group's interests.

*Leaders as entrepreneurs of identity*

Empirical evidence for the third principle includes research designs with high ecological validity illustrating the proactive nature of leadership in that leaders construct group values to mobilise group action. In social psychology the meaning or values of an individual's group membership is defined as social identity content (Reicher, 1984). As evidence has indicated that group behaviour is directed by group norms (Adarves-Yorno et al., 2006; Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Reicher, 1984) leaders may aim for group members to take on values that align with the leader's vision.

In a flagship investigation, the BBC Prison Study (Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Reicher & Haslam, 2006) exposed participants to a two week experimental study in a simulated prison. The study created two groups of unequal power, with participants randomly assigned to prisoners or guards while the authors examined leadership processes. In the first few days of the experiment a social system of antagonism between the guards and prisoners prevailed. On day five a new participant was introduced to the study and they encouraged fellow participants to view themselves regarding a new set of values within a broader group of participants (including both prisoners and guards). The individual used the context by drawing on the participants' clothes, together with other metaphors and inclusive language (e.g., "we" and "us") emphasising their group focus. The results suggested these actions allowed the leader to re-define identity to encompass all the participants who challenged the experimenters, rather than two distinct groups of prisoners and guards. The leader's collective focus and creation of new group norms that were meaningful to the group, allowed the leader to gain support and mobilise the group while simultaneously progressing towards their own vision (Haslam & Reicher, 2007).

The BBC Prison Study and research in sporting contexts (e.g., Wann et al., 2001) has indicated group memberships contribute to individuals' sense of self positively or negatively. The influence social groups have on individuals depends on the status of the group comparative to out-groups, with perceived status derived from the dimension upon which individuals compare themselves to out-groups (Boen, Vanbeselaere, Pandelaere, Schutters, & Rowe, 2008). Social identity theory and associated research has suggested that in a leadership context it is crucial for leaders to emphasise the dimensions where the in-group is superior to the out-group to ensure favourable comparison (Boen et al., 2008).

Accordingly, leadership is a proactive process where leaders can shape the social context to create and advance shared identities (Reicher, Hopkins, & Haslam, 2005). Thus, further than being a reactive onlooker and allowing the group to direct values and behaviour, leadership is about actively shaping events to immerse the group in the leader's ideas. To draw upon Reicher and Hopkin's (2001) terminology, such leaders are *entrepreneurs* of identity, whereby they structure their own beliefs within the framework of the group's identity. In turn, group members are mobilised to act for the leader because they willingly invest in their valued group membership. Defined, mobilisation refers to the convergence of members to a leader's vision, to the extent that members are motivated and compelled to achieve a leader's vision. A shortcoming of social identity leadership research is that much existing evidence focuses on group members' perceptions of leaders (Subasic et al., 2011) rather than how leaders enlist the efforts and abilities of the group to *mobilise* them. An exception though is research by Halevy, Berson, and Galinsky (2011) who investigated leaders effect on group members' behavioural intentions. Specifically, participants read a scenario referring to a town crisis and were asked to indicate "how many hours per week (between 0 and 15) they would volunteer in the community

following the crisis and the mayor's call" (p. 899). Although reflecting a hypothetical design the study captured intentional behaviour and resonates with the influential nature of leadership (Northouse, 2010) more so than perceptions of leader endorsement.

Within groups, individuals provide various explanations of what it means to be members of their distinct groups (Haslam, 2004). For instance, after a disappointing London 2012 Olympic Games, British swimmer Fran Halsall stated: "We're British, and British people always come back stronger and that's what we're [British swimming] going to do" (BBC Sport, 2012). The quote illustrates how Fran Halsall characterises being British. To her being British means to work hard, to be resilient, and to demonstrate typical British spirit. In the same way, leaders too, as group members, have specific reasons as to why they belong to a group, which is likely to be reflected in the vision they wish to fulfill. In social identity terms, Fran Halsall is likely to feel a stronger identification with and be more influenced by a leader who also values British spirit. Conceivably, multiple contents may exist within a group and thus leaders may aspire to redefine group identity and thereby provide converging values to be embraced by all group members. In redefining identity, leaders aim to maintain in-group and prototypical status, together with developing new group values consistent with their vision. One way leaders can strive to achieve this is by selecting formal leaders (e.g., captains, support staff) that represent the values they wish to instill and are grounded in the existing group identity.

### *Leaders as embedders of identity*

The final principle of social identity leadership proposes the values put forth by the leader need to become reality. In social identity terms, research studies have indicated that leadership is about achieving, or at least making progress towards, a collective vision that aligns what the

group values (Reicher & Haslam, 2006; Reicher et al., 2005). In particular, the BBC Prison Study suggested group members endorsed and were more willing to act for the leader when practical structures were provided (e.g., discussion forums) that aided the fulfillment of the group's values (Haslam & Reicher, 2007). In social identity leadership terms, after creating a new group identity the leader was successful because they embedded what mattered to the group in the context of the simulated prison.

