The Coach as a Contributor to the Socio-moral Context: A Literature Review*

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This purposeful review aimed at examining literature dealing with the role of the coach as a contributor to the socio-moral context. We carried out inductive analysis of the relevant literature through the constant comparison technique to synthesize the results of the reviewed studies and to gain insights into the characteristics of the studies. Thirty-four studies were included. Results suggest that coaches are main contributors to the socio-moral context and as such, they play an important role in their athletes’ moral development. The coach contributes to the athlete’s moral development through four main strategies: (1) modeling; (2) the creation of a socio-moral environment/context; (3) teaching moral skills and values; and (4) thorough discussion with the athletes about moral issues. In general, coaches promoted positive moral behaviour during training; however, sometimes, the coaches transmitted a different message to the athlete. A major implication of the purposeful review is that in order to fully assume their moral responsibilities, coaches have to be sensitized about the moral role they play and need to be aware of the impact their moral attitudes and behaviours have on the athletes.

Keywords: review, socialization, morality, coaching

Introduction

The psychosocial outcomes of sport participation can be positive or negative. As such, stories of doping (Rivet, 2010), match-fixing (Warshaw, 2012), and cheating (Ebner & Christie, 2012) frequently reported by the public.

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media coexist with research indicating that sport programs purposefully designed to foster participants’ positive moral development attain their goals (Ennis, Solmon, Satina, Loftus, Mensch, & McCauley, 1999; Gibbons & Ebbeck, 1997; Miller, Bredemeier, & Shields, 1997; Solomon, 1997). This evidence suggests that the way in which sport interventions are structured and implemented may enhance or hinder an athlete’s psychosocial development (Holt & Jones, 2008; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009).

Sport literature dealing with socializing agents identified the coach as a key player in structuring the socio-moral context (Amorose, 2007; Chelladurai, 2007; Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Horn, 2008), and therefore, contributing to the athletes’ moral development (Kavussanu, 2007, 2008; Shields & Bredemeier, 2007; Weiss, Smith, & Stuntz, 2008). Although understanding this relationship would have empirical and practical consequences, there are no peer-reviewed papers that have reviewed this topic in-depth.

**Conceptual Framework**

One recurring obstacle in designing reviews of morality is the lack of consensus in its definition (Shields & Bredemeier, 2007; Weiss & Smith, 2002; Weiss et al., 2008). To offer a rationale for the selection of studies, we present our conceptual framework that consists of a brief overview of morality and the theoretical approach we adopted.

“Morality” is the interwoven set of values, virtues, norms, and practices concerning justice, rights, and welfare that makes social life possible (Haidt, 2008) and has consequences for others’ rights and well-being (Turiel, 1983). The study of morality as a psychosocial phenomenon has been mainly presented as: (1) moral agency (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996); (2) moral reasoning (Tod & Hodge, 2002); (3) moral thought (Bandura, 1991); (4) moral action (Bandura, 1991); (5) moral behaviour (Sage & Kavussanu, 2007); and (6) moral development (Shields & Bredemeier, 2001). By accepting these conceptualizations, we found that there are sport studies that deal with similar issues, yet do not refer to morality but instead to sportsmanship, fair play, moral character, pro-social behaviour, life skills, and ethics.

“Sportsmanship” has been treated as a construct that reflects both the positive (e.g., respect) and negative (e.g., win-at-all-costs) sides of the relationships established in the sport context (e.g., Vallerand, Deshaies, Currier, Brière, & Pelletier, 1996). Similarly, “fair play” has been associated to the provision of equal chances and conditions for a game to all participants (Boixadós & Cruz, 1995; Boixadós, Cruz, Torregrosa, & Valiente, 2004). “Moral character” has been broadly described as entailing four virtues or values: compassion, fairness, sportsmanship, and integrity (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Instead, “pro-social behaviour” (e.g., helping another player off the floor) has been defined as voluntary behaviour intended to help or benefit another individual (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). The study of social and moral skills has been conducted within the boundaries of the “positive youth development” approach (e.g., R. M. Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & J. V. Lerner, 2005). This approach proposes that, under proper adult-supervised programmes, youth can learn social, emotional, behavioural, and moral skills, such as “respect” (e.g., Danish, Nellen, & Owens, 1996; Gould, Carson, Fifer, Lauer, & Benham, 2009). Finally, some studies have used the concept of “ethics” to refer to a system of moral principles (e.g., Bergmann-Drewe, 2000; Hardman, C. Jones, & R. Jones, 2010). In sum, morality is a broad concept that integrates under its umbrella different concepts that share commonalities.

