



The relationship between psychological well- and ill-being, and perceived autonomy supportive and controlling interpersonal styles: A longitudinal study of sport coaches



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 June 2014

Received in revised form

15 February 2015

Accepted 17 February 2015

Available online 6 March 2015

Keywords:

Sport

Coaching

Self-determination theory

Hedonia

Eudaimonia

Interpersonal behavior

ABSTRACT

The present study longitudinally explored sports coaches' psychological well-being (positive affect and integration of coaching with one's sense of self) and ill-being (negative affect and devaluation of coaching) as predictors of their perceived autonomy supportive and controlling interpersonal styles towards individuals under their instruction. Participants were 195 sport coaches who completed questionnaire measures at three time points across an eleven-month period. Controlling for social desirability, multilevel analyses revealed that within-person increases and individual differences in positive affect and integration were positively associated with autonomy support. Conversely, within-person increases and individual differences in negative affect, but not devaluation, were associated with increased use of interpersonal control. The indicators of well-being did not predict interpersonal control and the indicators of ill-being did not predict autonomy support. In their entirety, the present findings suggest that autonomy supportive and controlling interpersonal styles have unique correlates, and affective determinants may play a particularly central role in controlling interpersonal styles. Supporting the psychological health of coaches may lead them to create an adaptive interpersonal environment for their athletes.

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Considerable research has attempted to identify the components of psychological well-being and pinpoint its antecedents within a range of life domains, including education, parenting, sport, and physical activity (e.g., Diener, 2000; Quested & Duda, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff et al., 2006; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2005). This research agenda has, however, typically regarded psychological well-being as the end product, while less attention has been given to potential outcomes of this optimal state. In the current study we adopted the self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) framework in order to examine whether indices of psychological well- and ill-being reported by sports coaches were related to their perceived autonomy supportive and controlling interpersonal styles towards athletes under their instruction. The coaching domain is one in which these research questions are particularly salient because the benefits for athletes of receiving autonomy support are manifold (see Amorose,

2007; for a review), yet controlling coaching styles remain evident (e.g., Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). In addition, psychological ill-being in various forms is particularly prevalent in sport coaches; for example, negative affect (Stebbins, Taylor, Spray, & Ntoumanis, 2012), burnout (Goodger, Gorely, Lavellee, & Harwood, 2007), stress (Olusoga, Butt, Hays, & Maynard, 2009), and dissatisfaction (Dixon & Warner, 2010) have been reported by coaches. It is important, therefore, to assess the potential effects this may have on interpersonal interactions.

The SDT perspective on interpersonal styles

The investigation of coaches' behavior towards athletes has attracted considerable research attention. Within SDT, primary attention has been given to autonomy supportive and controlling interpersonal styles (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Coaches create an autonomy supportive environment when they facilitate athletes' sense of volition and causality by acknowledging their feelings and perspectives, highlighting the value of an activity, and demonstrating confidence in their abilities. Observational research conducted in educational settings has also demonstrated an autonomy

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supportive style to include praising improvement and mastery, encouraging effort, and responding positively to questions (Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999; Reeve & Jang, 2006). Conversely, behaviors characteristic of a controlling interpersonal style include seeking compliance, withdrawal of time and attention, coercion, criticism, punishment, task-contingent rewards, and the provision of feedback to manipulate subordinates' thoughts and behaviors (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2009; Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004). Previous research has pointed towards the independence of autonomy support and control in light of small negative associations between the constructs, and their distinct psychological correlates (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Briere, 2001; Silk, Morris, Kanaya, & Steinberg, 2003).

Considerable research has demonstrated the advantages of coach autonomy support (e.g., Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012; Gagné, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003; Qusted & Duda, 2011) and the deleterious effects of coaches' controlling strategies on their athletes (e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2011). This evidence implies that an autonomy supportive style should be promoted, whereas a controlling style should be discouraged. This literature, however, has typically considered the athletes as the central group of interest, and only assessed athlete-based variables (i.e., athlete perceptions of coach behavior, and athletes' well-/ill-being). Research has been less forthcoming that addresses coach-related factors as reasons why coaches engage in these contrasting interpersonal styles. There are many plausible factors, such as the coach's personal orientation, the coaching context, and athletes' behaviors and motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Whilst these variables have received some research consideration, one other likely correlate is the coaches' psychological health.