Research findings have suggested that planning and delivering activities or structures that reflect the leader's and group's values is important to allow the positive benefits of social identities (e.g., Boen et al., 2008) to become reality. Specifically, providing opportunities for the group to achieve its target means that group members will be motivated to invest their resources (e.g., effort, finances) in their group membership because their identification contributes to their sense of self. For example, British Cycling's value of marginal gains is underpinned by innovation and attention to detail, and Brailsford invested in a research and development team to focus on unearthing novel equipment or actions to embed marginal gains in reality. In addition, goal setting provides an example of a structure that might be organised by leaders in collaboration with their group to achieve leaders' ambitions. For instance, large-scale research in American organisations indicated that leaders acting proactively and setting challenging goals led to increased performance of team members (Crossley, Cooper, & Wernsing, 2013). Further, the authors found the association between challenging goals and performance was significantly moderated by trust in the leader. When taken together with social identity leadership, the results have implications for leadership practice because prototypical leaders are trusted more by group members (Giessner, van Knippenberg, & Sleebos, 2009). Namely, once establishing shared identification and prototypical status, and therefore reciprocal trust, leaders may be equipped to

set challenging targets for group members that will improve performance. This notion requires research attention, but from a social identity perspective challenging targets may be an example of a structure that provides group members with the guidance to fulfill leaders' aspirations providing a shared identity is established. Indeed, overlooking practical support to help the group to achieve their vision may lead to unsustainable and ineffective leadership (Haslam et al., 2011).

### **Contrasting a social identity approach with current leadership theories**

The value of social identity leadership for sport psychology may be enhanced because individuals can proactively work on the four principles of social identity leadership (see Figure 1). Informed by Haslam et al. (2011), Figure 1 demonstrates that shared group identity is a pre-requisite for the four principles of social identity leadership. The first principle involves leaders being perceived to represent the group (i.e., prototypical). Leaders can act to foster their prototypicality by understanding the values of the group and demonstrating their similarity with group members. In turn, the leader will epitomise the group's values and be perceived as effective by group members. Building on their prototypicality, the second principle refers to leaders as in-group champions in that leaders act and behave in-line with the group's values. As a result, leaders are supported more by the group and will gain influence. Sequentially, the third principle involves being an entrepreneur of identity where leaders propose a vision that encompasses their own and group members' values. In turn, group members embrace the consensual values and are mobilised towards the leader's vision. The final principle reflects embedding the proposed vision in reality. To achieve the outcome, leaders may organise events and provide opportunities for the vision to be attained. Through reflective practice, it is hoped sport leaders will be able to locate themselves within the model with a view to develop their identity leadership by adopting the actions and associated outcomes at each stage.

In contrast to social identity leadership, early leadership research focused on personality characteristics of leaders (i.e., the great man approach) to establish qualities that set leaders apart from other individuals. Individualistic approaches to leadership were soon refuted and there was a move to theoretically encompass the role of the environment in leadership processes (e.g., Fiedler, 1964). Despite advancing understanding of leadership, early approaches conceptualised individual characteristics and environmental factors separately rather than adopting an interactional framework.

Chelladurai's (1993) multi-dimensional model provides an interactional approach to leadership in sport. The multi-dimensional model proposed athlete satisfaction and performance is determined by the interaction of required coach behaviour (i.e., the behaviour that best suits the situation), athletes' preferred coach behaviour (i.e., what the athletes want the coach to do), and actual coach behaviour. The effectiveness of the coach relies upon the congruence between the three model components, with optimal satisfaction and effectiveness occurring when there is correspondence across all three aspects. Although the multi-dimensional model has extended knowledge by considering athlete preferences, research findings have been inconsistent relating to the model's hypotheses (Crust & Azadi, 2009). The attention paid to the followers is a significant development following calls by Chelladurai (1990) to assess the influence of athletes' personality on leadership preferences. Nevertheless, this advancement is masked by an individualistic approach, where individuals' characteristics (e.g., mental toughness; Crust & Azadi, 2009) are the focal point. Such perspectives are less likely to explain the mechanisms pertaining to why people are positively influenced by leaders (van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). A leader's relative influential capacity is important because leadership is conceptualised as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal"



(Northouse, 2010, p. 3). Thus, leadership is concerned with the influential interaction between individuals in a group. Leadership theories that lack consideration of leader and group member relationships are less likely to explain the influential and contextual nature of leadership (Haslam et al., 2011). An analysis of individuals' group memberships and social context may provide an original contribution to knowledge of sport leadership. As Avolio (2007) stated:

. . . if the accumulated science of leadership had produced a periodic table of relevant elements . . . one might conclude that leadership studies had focused too narrowly on a limited set of elements, primarily highlighting the leader yet overlooking many other potentially relevant elements of leadership such as the follower and context (p. 25).

