

The Influence of Perception on Student-Athletes' Motivation and Relationship with Coaches — Student-Athlete's Perception

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The present study was created to better understand the influence of coaches on student-athlete's motivation. The goal of this study was to determine how the student-athlete's motivation level is affected by the type of relationship between the coach and the student-athlete in comparison to non-athletes. The hypothesis is that athlete status (student-athlete or non-athlete) impacts perceived motivation when faced with a particular coach ("supportive" or "non-supportive"). The approach was to conduct a two-group experiment providing participants with two different scenarios. One of two scenarios was presented to manipulate the perception of a coach. Forty participants participated in this study. The recruited participants were either student-athletes or non-athletes. All participants were recruited from a Historically Black Institution: 58% were male, 42% female. The results indicate that the type of coach will differently impact a student-athlete's motivation than a non-athlete. More specifically, both student-athletes and non-athletes perceive a "supportive" coach to be more supportive; however student-athletes perceive "non-supportive" coaches to be less encouraging than non-athletes. The findings from this study suggest that student-athletes and non-athletes perceive a non-supportive coach differently.

Keywords: student-athlete, motivation, non-athlete, coach, perception

La présente étude a été conçue pour mieux comprendre l'influence des entraîneurs sur la motivation des étudiants-athlètes. Le but de cette étude était de déterminer comment le niveau de motivation de l'étudiant-athlète est affecté par le type de relation entre l'entraîneur et l'étudiant-athlète, en comparaison aux non-athlètes. L'hypothèse est que le statut d'athlète (étudiant-athlète ou non-athlète) influence la motivation perçue en présence d'un type d'entraîneur particulier (« soutenant » ou « non-soutenant »). L'approche consistait à mener une expérience en deux groupes fournissant aux participants deux scénarios différents. L'un des deux scénarios était présenté dans le but de manipuler la perception de l'entraîneur. Quarante participants ont participé à cette étude. Les participants recrutés étaient des étudiants-athlètes ou des non-athlètes. Tous les participants ont été recrutés dans une institution historiquement noire : 58% étaient des hommes, 42% des femmes. Les résultats indiquent que le type d'entraîneur aura une incidence différente sur la motivation d'un étudiant-athlète qu'un non-athlète. Plus précisément, les étudiants-athlètes et les non-athlètes perçoivent un entraîneur « soutenant » comme étant plus encourageant. Cependant, les étudiants-athlètes estiment, comparativement aux non-athlètes, que les entraîneurs « non-soutenants » sont moins encourageants. Les résultats de cette étude suggèrent que les étudiants-athlètes et les non-athlètes perçoivent un entraîneur « non-soutenant » différemment.

Mots-clés : étudiant-athlète, motivation, non-athlète, entraîneur, perception

Many individuals tend to focus on how positive a student-athlete's competitive experience can be, without acknowledging the difficulties that may occur, such as long practices, losing games, and overcoming an injury. The reason student-athletes are apt to enjoying challenges that push them to their limits is because they are highly motivated individuals. However, research shows that the level of motivation of student-athletes is potentially influenced by many external factors, such as their relationship with the coach. These same factors may not impact the motivation of non-athletes in the same way, as they are inherently less motivated to play sports.

The present study will expand on the student-athlete's perception of their coach and how it influences their motivation. The goal of this study is to determine how the athletic status of a student, whether they are student-athletes or non-athletes, will impact the perceived motivation to play after being presented with either a supportive or unsupportive coach.

Motivation

There are two major factors that can make a student-athlete successful. These factors are motivation and the relationship of the student-athlete with the coach. In the present article, we first focus on motivation. In general, most student-athletes who tend to be successful are at least somewhat intrinsically motivated. According to Ryan and Deci (2000),

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intrinsic motivation is defined as engaging in an activity for the enjoyment rather than for outside motivation, outcomes, or rewards. Furthermore, research has shown that many individuals who are student-athletes experience intrinsic motivation (Adie & Jowett, 2010). In other words, student-athletes are self-motivated, leading to a higher likelihood to participate in sports because of their passion for the sport rather than the rewards that are associated to it.

