

Differences between males' and females' interpretations of roles in team sport contexts

Introduction

- Roles are “the set of prescriptions defining what the behavior of a position member should be” (Biddle & Thomas, 1966, p. 29).
- In sport contexts, there are four main categories of roles based on **functionality** (Benson et al., 2014):
 - specialized task-oriented* (related to specific to technical skills)
 - auxiliary task-oriented* (supplementary jobs to increase the group's overall functioning)
 - leadership* (unifying team members)
 - social-oriented* (facilitate interpersonal interactions)
- In sport, roles also have both **independent** (i.e., individualized) and **interdependent** (i.e., intersecting with teammates) qualities (Bray et al., 2002)
- Based on self-construal gender differences are possible (Cross & Madson, 1997)
 - Females are more likely to prioritize relationships with others (i.e., interdependent) vs personal needs and goals (i.e., independent)
 - These differences are thought to be influential on group processes (e.g., cohesion; Eys et al., 2015)

Purpose

To explore the manner (i.e., independent versus interdependent) with which male and female athletes describe their roles based on functionality.

Method

Participants

- 385 athletes ($M_{age} = 23.4$, $SD = 2.7$; 193 males, 192 females) from competitive interdependent sport teams.

Procedures

- Athletes were prompted to report their role(s) in relation to team performance.
- As seen in Table 1, athletes' roles were deductively coded by (a) role type (e.g., mentor) and (b) construal description type (e.g., independent)
- A critical friend (Smith & McGannon, 2017) was used to offer alternative perspectives regarding the deductive coding process
- Specific role types were then placed into their overarching role categories (e.g., leadership; Benson et al., 2014)

Statistical Analysis

- For each overarching category a 2 (male/female) X 2 (interdependent/independent) chi-square analysis was conducted

Results

Table 1. Independent and interdependent role counts across role types.

Role types	Independent	Interdependent
Specialized task-oriented (N = 274)		
Task-specific	182	27
Positional	59	6
Auxiliary task-oriented (N = 218)		
Energy player	30	12
Encourager	22	31
Managerial-related	4	5
Team player	46	48
Enforcer	17	3
Leadership (N = 124)		
Unidentified leadership	49	29
Formal leadership	19	12
Mentor	2	13
Social-oriented (N = 11)		
Team comedian	3	2
Miscellaneous social	2	4

Note. Overall N is less than total role type counts due to some athletes reporting multiple roles.

- Females were **2.5 times more likely** (vs males) to describe their auxiliary task-oriented roles in an interdependent manner, $\chi^2(1, N=218) = 11.28, p < .001$
- No other significant differences were found in the other three overarching role categories