We used the “relational being” approach (Gergen, 2009), a worldview grounded in social constructionism, to frame our review. This approach proposes that personal development is based on co-action, co-creation, and collaboration. As well as people’s lives are coordinated, the established relationships are co-built. Therefore, to
examine the coach’s contribution to the socio-moral context, we considered the relationship between a coach’s and his/her athletes’ moral attitudes and behaviours outcomes.

The Present Review

Although previous reviews have already discussed the role of the coach as a contributor to the socio-moral context (Kavussanu, 2007; Shields & Bredemeier, 2007; Weiss et al., 2008), the present review represents an advance in knowledge in three manners. First, we included novel research published since the last synthesis on the topic appeared; Second, as compared to previous narrative syntheses, we have been both inclusive and transparent concerning our inclusion and exclusion criteria; And third, in addition to presenting the relationship between coaches’ and athletes’ moral attitudes and behaviours, we provide questions and comments to better understand: (1) the evidence; and (2) the context, in which the reported studies were conducted. In sum, we aimed at contributing to the understanding of a topic that still requires attention (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004; Kavussanu, 2007).

Methods

Research Synthesis Design

We designed a “purposeful” review (Suri & Clarke, 2009). The main goals of such a review are to: (1) enhance the understanding in areas that have been previously referred to though not yet studied in-depth; (2) reflect the complexity and richness of the existing primary research; and (3) encourage the reader’s reflection by illuminating the essence of the phenomenon in question and the context through which it has been informed. A purposeful review is methodologically inclusive because it subscribes to the idea that different paradigms exist and can be used for complementary purposes. As noted by Gough (2007), these types of reviews consider the relevance of the evidence without focusing only on the validity of the studies.

Searching for Appropriate Evidence

We listed the following keywords to guide our search on morality: moral, character, sportsmanship, sportspersonship, sportsmanlike, unsportsmanlike, pro-social, antisocial, fair play, ethics, life skills, values, virtues AND coach, and AND sport. We used three data bases to search for relevant English literature: (1) ProQuest (PQDT); (2) PsycINFO (OVID); and (3) SportDISCUS (EBSCO). We selected publications written between January 1980 and December 2011, because we followed the trend depicted in previous synthesis of literature dealing with topics associated with sport and morality (Kavussanu, 2007, 2008; Shields & Bredemeier, 2001, 2007; Solomon, 2004; Weiss et al., 2008). While relying upon ProQuest (PQDT) could be considered as a limitation because thesis and dissertations have not undergone the peer review process. This decision allowed us to include ideas that have not yet been part of the peer reviewed literature. Thus, although we recommend caution in the consideration of this evidence, we believe it uncovers new and innovative perspectives.

Identifying Relevant Information

The computer search yielded 499 research studies in total. We first left out papers dealing with issues not related to morality (e.g., physiology). This step led us 117 studies. Based on our conceptual framework, we looked for studies in which the athletes’ moral outcomes resulting from the coach-athlete interaction were assessed. Thus, we left out studies in which: (1) sampled coaches and athletes were from different sport contexts ($n = 3$); (2) athletes’ perceptions of their coach’s moral attitudes and behaviours were assessed, but the athletes’ moral outcome was not measured ($n = 4$); (3) athletes’ moral outcome was assessed, but this evidence
was not related to the coach \((n = 12)\); (4) only coaches were sampled \((n = 24)\); and (5) the articles were non-empirical (e.g., discussion of philosophical stances) \((n = 21)\). In addition, 26 studies were removed because 24 were duplicated and two were published abstracts.

We conducted a manual search in the remaining 27 studies and those references that contributed to the understanding of the topic were included. This last part of the sampling procedure yielded seven additional studies. Thus, a total of 34 empirical studies were included in the present review.

**Data Analysis**

We conducted an inductive analysis of the results of the studies. We used the “constant comparison” technique (Glaser, 1965) which consists of comparing incident with incident. We defined incident as: (1) the results reported in the studies; and (2) the methodological characteristics of the studies that portrayed the context in which the studies were conducted.

**Results and Discussion**

Because the lack of a clear definition of morality is still a major constraint, in the presentation and discussion of the results, we globally referred to positive (e.g., respect) and negative (e.g., cheating) moral attitudes and behaviours; however, in Table 1, we reported the main results from each study respecting the authors’ wording.