Additionally, previous research has looked into the hierarchy of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to Vallerand (2007), both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations differ depending on factors that affect the student-athlete. To understand how these factors impact an individual, one must understand the characteristics that make up intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. For example, athletes that take on a new sport usually display intrinsic motivation because they enjoy learning new skills. Additionally, if an individual is more intrinsically motivated, he is more likely to connect with his desire. In the case of an athlete, he would be more motivated to achieve a set goal. According to Vallerand (2007), athletes that are extrinsically motivated are more likely to participate in a sport because of an outside influence, not because of their passion for the game. Moreover, extrinsic motivation is driven by contextual factors such as rewards and negative incentives such as fear and anxiety. External relationships such as coaches can impact student-athletes, therefore impacting their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Relationships with Coaches

According to Heird and Steinfeldt (2013), many student-athletes can build close relationships with coaches and teammates in a short amount of time. Jowett, O'Broin, and Palmer (2010) argue that the coach-athlete relationship is a bond that influences the mental, physical, and emotional reaction of student-athletes to a coach's behavior. The coach-athlete relationship can also have an effect on the expectancies that have been determined by the student-athlete. These are based on the coach's behavioral response to how the student-athlete acts on a day to day basis (Manley, Greenlees, Smith, Batten, & Birch, 2014). It has been noted that many student-athletes have experienced both positive and negative interactions with their coaches. When examining the coach-athlete relationship, one must understand the effects that both the coaching style and the student-athletes' interpretation of that style have on the dyad.

Sagar and Jowett (2012) stated that when looking at coaching styles, there are five important behaviours that depict coaching styles: 1) democratic style, where a coach requests more interaction and participation from student-athletes when it comes to making

decisions during games; 2) autocratic style, in which a coach tries to display a level of power over student-athletes; 3) training and instruction style, where a coach demonstrates more actions that focus on knowledge and skill levels of the particular sport; 4) positive feedback style, in which a coach focuses more on making sure the student-athlete understands the gratitude that the coach has for them and for the effort/participation that they are bringing to a practice or a game; 5) social support style, where the coach looks at the personal needs of a player to make them a better player. Knowledge of these styles is important because they define the different techniques that are identified in most coaches. It also impacts the perception of student-athletes about the coach and hence their motivation.

In general, student-athletes that have encouraging and inspirational coaches that display training and instruction, positive feedback, and social supportive styles have higher performance and learning levels than student-athletes playing for coaches practicing democratic and autocratic styles (Sagar & Jowett, 2012). Furthermore, Sagar and Jowett (2012) found that coaches who tend to display more degrading actions such as ignoring or shouting tend to leave a negative impression, resulting in an ineffective interaction with the student-athlete. Their research also suggests that coaches who lack good communication skills have a negative effect on a student-athlete's perception of a coach (Sagar & Jowett, 2012). Thus, both negative and positive behaviours that are demonstrated by a coach can change how a student-athlete perceives them. From a student-athlete's viewpoint, some of the behaviours that a coach displays could come off as negative which can negatively affect the student-athlete's motivation and the performance.

The coach-athlete relationship can have either a positive or negative effect on a student-athlete. Sometimes when student-athletes face challenges, a coach's overall demeanor can play a role in the player's performance and student-athlete's motivation. Previous research has found that dominant behaviours such as yelling, manipulation, and assertive communication, displayed by authoritative figures decrease the student-athlete's level of self-determination, leaving to a decrease in intrinsic motivation (Sagar & Jowett, 2012). In comparison, coaches who are less controlling increase the student-athletes' intrinsic motivation and improve one's attitude on self-determination. For example, Amorose and Horn's (2001) research shows that athletes who perceive their coaches to be more authoritative tend to report lower levels of intrinsic motivation and higher levels of external regulation. Clearly, coaches can strongly impact student-athletes' motivation.

While much research has been conducted to thoroughly understand motivation and the coach-athlete relationship, the present study focuses on further understanding whether student-athletes are different from the general student population in relation to their motivation to play. This study will be assessing how differences in motivation emerge between student-athletes and non-athletes after reading a scenario in which the coach is supportive or another scenario with a non-supportive coach. The main hypothesis for this study is that athlete status (student-athlete vs. non-athlete) will moderate the relationship between the type of coach (supportive vs. non-supportive) and athletes' motivation. More specifically, student-athletes are predicted to have lower motivation with a non-supportive coach as compared to non-athletes. This is best explained by student-athletes feeling more self-efficacious with their identity within their social group (i.e., student-athlete). Overall, the results in this study can provide information related to further understanding student-athletes' motivation. Furthermore, this study will help distinguish the different perceptions that are demonstrated by both student-athletes and non-athletes in relation to their motivation to play. Student-athletes and non-athletes may not perceive a coach the same way which can impact their perceived motivation to play. This study may contribute to the literature by providing new information in regards to the influence of coaches on student-athletes.