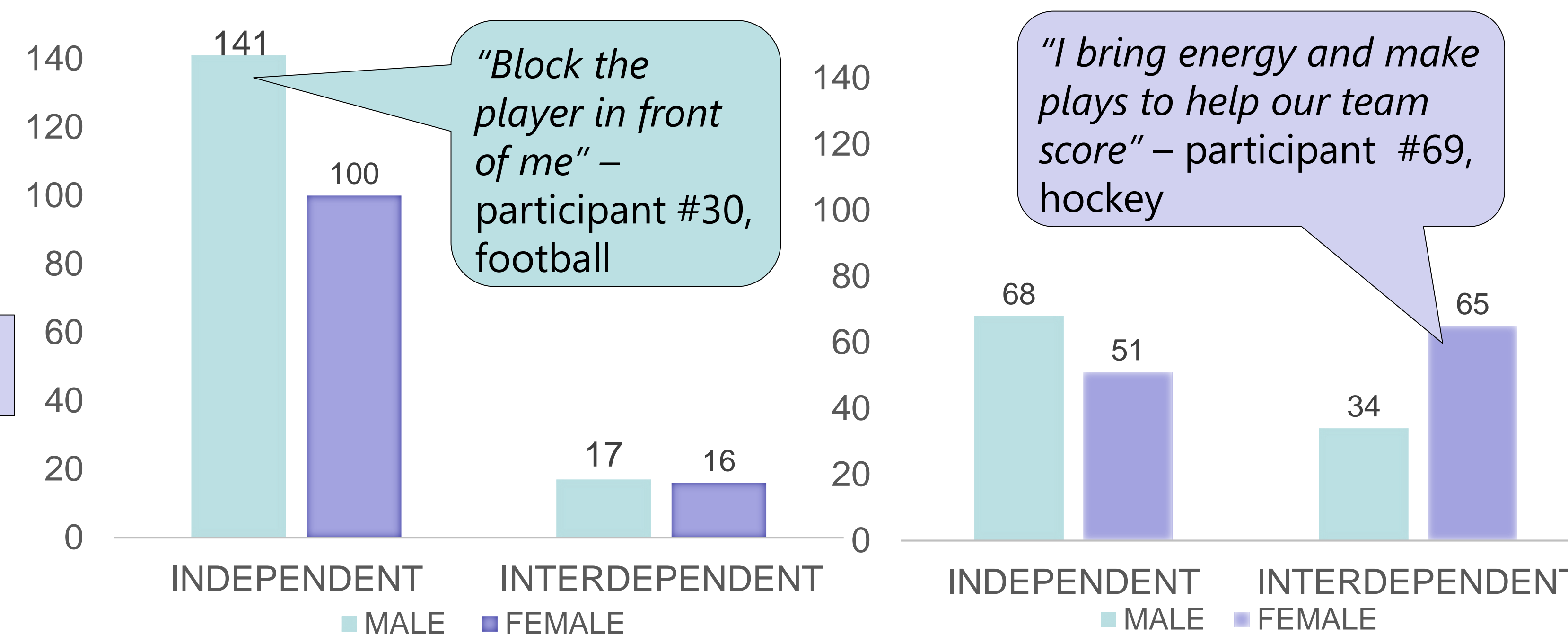


Figure 1. Specialized task-oriented role category frequencies comparisons between genders and construal contexts.

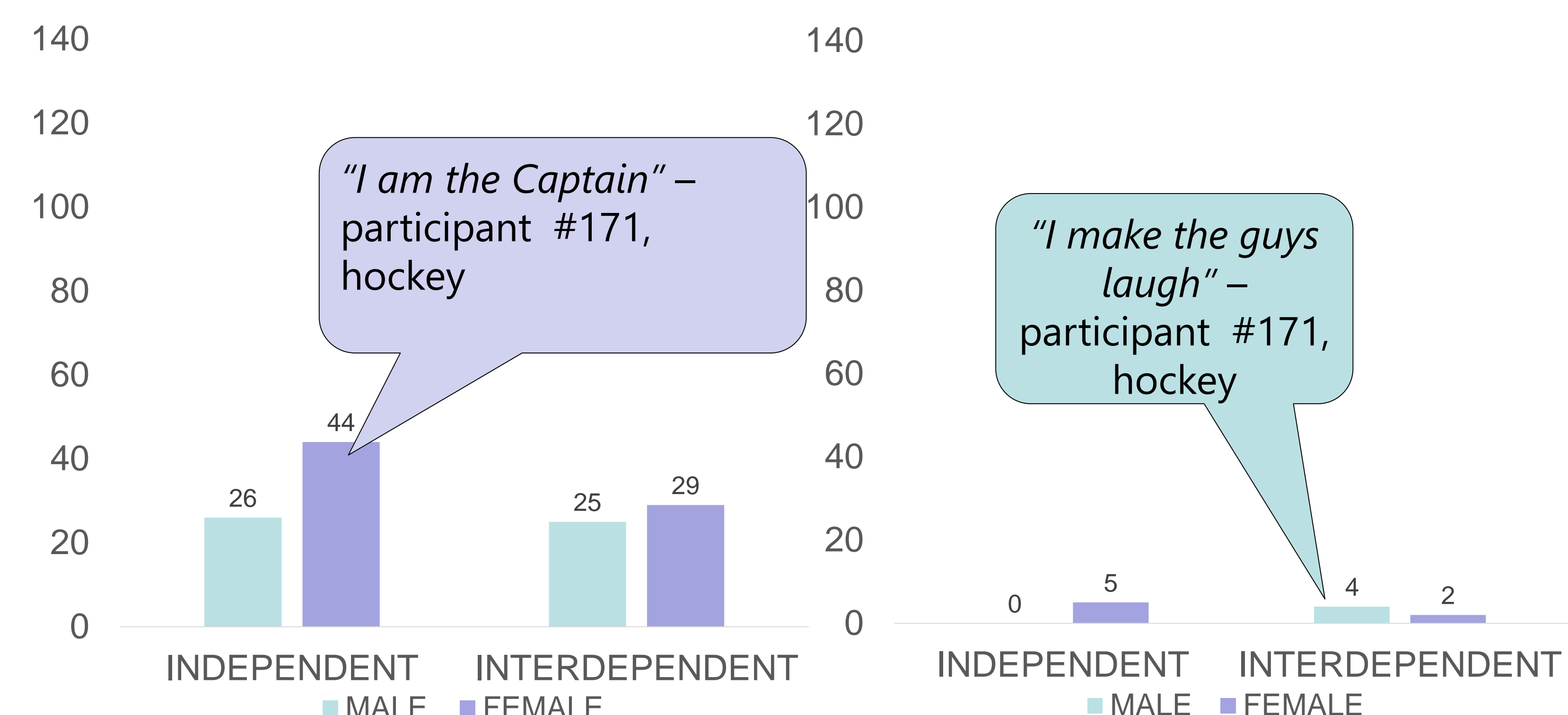


Figure 2. Auxiliary task-oriented role category frequencies comparisons between genders and construal contexts.