**Table 1**

*Main Characteristics of Overviewed Studies Presented in Alphabetical Order in Relationship to the Theoretical Perspective Used to Frame the Study (\(n = 34\))*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Participants sampled</th>
<th>Variables assessed</th>
<th>Main results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buford-May (2001)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>Coaching philosophy and sportsmanship</td>
<td>Coaching philosophy emphasizing “winning-at-all-costs” influenced athletes’ understanding and enacting of sportsmanship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chow et al. (2009)</td>
<td>(N = 258) athletes (101 males, 157 females; age range = 12–19) and (N = ) 25 coaches</td>
<td>Judgments about moral behaviour and coaching efficacy</td>
<td>Coaches’ self-reported game strategy efficacy positively predicted athletes’ self-described likelihood to aggress ((\gamma_{06} = 0.10, t = 5.63, p &lt; 0.05))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goeb (1997)</td>
<td>(N = 366) athletes and (N = 56) coaches</td>
<td>Moral reasoning</td>
<td>Coaches and athletes reported similar levels of cognitive moral reasoning (justice, honesty, and responsibility) ((M\text{-}\text{difference} = 3.35; t = 2.75))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guivernau &amp; Duda (2002)</td>
<td>(N = 194) athletes (males (M\text{-}\text{age} = 15.41), females (M\text{-}\text{age} = 15.32))</td>
<td>Judgments about moral behaviour and team norm</td>
<td>Athletes were significantly morally influenced by their coaches (than by any other individual) ((M = 2.80, SD = 1.40, p &lt; 0.001) via (t)-test difference of means)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kavussanu, Roberts, &amp; Ntoumanis (2002)</td>
<td>(N = 199) athletes (56 males and 143 females; age range = 17–25, (M\text{-}\text{age} = 19.58, SD = 1.26))</td>
<td>Moral functioning, moral atmosphere, perceived motivational climate, and social desirability</td>
<td>The athletes’ perception of the moral atmosphere and the performance motivational climate predicted their moral functioning ((\chi^2 \text{diff} (4) = 1.28, p &lt; 0.05; \beta = 0.49) (for judgment), (\beta = 0.50) (for intention), (\beta = 0.37) (for behaviour))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kavussanu &amp; Spray (2006)</td>
<td>(N = 325) male athletes (age range = 12–17, (M\text{-}\text{age} = 14.58, SD = 1.68))</td>
<td>Moral functioning, moral atmosphere, perceived motivational climate</td>
<td>Athletes’ perception that the coach would encourage negative moral behaviour (e.g., “wind up an opponent”) was related to athletes’ moral: (1) judgment ((r = 0.69, p &lt; 0.05)); (2) intention ((r = 0.63, p &lt; 0.05)); and (3) behaviour ((r = 0.64, p &lt; 0.05))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long et al. (2006)</td>
<td>(N = 10) athletes ((M\text{-}\text{age} = 16.5, SD = 1.0))</td>
<td>Perceptions of rules in competitive sport situations</td>
<td>Athletes mentioned that coaches asked them to respect the rules; however, in some cases when performance results were needed, the coaches called for, allowed, or did not condemn negative moral behaviours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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(Table 1 continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural development theory</th>
<th>Perceived motivational climate, moral functioning, moral atmosphere, and perceived legitimacy of injurious acts</th>
<th>Athletes’ perception of a mastery motivational climate predicted: (1) more mature moral reasoning (boys: $r = 0.15, p &lt; 0.05$; girls: $r = 0.12, p &lt; 0.05$); and (2) a coach not approving negative moral behaviour ($r = -0.22, p &lt; 0.05$)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kavanagh (2003)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Athletes who perceived a high mastery motivational climate and a low performance motivational climate reported positive sportspersonship behaviours (e.g., respect for the conventions ($R = 0.64$)) and low coach encouragement of pro-aggressive norms ($R = -0.59$) (Wilks’ lambda = 0.79, $F_{(18,240)} = 3.44, p &lt; 0.05$)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephens &amp; Stephens (2000)</td>
<td>Verbal intelligence, social desirability, socio-moral reasoning, attitude toward fair play, relational support, and socio-moral team atmosphere, on- and off-field antisocial behaviours</td>