Method

Participants

Forty participants from Winston-Salem State University, a historically black university, participated in the study. Most of the participants were college-aged ($M = 20.50$, $SD = 1.55$). In this study, the participants were fairly distributed in terms of gender, with male 58% and 42% female. When looking at the race, the majority of the participants were Black (75%), then Hispanic (15%), and Biracial and Multiracial (10%). Lastly, out of the 40 participants, 15 were collegiate student-athletes (demographic question was asked by the experimenter about their participation in sports at the institution while debriefing).

Procedure and Measures

The experiment involved presenting one of two scenarios to participants where the independent variable was manipulated (supportive coach manipulation and non-supportive coach manipulation). The dependent variable was the perceived motivation.

Participants were randomly assigned to either the "supportive" coach group or the "non-supportive"

coach group prior to recruitment. The experimenter introduced the participants to the general subject of the study. The experimenter then explained the consent form and had the participants sign their name. Then the participants were given separate scenarios depending on the assigned group. For the "supportive" coach group, the scenario presented Taylor as the head coach of an athletic sports team. Taylor's coaching style was presented as instructive and his personality as supportive and understanding. For the "non-supportive" coach group, the scenario presented Taylor's coaching style as hard and firm. The coach's personality was described as being detached and cold-hearted. In both scenarios, Taylor's players are hardworking and great students. After reading the scenario aloud to the participant, the experimenter asked five questions and participants answered on a seven point scale, 1 being 'not at all' and 7 being 'very much'. The questions asked were: "How nice is Taylor?" "How mean is Taylor?", "How motivated are the athletes to play for Taylor?", "How supportive is Taylor?", "How encouraging is Taylor?". The first two questions were manipulation check questions and the last three were the dependent variable questions (i.e., motivation). After writing-down the responses for each question, the experimenter asked them three demographic questions focusing on age, sex, and race.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Two independent *t*-tests were conducted to examine if the experimental manipulation had an effect on the two manipulation check questions. First, the individuals in the supportive coach group ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.38$) reported that the coach was significantly nicer than the people in the non-supportive coach group, ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.83$), $t(38) = 5.35$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.66$. Second, the individuals in the non-supportive coach group ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.72$) reported that the coach was significantly nicer than the people in the supportive coach group ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.35$), $t(38) = 5.80$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$. An effective manipulation is evident from these statistics conveying that our scenarios portrayed differently and as expected the assigned coach.

Primary Analysis

The level of activity (student-athlete vs. non-athlete) is predicted to moderate the relation between the type of coach (supportive vs. non-supportive) and students' motivation. A 2 x 2 (student-athlete versus non-athlete * supportive versus non-supportive coach) ANOVA was conducted to test whether student-athletes reacted differently to a supportive versus unsupportive coach. Results show that there is a significant interaction between the participants'

athletic status and the type of coach they read about, $t(1, 36) = 6.76, p = .013$.

Student-athletes ($M = 6.50, SD = 0.75$) in the supportive coach group reported being more motivated by Taylor than the non-student-athletes ($M = 6.25, SD = 0.75$), but this difference is not significant, $t(18) = 0.73, p = .477, d = 0.17$. Student-athletes ($M = 2.86, SD = 1.35$) in the non-supportive coach group reported being significantly less motivated by Taylor than the non-athletes ($M = 4.62, SD = 1.56$), $t(18) = -2.52, p = .021, d = 0.510$. This finding is mainly due to the student-athletes who read about a non-supportive coach.

Discussion

The overall goal of this study was to determine whether student-athletes and non-athletes (athlete status) will differ in the perceived motivation to play based on the type of coach. There is some evidence to support the hypothesis – the athlete status (student-athlete vs. non-athlete) moderated the relationship between the type of coach (supportive vs. non-supportive) and students' motivation (as measured by the question "How encouraging is Taylor?"). The results in this study reveal that there is a significant difference in how student-athletes and non-athletes perceive a coach. Specifically, a significant difference was found in the non-supportive coach group when comparing how motivated students were to play for this coach.