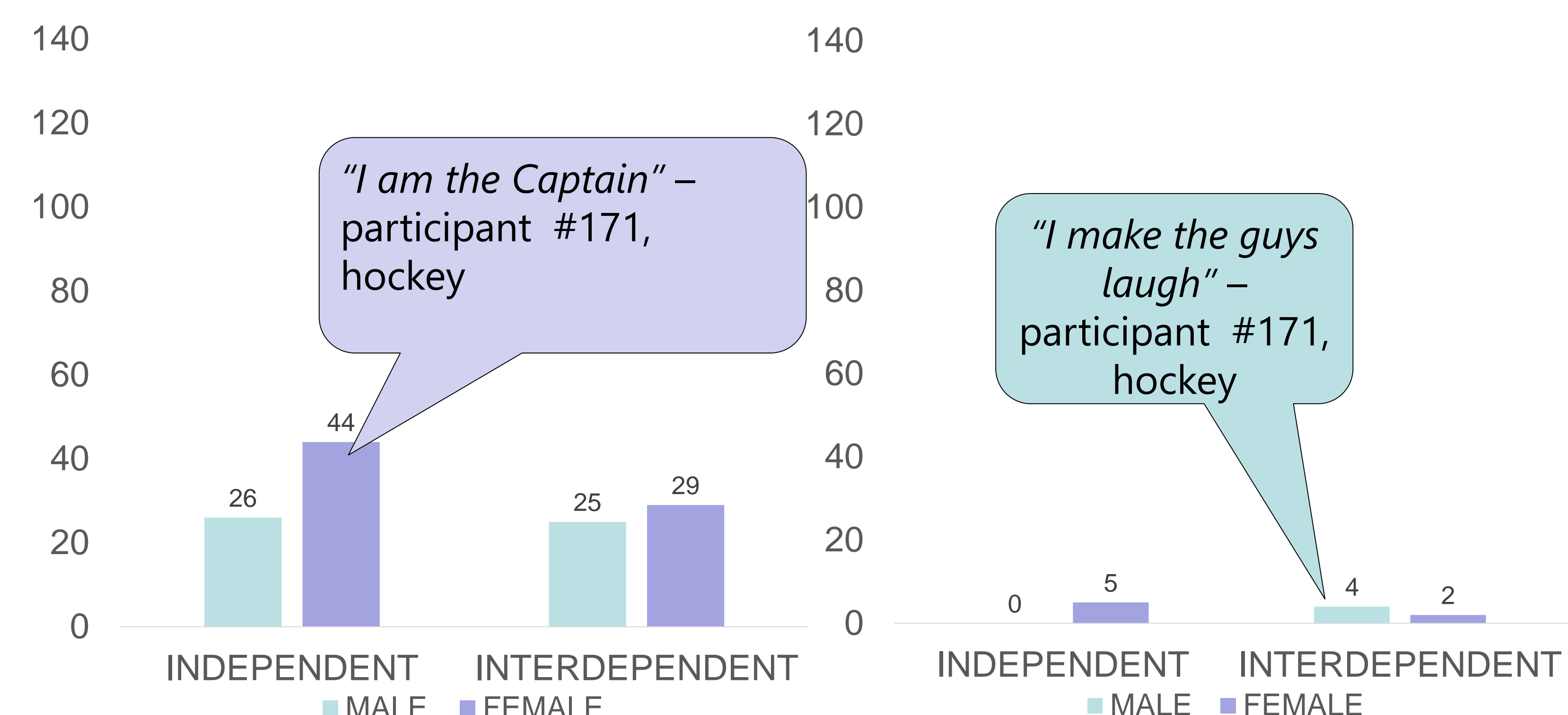


Figure 3. Leadership role category frequencies comparisons between genders and construal contexts.

