

Predicting young athletes' motivational indices as a function of their perceptions of the coach- and peer-created climate

Spiridoula Vazou, Nikos Ntoumanis*, Joan L. Duda

School of Sport & Exercise Sciences, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to examine the additive and interactive influence of perceptions of the coach- and peer-created motivational climates (MC) on affective (physical self-worth, enjoyment, trait anxiety) and behavioral (exerted effort as rated by the coach) responses of young athletes. Age and gender differences in athletes' views regarding these psychological environments were also examined.

Design: Cross-sectional; participants responded to a number of questionnaires assessing peer and coach motivational climate, and affective and behavioral responses in youth sport.

Methods: Participants were 493 young athletes, age 12–17 years (M age = 14.08; SD = 1.29), from various individual and team sports.

Results: Hierarchical regression analyses, controlling for age and gender, showed that a perceived task-involving peer MC was the only predictor of physical self-worth. A perceived ego-involving coach climate emerged as the only predictor of trait anxiety. Enjoyment was predicted positively by both coach and peer task-involving MCs, whereas reported effort was predicted only by the coach task-involving MC. A 2-way MANOVA revealed that perceptions of ego-involving coach and peer MCs were higher among males, whereas females reported higher perceptions of task-involving coach and peer MCs, whereas no age differences were identified. A significant age–gender interaction effect on the peer ego-involving MC emerged.

Conclusions: The findings provide evidence for the importance of peer-created MC in youth sport and suggest that both coach and peer influence should be considered in future research on young athletes' self perceptions and motivation-related responses in sport.

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Keywords: Motivational climate; Physical self-worth; Enjoyment; Anxiety; Effort; Youth sport

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 121 4147981; fax: +44 121 4144121.

E-mail address: n.ntoumanis@bham.ac.uk (N. Ntoumanis).

Youth sport involves the participation of children and adolescents in activities organized and/or supervised by adults. However, it is important that the potential influence of peers is not neglected when we consider determinants of the quality of young athletes' sport engagement. Pointing to the salience of peer influence, the peak years of sport involvement for young athletes coincide with the developmentally dependent tendency for youngsters to rely on peer informational sources in assessing personal competence (Horn & Weiss, 1991). Moreover, the participation motivation research clearly indicates that affiliation with teammates and the development of positive social relations with peers are major motives underlying children's and adolescents' interest in sport and the quality of their experiences while engaged (Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989).

It is surprising, therefore, that only recently has greater research recognition been given to peers as essential contributors, along with adults (e.g. parents, the coach and the physical education [PE] teacher) to the overall social psychological environment manifested in youth sport. Such recognition has resulted in an increased scholarly interest in peer relationships within physical activity contexts (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001; Brustad & Partidge, 2002; Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999; Smith, 2003). Topics such as the development of social competence (and its link to perceived athletic competence), peer acceptance, and friendship quality are some of the areas that have attracted attention in the contemporary youth sport psychology literature (Brustad & Partidge, 2002; Smith, 2003). Despite the recent work on peer influence in youth sport, there is a scarcity of research on peer-held criteria for success and failure and the way these criteria are communicated and affect children's achievement motivation in sport.

A viable theoretical framework that can help foster understanding of the social psychological determinants of children's motivation in sport is achievement goal theory. According to this social-cognitive framework (Ames, 1992; Duda & Hall, 2001; Nicholls, 1989), in order to understand the motivation of young athletes, it is necessary to study the function and the meaning of their goal-directed actions. Such actions focus on the demonstration of competence and the avoidance of showing incompetence (Nicholls, 1989). It is assumed that individuals can evaluate their competence in two different ways, and these divergent conceptions of ability are assumed to be tied intimately to two different achievement goal orientations. The first goal orientation, namely task orientation, is evident when perceptions of competence are self-referenced and primarily based upon personal improvement and exerting maximum effort. The second goal orientation, namely ego orientation, is evident when competence is normatively referenced and inferred by demonstrating superior ability and outperforming others (Nicholls, 1989). A plethora of studies has demonstrated that high task orientation, compared to high ego orientation, relates to more positive outcomes in youth sport (for reviews, see Duda, 2001; Duda & Hall, 2001; Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005).

In addition to dispositional achievement goals, social situational factors are assumed to play a substantial role in the activation and direction of children's achievement behavior (Ames, 1992). The term motivational climate refers to perceptions of situational cues and expectations that encourage the development of particular goal orientations, and at a given point in time, induce a certain goal involvement state. It is assumed that variations in achievement behavior can be explained by the interplay of individuals' achievement goals and the motivational climate created by significant others (Ames, 1992; Treasure & Roberts, 1998).

Two types of motivational climate have been proposed by Ames (1992): A task-involving (or mastery) motivational climate that encourages effort and rewards task mastery and individual improvement, and an ego-involving (or performance) motivational climate that fosters social comparison and emphasizes normative ability. More specifically, in a task-involving motivational

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