The present results sustain the idea that student-athletes' motivation is not impacted in the same way by unsupportive coaches than non-athletes' motivation is. This suggests that either because of experience (i.e., injury or losing a game) or personal characteristics (a stronger intrinsic motivation), student-athletes are particularly attuned to unsupportive coaches. On a theoretical level, this means that intrinsic motivation can be influenced by behaviorism (Huber, 2013). Although Adie and Jowett (2010) suggested that student-athletes are more likely to have higher levels of intrinsic motivation, research also suggests that the coach-athlete relationship can impact several internal variables and expectancies (i.e., thoughts, behaviours, need for positive feedback, confidence, and athletic ability; Jackson, Grove, & Beauchamp, 2010; Manley, Greenless, Smith, Batten, & Birch, 2014). Behaviorism speaks to the notion of positive or negative reinforcement influencing one's motivation based on recurring patterns (Huber, 2013). The study presented in this article focuses on how the perception of a coach as non-supportive by student-athletes affects their motivation. Therefore, student-athletes that are constantly exposed to external reinforcement (i.e., setting goals) appear more likely to view the role of a negative coach more strongly

than non-athletes, probably because of their relationships with previous coaches. This study answers why student-athletes and non-athletes' motivation differs based on the perception of a coach. Ultimately, literature used throughout this article and results from this study suggest that there is a difference between student-athletes and non-athletes' perception of coaches and how it affects their motivation.

Strengths and Limitations

These findings are important because they examine perceived motivation based on a manipulated scenario. The results add evidence to present literature by offering the chance to examine the differences between student-athletes and non-athletes in how they react to different coaching styles. Furthermore, the demographics of participants in the present study are important because previous studies used male, white collegiate-athletes as participants whereas the participants in this study were fairly distributed in relation to gender and recruited participants identified as minority. Therefore, this study provides insight from underrepresented social groups inferring that the gathered information is vital to advancing the growing knowledge on athletic motivation and performance across different demographics. Moreover, this study found that student-athletes' motivation differ from non-athletes' motivation and hence it is likely that other differences between these groups exist such as differences between perceptions and behaviours. Other recognized differences between these two groups may include openness to experience, academic success, or outgoing and sociable personality.

However, there are a few limitations to this study. First, only one measure of motivation was significantly predicted by both types of coaches presented and the athlete status. It is possible that the results were not consistently found for all three measures of the dependent variable because the sample size recruited for this study was small. As such, future research should attempt to replicate these findings with a larger sample size. Additionally, the scenario did not state how long the athlete had been playing for the coach which could affect how the participants perceived the athletes' motivation to play. Therefore, the length of time that a student-athlete has played for a coach may affect how participants perceive the coach-athlete relationship in the scenario.

Future Directions

The strength of this study is that it compares student-athletes and non-athletes' perceived motivation in relation to the type of coach. Future studies could focus on understanding differences in motivation to play for a supportive or non-supportive

coach between underclassman and upperclassman student-athletes because student-athlete's motivational levels may differ based on the time that they have played at a competitive level. Additionally, future studies could also determine if there is a difference between a student-athletes' motivation when they are in-season and out-of-season. More specifically the coach-athlete relationship (and hence the student-athlete's motivation) could vary based on external variables (i.e., scheduling, academic success, playing time, pressure to win, etc.) that are present in and out of season. Lastly, researchers can replicate this study and assess if there is a difference between males and females' motivation to participate in a sport. Researchers should study this due to possible gender biases and stereotypes that are prevalent in today's society.

Ultimately, many people argue that athletes have a great impact on our society. As stated by Macri (2012), this is because today's society is impacted by the morals and ethics of our popular athletes. For example, success is correlated with the idea of "winning" which is linked to control and authority. The author went on to state that an individual's cognitive processes are affected when participating in a sport. Therefore, by understanding the origin of an athlete's motivation, society's view of an athlete may change. These findings provide future research with the opportunity to examine how social status affects student-athlete's mindset on how society views them.

In summary, there is no difference between how student-athletes and non-athletes perceive a supportive coach. However, there is a difference between how student-athletes and non-athletes perceive a non-supportive coach. Consequently, student-athletes are more likely to be less motivated by a non-supportive coach than non-athletes. This evidence provides psychologists with an opportunity to examine how student-athlete's perception of a coach may differ in comparison to society's perception. Ultimately, if a student-athlete's motivation is established, psychologists will be able to determine what separates a student-athlete's drive from their peers.

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