



Coping rarely takes place in a social vacuum: Exploring antecedents and outcomes of dyadic coping in coach-athlete relationships



Helen R. Staff^{*}, Faye F. Didymus, Susan H. Backhouse

Carnegie Research Institute, Leeds Beckett University, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 15 June 2016

Received in revised form

23 February 2017

Accepted 24 February 2017

Available online 27 February 2017

Keywords:

Communal coping

Intimate relationships

Relational coping

Social support

ABSTRACT

Objectives: Despite widespread acceptance that coping is an interpersonal phenomenon, sport psychology research has focused largely on athletes' and coaches' ways of coping individually. The aim of this study was to qualitatively explore coping from an interpersonal perspective (i.e., dyadic coping) in coach-athlete relationships.

Methodology and methods: Antecedents and outcomes of dyadic coping were discussed with five coach-athlete dyads. We conducted individual interviews with athletes and coaches and then one interview with each coach-athlete dyad. Interviews were analyzed using dyadic analysis and composite vignettes were created to present the data. Methodological rigor was enhanced by focusing on credibility, resonance, rich rigor, significant contribution, and meaningful coherence.

Results: Five themes were identified. These represented the essence of dyadic coping (theme: the essence of dyadic coping), antecedents of dyadic coping (themes: lock and key fit, friendship and trust, communication of the stressor), and outcomes of dyadic coping (theme: protection and support). The first theme captures coaches' and athletes' understanding of dyadic coping. The antecedent themes represent the factors that were necessary for dyadic coping to occur. Protection and support relates to the positive nurturing environment that was discussed as an outcome of dyadic coping.

Conclusion: The results extend published research by exploring antecedents and outcomes of dyadic coping in sport. The findings highlight that dyadic coping was prevalent in coach-athlete relationships when various antecedents (lock and key fit, friendship and trust, communication of the stressor) existed. Protection and support were pertinent outcomes of dyadic coping that contributed to personal and relationship growth.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

In the sport psychology literature, psychological stress is an overarching term that encompasses stressors, appraisals, coping, and outcomes (Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006). Coping can be defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). This definition stems from the transactional perspective of coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which is a seminal theory that has been used to guide research on coping in sport (see, for a review, Nicholls & Polman, 2007). The findings of the research in this area collectively highlight some of the individual coping strategies that are used by athletes (e.g., planning, venting emotions, mental disengagement; Hoar,

Kowalski, Gaudreau, & Crocker, 2006) and coaches (e.g., planning, self-talk, centering; Olusoga, Butt, Maynard, & Hays, 2010). They also provide preliminary understanding of how coaches and athletes learn to cope with stressors (Tamminen & Holt, 2012). The majority of coping research that has been framed by transactional based theories of stress (e.g., Weston, Thelwell, Bond, & Hutchings, 2009) overlooks the dynamic nature of coping that rarely takes place in a social vacuum (Bodenmann, 1995, 2005). Indeed, researchers have focused on either athletes or coaches and minimal attention has been paid to the notion of coping as an interpersonal process (Crocker, Tamminen, & Gaudreau, 2015; Nicholls & Perry, 2016; Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014). This is contrary to literature in other disciplines, which supports the view that coping should be considered as a dynamic interplay between two or more people (Bodenmann, 1995; Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998).

In relationship and health psychology contexts, coping research has often been framed by dyadic conceptualizations (Bodenmann,

^{*} Corresponding author. Carnegie Research Institute, Leeds Beckett University, Headingley Campus, Leeds, LS6 3QS, United Kingdom.

1995, 2005). According to these conceptualizations, dyadic coping is defined as the combined effort of both partners when they experience a shared stressor (cf. Bodenmann, 1995, 2005). This definition highlights the shared social context of coping that should be considered in addition to individual coping efforts that are detailed in transactional stress theory (Bodenmann, 2005). One widely used model of dyadic coping is the systemic transactional model (STM; Bodenmann, 1995), which extends transactional stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) by focusing on the dynamic interplay between two people. The STM maintains an appraisal based view of stress and suggests that one partner's appraisal of a stressor is communicated to the other partner who responds with positive and or negative forms of dyadic coping (Bodenmann, 1997, 2005). Despite the potential relevance of this model to coach-athlete relationships and specific calls for research on interpersonal coping in contexts other than romantic relationships (Bodenmann, 1997), such an approach is yet to be qualitatively explored in sport. This is surprising given the potential for dyadic coping to enhance relationship functioning and stability (Bodenmann, Pihet, & Kayser, 2006; Papp & Witt, 2010) and the importance of these factors in coach-athlete relationships (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002).