Most recently, leadership research in sport psychology has adopted the transformational–transactional paradigm. Burn's (1978) transactional theory stated leadership involves exchange processes between leaders and followers where rewards or punishments are given to followers dependent on performance. In such exchanges, leaders outline tasks to be completed and then monitor followers' attainment, before recognising their success or failure. The transactional framework is two-sided between the leader and followers, but ultimately places leaders in positions of power over the group (Turner, 2005). Alternatively, and more prevalent in the sport psychology literature, is transformational leadership, which is concerned with leaders' ability to inspire and motivate followers to achieve their potential through the proposal of an aspiring vision (Bass, 1985). In comparison to previous conceptualisations of leadership, the transformational approach emphasised the importance of building interpersonal relationships between leaders and followers. Because of these advancements that capture features that

previous theories have overlooked, transformational leadership is, justifiably, the most popular approach in contemporary leadership research in sport psychology.

Research attention has supported the predictive qualities of transformational leadership in sport (e.g., Arthur, Woodman, Ong, Hardy, & Ntoumanis, 2011; Rowold, 2006). For instance, Rowold demonstrated that transformational behaviours of martial arts coaches led to elevated perceptions of coach effectiveness in comparison to transactional behaviours. Further research has indicated that particular transformational behaviours displayed by coaches predicted task and social cohesion, with performance level moderating these relationships (Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur, & Hardy, 2009). Of particular relevance, Callow and colleagues reported that coaches' relative influence varied across different contexts, leading the authors to conclude: "future research needs to examine the effect of contextual influences on both transformational and transactional leadership" (p.407). In sum, transformational leadership has advanced understanding of sport leadership, particularly by emphasising collective processes and influential processes. Nevertheless, the analytic focus reflects the leader as an individual, which overlooks the context within which leadership takes place (Currie & Lockett, 2007).

In addition, charisma is outlined as a characteristic key to the inspirational qualities of transformational leaders (Haslam & Reicher, 2012). Empirical evidence (Van Dijke & De Cremer, 2010) has experimentally measured attributions of charismatic leadership. Data suggested charisma is bestowed upon leaders by the group when leaders are perceived as group prototypical. Thus, rather than being a characteristic that leaders possess (or not), evidence has indicated that charisma is something that leaders can construct by representing the in-group (Van Dijke & De Cremer, 2010). Accordingly, perceptions of charisma may flow from leaders' belonging to the group, and in this way identification is the source of effective leadership.

### *Summary of current leadership theories*

Despite these endeavours that have advanced our understanding of leadership, research in sport has not been as extensively analysed as in other disciplines in psychology (such as organisational psychology; Jones, 2002) with scholars suggesting: “few comprehensive, scientifically testable theories have been developed to describe this phenomenon” (Vidic & Burton, 2011, p. 279-280). On reflection, a social identity approach to leadership has the potential to extend knowledge by providing an understanding of group-level psychological processes that underpin leadership. In particular, the influence of athletes’ social identities and context has been overlooked by previous theory and yet is pertinent to leadership because individuals are mobilised to enhance their group memberships (Haslam et al., 2011). It follows that empirical examination of social identity leadership in sport may be fruitful.

### **Suggestions for future research investigating social identity leadership in sport**

A social identity approach to leadership may provide enhanced understanding of the social psychological principles underpinning effective leadership. Despite our reflections from elite sport, no leadership research has investigated the social identity framework in sport, thus examination of sport leaders from an identity perspective may be worthwhile. The present review has drawn on an evidence-base to provide a rationale for researching social identity leadership in sport across multiple levels of leadership. The importance of group identification in sport has been demonstrated in extant literature regarding sport fandom (e.g., Wann, 2006; Wann et al., 2001) and sport club merger (Boen et al., 2008). Nevertheless, future research may wish to specifically examine the four principles of identity leadership and the model presented in the current article (Figure 1) by adopting relevant measures utilised in social psychology (e.g., leader

prototypically; van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005). In particular, the proposed model lends itself to applied research focusing on leadership development from a social identity perspective. For example, a single-case research design (see Barker, McCarthy, Jones, & Moran, 2011) could be adopted to employ an identity-based leadership intervention, informed by Figure 1, to monitor leadership development.

Additionally, the influence of leaders' and athletes' social identities and associated values on sport leadership processes is unknown. In particular, building on work by Halevy et al. (2011), to examine more objective measures of mobilisation and group performance goes beyond perceptions of leadership effectiveness and appears warranted (Subasic et al., 2011). In addition, the social identity perspective and the potential extension of knowledge from a systematic research programme on social identity leadership in sport has the potential to provide a conceptual foundation for leadership interventions.

## **Conclusion**

Drawing upon social identity theory and research evidence, together with reflections from elite sport, the present review sought to illustrate that leadership is inextricably bound up in group processes. The current review has indicated that leadership research in sport psychology may benefit from examining how group memberships, and in particular the meaning of these memberships, influence individual and group attitudes and behaviour. In particular, the social identity analysis of leadership may offer an original contribution to sport leadership by understanding of the social, influential, and contextual nature of leadership. Thus, a social identity approach to leadership offers a promising springboard for future research and applied practice.

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