Psychological well-being and ill-being

Numerous operationalizations of psychological health exist, yet considerable attention has been focused upon two key perspectives; the hedonic approach and the eudaimonic approach (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic tradition of well-being focuses on the attainment of happiness, and seeks to understand "what makes experience and life pleasant and unpleasant" (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999, p. ix). Consistent with this standpoint, early research (e.g., Andrews & Withey, 1976; Bradburn, 1969) conceptualized psychological well-being as a range of positive emotional experiences or moods (e.g., happiness, pleasure, interest, enthusiasm and inspiration); collectively termed positive affect (Diener, 2000). On the other hand, psychological ill-being is acknowledged as a separate, independent dimension of psychological functioning (Ryff et al., 2006; Watson, Tellegen, & Clark, 1988), often associated with discrete predictors than that of well-being (Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2008; Bartholomew et al., 2011; Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002). From the hedonic tradition, psychological ill-being is reflected, not in the absence of positive affect, but in the overt experience of negative affect, such as distress, nervousness, anger, and aversion (Watson et al., 1988).

Despite the value of assessing well-being in terms of pleasure and happiness, this hedonic standpoint has been criticized as being limited in scope. From Greek philosophers to modern psychological theorists, many contend that human psychological well-being encompasses more than the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Rather, the eudaimonic approach is concerned with human growth and actualization of potential. In order for individuals to experience eudaimonia, they must engage in activities that are personally expressive and congruent with their true sense of self (Waterman, 1993). In

contrast to this integrated functioning, the concept of devaluation represents a sense of detachment from an activity (Raedeke, 1997). Researchers have differentiated between this eudaimonic perspective and hedonic components of well-being in their discussions on psychological health (e.g., Mack et al., 2011; Gunnell, Crocker, Mack, Wilson, & Zumbo, 2014). As such, positive affect and integrated functioning are indicative of healthy psychological experience, whereas, negative affect, and devaluation of an activity are representative of psychological malfunction (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Psychological well- and ill-being and interpersonal styles

In a recent cross-sectional study, Stebbings et al. (2012) reported that sports coaches' psychological well-being was significantly associated with the provision of autonomy support towards their athletes, whereas coaches' psychological ill-being was associated with their use of controlling interpersonal behaviors. These authors, however, operationalized psychological well- and ill-being as composite factors inclusive of a range of hedonic and eudaimonic indicators, including positive affect, subjective vitality, negative affect and emotional and physical exhaustion. As such, the present study is the first to examine the relative contributions of the different components of well- and ill-being and offer insight into the most important psychological correlates of perceived interpersonal behavior. No previous research has undertaken this task; however, indirect evidence suggests relations among different elements of well-being and interpersonal behavior. For instance, a positive affective state (i.e., hedonic well-being) has been associated with helping and altruism, persuasive communication, and negotiating. In addition, people in a positive mood may be more likely to be empathic towards others. On the other hand, individuals in a negative mood have been rated by others as more defensive, critical, and less friendly and cooperative (see Forgas, 2002; for a review).

There is a scarcity of research examining the relationship between eudaimonic integrated functioning and interpersonal behavior. Research in the educational domain has, however, linked teachers' self-determined and internalized motivations, as well as their degree of engagement with their role, with their use of adaptive interpersonal teaching and leadership strategies (Klussman, Kunter, Trautwein, Lüdtke, & Baumert, 2008; Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Taylor, Ntoumanis, & Standage, 2008; Trepanier, Fernet, & Austin, 2012). For example, Trepanier et al. (2012) reported a link between school principals' autonomous motivation for work and their adaptive transformational leadership style. In addition, Taylor et al. (2008) speculated that autonomy supportive teaching strategies require one to invest personal effort into teaching and are, therefore, more likely if teaching is personally expressive and integrated into the essence of one's self.

Indicators of eudaimonic ill-being have similarly been associated with poor quality interpersonal behavior. For example, research has indicated that when teachers experience pressure to comply with set curricula and colleagues' teaching methods, and are evaluated based on student performance standards, they become less-self-determined in their work, and adopt a more controlling interpersonal style with students (e.g., Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner, & Kauffman, 1982; Pelletier, Séguin-Lévesque, & Legault, 2002). In addition, teachers' and sports coaches suffering with symptoms of burnout have been associated with the use of psychological controlling and autocratic instructional strategies (Soenens, Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Dochy, & Goossens, 2012; Vealey, Armstrong, Comar, & Greenleaf, 1998).

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