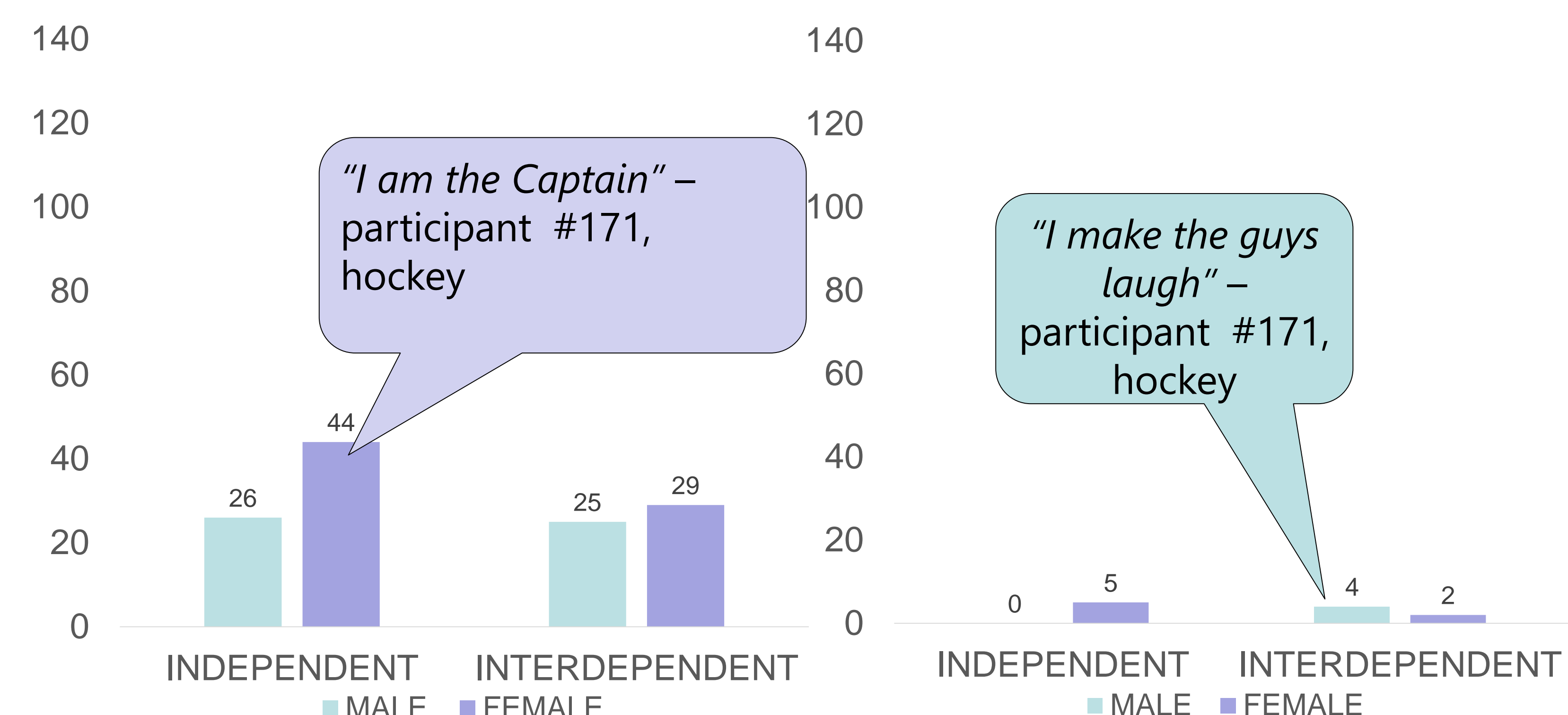


Figure 4. Social-oriented role category frequencies comparisons between genders and construal contexts.

Discussion

- Males and females may interpret their auxiliary task-oriented role responsibilities differently
 - Female athletes may be more likely to interpret responsibilities that intersect with their teammates' roles and group functioning
 - Male athletes may require their role to be described in an independent context revolving around their personal actions and outcomes
- Often occupied by non-starters (Benson et al., 2014), many auxiliary task-oriented roles are informal:
 - There may be more freedom for athletes to interpret auxiliary roles in an interdependent manner, allowing for a greater range in descriptions
 - Notably, post-hoc analyses also revealed that general role responses of females, $M = 108.84$, $SD = 61.74$, were significantly longer in character length compared to males, $M = 83.44$, $SD = 54.04$, $p < .001$, affording a more detailed set of descriptions overall

Future Directions & Practical Implications

- These results support the generalized gender differences found in self-construal literature (Cross & Madson, 1997)
 - However, these differences do not imply that one role interpretation is more effective than another.
 - Rather, this information can be used critically such that teams, female or male alike, can attain optimal role performance
- Although speculative in nature, these findings may help to enhance the communication of role responsibilities by coaching staff
- Future interventions should look to explore how role communication influences other group dynamic variables when comparing genders
- Proper communication may subsequently positively influence athletes' understanding of their roles, increase satisfaction, and athlete retention (Eys et al., 2003).

Recommendation for coaches:

When formally assigning auxiliary task-oriented roles to female athletes, consider emphasizing how their actions (e.g., encouraging, communicating) will influence their teammates' functioning in addition to their personal goals.