



## The relationship between observed and perceived assessments of the coach-created motivational environment and links to athlete motivation



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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** The majority of research examining the relationship between the coach-created motivational and athlete motivation has relied on self-report measures. Grounded in Duda's (2013) theoretically integrated model, the present study examined: (1) athletes', coaches' and observers' reports of the multidimensional motivational coaching environment in four European countries, (2) the interrelationships of these different perspectives of the motivational environment, and (3) links between the multidimensional environment and athletes' autonomous, controlled and amotivation.

**Design:** We employed a cross-sectional study design and utilized mixed methods to tap the variables of interest. Both descriptive and more sophisticated multi-level statistical analyses were employed to test our hypotheses.

**Methods:** Seventy-four grassroots soccer coaches and 882 youth athletes from England, France, Greece and Spain were recruited. Coaches were video-recorded during a training session and observers rated the degree to which the coaching climate was autonomy supportive, controlling, task-involving, ego-involving and relatedness supportive. Athletes and coaches completed questionnaires assessing their perceptions of the coach created climate in relation to the aforementioned dimensions of the environment. Athletes also completed measure of their sport-based motivation regulations.

**Results:** A profile of the motivational environment and athlete motivation was presented across four countries. There were weak associations found between different perspectives of the multidimensional coaching environment. However, athletes', coaches' and observers' reports of features of the motivational environment emerged as significant predictors of athletes' autonomous, controlled and amotivation.

**Conclusions:** Results provide partial support for findings of previous studies examining athlete motivation correlates of the motivational environment relying solely on self-report measures. Findings also point to the value of adopting a mixed-methodological approach and including athletes', coaches' and observers' reports of the environment when time and resources allow.

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The coach-created motivational environment has been found to be a key determinant of a variety of cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2008; 2012; Duda

& Balaguer, 2007). These outcomes include the extent to which athletes are motivated for autonomous and controlled reasons (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007), enjoy their participation (Boixados, Cruz, Torregrosa, & Valiente, 2004) and hold intentions to continue taking part in sport (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Briere, 2001).

Two popular theories of motivation, namely achievement goal

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theory (AGT; Nicholls, 1989) and self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), place importance on the social psychological environment created by significant others (such as the coach) for the quality of athletes' sport experiences. To date, much of our understanding of the coaching environment drawing from these two theoretical perspectives has been based on research utilizing athletes' self-reported views regarding the characteristics of the environment created. It has been repeatedly suggested that coaches' own perceptions and independent observers' ratings should also be considered when assessing the coach-created environment (Duda, 2001; Duda & Balaguer, 2007). In past work, studies have assessed the coach-created motivational environment from different perspectives. This has included ratings made by independent observers (Tessier et al., 2013), coaches' own perceptions (Stebbins, Taylor, & Spray, 2011) and, most often, athletes' views regarding the features of the environment manifested on their team (Adie et al., 2008; Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004). However, these studies have typically considered only one methodological approach in isolation. Triangulating assessments of the motivational environment and collecting parallel data from coaches' and athletes', as well as independent observers, should provide a more comprehensive assessment of the environment (Duda, 2001; Ntoumanis, 2012). In addition, when determining the concomitants of the coach-created environment, researchers have suggested that using alternative methodologies (such as external observations) enables a more conservative test of relationships between theoretically-based dimensions of that environment and athlete responses, such as motivation, thereby avoiding issues related to common method variance (De Meyer et al., 2013). Ultimately, this multi-method approach can help identify where there is a shared understanding (between athletes and their coaches) and more or less accurate perspectives of the prevailing motivational environment and be used to inform decisions on where to focus any future intervention efforts (i.e., whether to target the coach and/or athlete; Ntoumanis, 2012). To date, the majority of research on the coach-created motivational climate has drawn from AGT and/or SDT.

## 1. Coach-created motivational environment

### 1.1. Achievement goal theory

Research grounded in AGT has highlighted two key dimensions of the coach-created motivational climate that are expected to influence how athletes define and construe competence within the sport setting, namely a task- and ego-involving motivational climate (Duda, 2001). When a coach is more task-involving, he/she emphasizes the importance of effort, self-improvement, cooperation and role importance. In contrast, a strongly ego-involving motivational climate is fostered when a coach emphasizes the importance of superiority, outperforming others, rivalry within the team and punishes mistakes (Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000). A considerable body of research has highlighted the adaptive and maladaptive implications of task- and ego-involving motivational climates, respectively (see Duda & Balaguer, 2007 for a review).

### 1.2. Self-determination theory

Grounded in the SDT framework, research has identified six dimensions of the social environment that are expected to influence the quality of an athletes' motivation, namely the extent to which the environment is autonomy supportive and controlling, relatedness supportive and relatedness thwarting, and marked by structure and chaos. Autonomy support is characterized by a coach encouraging athletes to take control over their participation and

behaviours nurturing athletes' interests and preferences. A relatedness supportive environment fosters a sense of belonging and encourages trust and respect while structure relates to the information, organization and guidance given by the coach (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Controlling motivational environments coerce athletes and pressure them to behave in ways reflective of the coaches' own interests and values. Relatedness thwarting environments are harsh, cold and critical, while chaotic environments are ambiguous, unclear and lack direction (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010; Van den Berghe et al., 2013). A number of studies in sport and PE have highlighted the adaptive implications of autonomy supportive, relatedness support and structured environments (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Curran, Hill, & Niemiec, 2013; Reinboth et al., 2004). In contrast, controlling environments have been linked to more maladaptive responses (Bartholomew et al., 2010).

## 2. An integrated assessment of the motivational environment

Past research has pulled from AGT and SDT and considered multiple dimensions of the coach-created motivational environment. For example, Reinboth et al. (2004) found autonomy supportive, task-involving and socially supportive features of the coaching environment to be positively associated with the satisfaction of athletes' autonomy, competence and relatedness need satisfaction, respectively. More recently, Quested and Duda (2010) found that autonomy supportive, task-involving and ego-involving features of the teaching environment accounted for unique variance in dancers' motivational responses in the form of psychological need satisfaction. As a result of these findings, Quested and Duda (2010) highlighted the value of concurrently examining dimensions of the coaching environment from both AGT and SDT perspectives. Although environment dimensions such as autonomy supportive and task-involving coaching are related (Reinboth et al., 2004), these also hold unique information regarding athletes' motivation. For instance, autonomy support, although often associated with all three psychological needs (Adie et al., 2008; 2012) is a key determinant of athletes' autonomy need satisfaction. Likewise, the task-involving dimension of the environment is expected to hold key information regarding athletes' perceptions of competence, while also being associated with the autonomy and relatedness (Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002). Based on the tenets of AGT and SDT and a plethora of research studies, Duda (2013) conceptualized environments that are autonomy supportive, task-involving and relatedness supportive, and promote higher quality forms of motivation as *empowering*. In contrast, environments marked by controlling, ego-involving and relatedness compromising features, and promote lower quality forms of motivation are considered *disempowering*. Given that researchers have often discussed the links between AGT and SDT (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Ntoumanis, 2012), the recent conceptualisation by Duda (2013) is timely and provides a theoretical basis to study further the multidimensional motivational coaching environment in sport settings. Nevertheless, despite this recent development further research is needed to better understand the relationship between and relative importance of the broad dimensions of the environment emphasised within Duda's conceptualisation of the motivational environment.

## 3. Relationship between athlete, coach and observers' reports of the environment

In previous studies researchers have examined the associations between coaches', athletes' and observers' reports on discrete coaching behaviours using the Coaching Behaviour Assessment

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