Perceived Coaching Behavior among Collegiate Women

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In general it has been assumed that female athletes are benefitting from participation in athletics; that they are developing mentally, socially, and physically, and are satisfied with their experience overall, and with the coaching they receive in particular. Furthermore, it has been identified that women prefer different coaching behaviors than males (Amorose & Horn, 2000), further driving a need for better understanding of female athletes and the coaching styles that aid in creating positive athletic experiences for women. Similarly, coach gender has also risen as a factor in athlete perception of experience.

Athlete perception of their coaches’ behavior has been found to have a significant impact on sport behavior. While many studies exist assessing perceptions of youth and high-school aged females, few studies exist that assess collegiate female athletes. Studies have found that female collegiate athletes value different coaching behaviors than do males, and are motivated by different behaviors than males (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Vargas-Tonsing, Myers, & Feltz, 2004; Wang, Chen, & Chen Ji, 2004). In addition, little research exists on female athlete’s perceptions of coaching behavior and its effects on self-efficacy or on satisfaction with coaching. Thus, this study will examine whether leadership differentially influences self-efficacy of female athletes, and whether the change in self-efficacy influences satisfaction with coaching. Furthermore, it will examine whether there are differences between female athletes coached by women and female athletes coached by men.

General leadership theory does not account for sport specific applications (Chelladurai & Carron, 1978). In his Multidimensional Model of Leadership, Chelladurai (1978; 1990) suggested that leadership influences member satisfaction and holds that satisfaction is maximized if the athlete perceives they are receiving the right type of leadership for the situation. Perceived leader behavior is partially determined by characteristics and behavior of the leader, but also by required and preferred leader behavior. The Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) created by Chelladurai (1978) is a five-factor solution describing the most salient dimensions of coaching behavior. The LSS consists of one direct task (Training and Instruction) factor, two decision-style factors (Democratic and Autocratic) and two motivational factors (Social Support & Positive Feedback).

Bandura outlined that self-efficacy is influenced through verbal persuasion, performance accomplishments, vicarious experience and emotional arousal – all of which include instructional elements found in coaching. According to Bandura (1977; 1989), self-efficacy is determined by one’s perceptions and influences one’s thoughts, goals, level of effort, and self-esteem. Based on this conceptualization, it is assumed that self-efficacy may be influenced by coaching leadership traits. To test for self-efficacy levels as defined by Bandura (1977), Marsh’s Self-Description Questionnaire (Marsh, 1992; Marsh & O’Neill, 1984) is used as a multidimensional measure of self-concept for late adolescence and early adulthood.

Satisfaction is influenced by salient values and these values are influenced directly by cultural socialization (Neiner & Neiner, 1995). Marsh, Parker and Martin (2008) found that significant self-concept factors that were most important to young adults were the relationships in one’s life and physical attributes, namely physical ability self-concepts. Athlete satisfaction is defined by Chelladurai and Riemer (1997) as “a positive affective state resulting from a complex evaluation of structures, processes and outcomes associated with the athletic experience” (pg. 28). Kenow and Williams (1999) suggested that if an athlete’s goals and beliefs were consistent with that of the coach, a resulting satisfactory interaction between coaches and athletes would occur. Balaguér (1999) further added that perceptions of motivational environments operating on sports teams have been linked to variability in satisfaction with team membership and self-efficacy.

The data set contained 526 female athletes competing at NCAA division I, II and III in varied sports. The subjects were coached by both male and female coaches. Internet-based survey information and an email asking for participation were sent to the coaches of the surveyed athletes. Links to the survey were then voluntarily sent to
athletes. Athletes completed a survey comprised of a Modified Leadership Scale for Sports, developed specifically for this research, but based on the LSS. The Athlete Satisfaction Questionnaire (Chelladurai & Reimer, 2007) and items from the SDQIII Instrument (Marsh, 1992) to assess dimensions of self-efficacy, were also included.

Cronbach’s Alpha measures ranged from \( \alpha = .687 \) (Autocratic Behavior) to \( \alpha = .947 \) (General Satisfaction) with a mean of \( \alpha = .828 \). For athletes with male coaches, the five self-esteem measures explained 20.3% of the total variance in General Satisfaction. Combined together with the five leadership scales, these 10 dimensions explained 66.88% of variance in General Satisfaction. For athletes with female coaches, self-esteem factors explained 22% of the variance of general satisfaction, and the leadership factors explained an additional 48.2% of the variance in General Satisfaction.

We found that Leadership predicted 24.5% and 30.6% of Same Sex Peer Relationships by male and female coaches respectively, 5% and 7.8% of Opposite Sex-Peer Relationships, 11.7% and 9.2% of Physical Ability, 4.8% and 8.3% of General Self-Esteem and 6.4% and 12.8% of Emotional Stability respectively for male and female coaches. The results indicated leadership behaviors make up the greatest indicator or female athlete satisfaction with their coach. Furthermore, leadership behaviors impacted some areas of self-efficacy and described relationships that can help coaches improve their coaching. Smaller relationships between factors also identified how satisfaction differs for behaviors from female and male coaches, providing a roadmap for improving coaching for female athletes from both coach gender perspectives. While the information from this study spoke to athlete satisfaction in terms of coach perceptions, the addition of sport success measures such as win-loss records would yield additional information for a more comprehensive view of leader behaviors on female athletes.