The coach-athlete relationship has been conceptualized as a mutual and causal interdependence between the coach's and the athlete's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Such relationships have been the focus of scientific research for over 15 years (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016) and, collectively, the findings suggest that dyads are interdependent (Jowett, 2007) and that individual differences (e.g., gender; Lorimer & Jowett, 2010), social-cultural factors (e.g., sport environment; Felton & Jowett, 2013), and relationship factors (e.g., leadership; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004) are important for maintaining quality in the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Researchers (e.g., Jowett & Nezelek, 2011) have also highlighted that coaches are an important source of support for athletes when they experience stressful situations. With this and the notion that interdependence is an important aspect of coach-athlete relationships in mind, the STM may provide a useful framework for research that focusses on coaches' and athletes' coping.

Despite dyadic coping in coach-athlete relationships being underexplored, researchers have acknowledged the role of social parties when athletes seek support to cope with stressful situations (e.g., Didymus & Fletcher, 2014). In addition, it is thought that athletes may appraise stressors as less threatening when in the presence of a coach (Nicholls et al., 2016) and that a coach can supplement and extend an athlete's coping resources (Bianco, 2001). Research that has explored social support in sport has considered the coach as a general other who can provide unidirectional support to athletes (e.g., Tamminen & Holt, 2012). Thus, the concept of social support is conceptually similar but distinct from dyadic coping, which is a broader term under which social support is nested (Lim, Shon, Paek, & Daly, 2014). In contrast to social support per se, dyadic coping involves both partners using coping strategies to support each other in a bidirectional manner (Bodenmann et al., 2006) and acknowledging the cooperative process of coping (Lyons et al., 1998). This approach to coping represents a novel avenue for sport research that has potentially powerful implications for research and applied practice. This is because research that explores interpersonal coping will allow us to better understand and develop shared coping experiences between coaches and athletes, which may contribute to more successful performance outcomes.

Although some sport psychology researchers have highlighted the need for studies that approach coping from an interpersonal standpoint (Tamminen & Gaudreau, 2014), little empirical research of this nature exists in sport. The sustained academic interest in

athletes' and coaches' individual ways of coping appears nonsensical when considering the mutual and causal interdependence of coach-athlete relationships. This study responds to calls for research on dyadic coping in sport (Didymus, 2017) by working towards an understanding of how coping occurs as an interpersonal process. In doing so, we move beyond the exploration of coping as a process that occurs in a social vacuum and toward a more complete understanding of how athletes and coaches work together to cope with stressors. The first logical step in developing such understanding is to explore the essence of dyadic coping, and the factors that lead to (i.e., antecedents) and occur as a result (i.e., outcomes) of dyadic coping. This was, therefore, aim of the current project.

1. Methodology and methods

1.1. Methodology

Using an interpretive paradigm, this study was informed by our relativist ontology and constructionist epistemological perspectives (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). We were, therefore, actively involved in the construction of the findings presented in this manuscript. The exploration of coaches' and athletes' experiences provides an opportunity to explore how individuals in close working relationships form meaning and understanding through their social worlds. The findings are a construction of the interaction between the researchers and the coach-athlete dyads (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and, therefore, capture *one* interpretation of antecedents and outcomes of dyadic coping. Readers are encouraged to interpret the findings in ways that are meaningful to them and to explore alternative interpretations to those that are presented here.

1.2. Interviewees

Six coaches ($M_{\text{age}} = 41.88$, $SD = 14.45$) and six athletes ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.06$, $SD = 2.97$) volunteered to take part in this study. These individuals made up six independent dyads: three male coach and athlete dyads, two male coach and female athlete dyads, and one female coach and male athlete dyad. Multiple cases were used to facilitate breadth of understanding relating to antecedents and outcomes of dyadic coping (see Schwandt, 1997). Criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to recruit dyads from individual sports (track and field, $n = 3$; squash, $n = 1$; triathlon, $n = 1$; swimming, $n = 1$). Individual sports were targeted due to the relevance of this context to the focus of our study. To expand briefly, Rhind, Jowett, and Yang (2012) suggested that athletes who compete in individual sports perceived their coach-athlete relationships to be closer and more committed than athletes who compete in team sports. Closeness and commitment to a relationship has been shown in other non-sport contexts (e.g., marital relationships) to be important for dyadic coping (e.g., Bodenmann et al., 2006) and, thus, focusing on individual sports allowed us to target individuals who could co-construct knowledge that was relevant to the aim of this study. Despite the fact that the coach-athlete dyads in this study worked in individual sports, four of the coaches reported that they worked with numerous athletes (i.e., they were not solely employed to work with the athlete that was interviewed for this study). Based on previous coping literature (Olusoga et al., 2010), the inclusion criteria for this study were (a) the coach was working with an athlete who was competing at University level or above at the time of the study, (b) the coach held a minimum of a level three coaching qualification from his or her appropriate governing body, (c) the coach and the athlete had been working together for at least one season at the time of the study, and (d) the coach and the athlete were working together on a weekly basis.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5036442>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5036442>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)