Implications of Motivation Among High School Student-Athletes

Michael Fraaina, Farmingdale State College
Donna Pastore (Advisor), Ohio State University

As noted by Hui and Tsang (2012), “Adolescence is a critical phase of life during which young people face physical, psychological, intellectual, and emotional concerns and challenges, search for self-identity, explore new roles, and deal with transition to secondary schools and later from school to work and adulthood” (Hui & Tsang, 2012, p. 1). One of the most alarming trends related to adolescence involves a general lack of physical activity (Troiano et al., 2008). In response to this (and other) challenges, sport has emerged as a popular developmental domain. Sport has been defined as “organized, recreational, and skillful physical activity that has an element of competition” (Anderson-Butcher, 2011, pp. 2835-2836). A variety of benefits, including emotional, intellectual, physical, psychological, and social development, have been attributed to sport participation during youth and adolescence (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2016).

In recent years, increased focus has been placed toward understanding the motivational orientations of athletes. Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) promotes that individuals’ motivational orientations are determined by satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Within the context of sport, scholars (e.g., Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Hodge & Gucciardi, 2015; Quested & Duda, 2010) have deciphered the influence of coaches, peers, and parents toward motivational orientations of adolescent athletes. However, few studies (i.e., Amorose et al., 2016; Riley & Smith, 2011) have accounted for combined influence from multiple sources of social influence. In order to address this gap in literature, the purpose of the current study was to measure the independent and interactive effects of coach and peer influence toward high school athletes’ perceptions of psychological need satisfaction.

The specific venue to be covered in this study is interscholastic (high school) sport. Adopting a theoretical framework of SDT, the current study explored the influence of coaches and peers toward high school student-athletes perceptions of need satisfaction and motivational orientations. Utilizing a convenience sampling approach, the research conducted a 49-item survey of interscholastic athletes at 8 schools in an urban region of the Midwestern United States. A total of 136 participants completed the study.

As the researcher intended to distinguish among the three psychological needs, three separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to analyze perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The first analysis measured the outcome variable of autonomy through four models: Block 1 included four demographic variables (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, type of sport), Block 2 added coach-autonomy support, Block 3 added peer-autonomy support, and Block 4 added coach x peer autonomy support. The four demographic variables explained 19.8% in the variance in autonomy, and this model was statistically significant (F (8, 127) = 3.92, p < .001). The introduction of coach-autonomy support explained an additional 27.5% of variance in perceived autonomy. The addition of peer-autonomy support explained an additional .6% of variance in perceived autonomy. The addition of coach x peer autonomy support explained an additional .9% of variance in perceived autonomy.

The second analysis measured the outcome variable of competence through four models: Block 1 included four demographic variables (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, type of sport), Block 2 added coach-competence support, Block 3 added peer-competence support, and Block 4 added coach x peer competence support. Model 1, including the demographic variables, explained 18.4% in the variance in competence and was statistically significant (F (8, 127) = 3.57, p = .001). The introduction of coach-competence support explained an additional 3.0% of variance in perceived competence. The addition of peer-competence support explained an additional 16.2% of variance in perceived competence. The addition of coach x peer competence support explained an additional .1% of variance in perceived competence.
The final analysis measured the outcome variable of relatedness through four models: Block 1 included four demographic variables (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, type of sport), Block 2 added coach-relatedness support, Block 3 added peer-relatedness support, and Block 4 added coach x peer relatedness support. Model 1, including the demographic variables, explained 11.9% in the variance in relatedness and was statistically significant (F (8, 127) = 2.14, p = .037). The introduction of coach-relatedness support explained an additional 16.9% of variance in perceived relatedness. The addition of peer-relatedness support explained an additional 18.0% of variance in perceived relatedness. The addition of coach x peer relatedness support explained an additional 3.7% of variance in perceived relatedness.

In the current study, as well as other related studies, high school athletes generally report satisfactory levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Previous studies toward this topic (e.g., Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Riley & Smith, 2011) have reached similar conclusions. Therefore, it appears that interscholastic programs are offering opportunities for psychological need satisfaction. The addition of the variables related to autonomy-support revealed that the contributions of coach-autonomy support were related to athletes’ perceptions of autonomy. Conversely, athletes reported that peer-autonomy support did not add to the model. This would seem to create an increased responsibility for coaches to promote autonomy among their athletes.

Unlike the findings generated through evaluation of perceived autonomy, athletes’ perceptions of competence were minimally related to competence-support from coaches. Peer-competence support was more prominently related to perceived competence. The findings of the current study seemed to reflect the importance of encouraging athletes to support the competence levels of their peers.

The findings of the current study supported the importance of coach-relatedness support toward establishing perceptions of relatedness. Athletes’ levels of relatedness were also influenced by relatedness support from peers (18.0% of variance). Further, relatedness was the only variable in which the combined effects of coach and peer influence were significant predictors of relatedness. Findings from the regression plot seemed to indicate that as the amount of peer-relatedness support rose, the effect of coach-autonomy support decreased. Therefore, it seems that relatedness satisfaction can be increased by both coaches and peers.