<td>Athletes’ positive perception of their coach’s relational support was related to on-field pro-social behaviour ($b = 0.22, t = 3.36, p &lt; 0.05$). Conversely, athletes’ perception of the coach’s fair play attitude was negatively related to on-field ($b = -0.22, t = 4.31, p &lt; 0.05$) and off-field moral behaviour ($b = -0.24, t = 5.30, p &lt; 0.05$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutten et al. (2008)</td>
<td>Social desirability, moral behaviour (antisocial and social), socio-moral reasoning, and coach-athlete relationship</td>
<td>Athletes’ perception of an enriched coach-athlete relationship quality was related to more mature levels of socio-moral reasoning ($r_{(258)} = 0.21, p &lt; 0.05$) and negatively associated with antisocial behavior, and positively associated with pro-social behavior ($r_{(258)} = 0.33, p &lt; 0.05$, and $r_{(258)} = 0.26, p &lt; 0.05$, respectively)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutten et al. (2007)</td>
<td>Sportsmanship and team norms</td>
<td>Self-reported unsportsmanship behaviours were best predicted by perceived coach’ sportsmanship behaviours and norms (along with other predictors) ($R^2 = 0.371$, $F_{(12,548)} = 55.54, p &lt; 0.05$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shields et al. (2007)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Athletes’ willingness to injure an opponent if coaches requested was associated to both athletes’ beginning skills level ($R^2 = 0.345$, $F_{(8,73)} = 4.81, p &lt; 0.05; \beta = 0.312$) and advance skills level ($R^2 = 0.535$, $F_{(8,37)} = 5.32, p &lt; 0.05; \beta = 0.563$)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephens (2001)</td>
<td>Goal orientation, judgments of injurious acts, and judgments about moral behaviour</td>
<td>Female athletes’ playing in all-girls teams who perceived their coaches as being ego-oriented and reported a higher likelihood to aggress an opponent ($R^2 = 0.55$, $F_{(2,42)} = 25.60, p &lt; 0.05; \beta = 0.258$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephens (2000)</td>
<td>Sport experience, goal orientation, perceived ability, and judgments about moral behaviour</td>
<td>Athletes who described themselves as being ego-oriented, both perceived their coach as being as well ego-oriented and reported likelihood to aggress an opponent ($R^2_{(13,199)} = 33.7, p &lt; 0.05; R^2 = 0.33$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephens &amp; Bredemeier (1996)</td>
<td>Goal orientation and judgments about moral behaviour</td>
<td>Athletes’ likelihood to aggress was related to athletes’ perception of team norm ($p$ for trend = 0.001) and coaches’ ego-orientation ($p$ for trend = 0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephens &amp; Kavanagh (2003)</td>
<td>Goal orientation, judgments about moral behaviour</td>
<td>Athletes’ perception of team norm ($p$ for trend = 0.001) and coaches’ ego-orientation ($p$ for trend = 0.001)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1**: Key researchers and studies with the measures they used, such as sportspersonship, moral reasoning, and relational support. The table includes information on sample sizes, the measures used, and the results of statistical analyses. For example, Kavanagh (2003) used structural development theory to explore the perception of a mastery motivational climate, while Stephens & Stephens (2000) examined the role of socio-moral reasoning in predicting moral behaviour. The table continues with more studies and findings, showing the complexity and depth of research in the socio-moral context.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>(Table 1 continued)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storres (2001)</td>
<td><em>N</em> = 12 athletes (age range = 19−27) and their coach</td>
<td>Respect, social expectation, type of interests, goal orientation, and moral behaviour</td>
<td>The coach’s expectations to win influenced athletes’ sportsmanship behaviours. This was specially the case of athletes who were less experienced</td>
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</table>

### Social cognitive theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stuart &amp; Ebbeck (1995)</th>
<th><em>N</em> = 249 athletes from two schools (school 1: <em>N</em> = 132, age range = 9−10, <em>M</em>-age = 10.5, <em>SD</em> = 0.27; and school 2: <em>N</em> = 117, age range = 12−13, <em>M</em>-age = 12.6, <em>SD</em> = 0.24)</th>
<th>Moral development and perceived social approval</th>
<th>Athletes’ perceptions of coaches social approval of antisocial behaviour was related to athletes’ moral development. (For 9−10 years old: Wilks’ lambda = 0.42, <em>F</em>(16, 379) = 7.71, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05, <em>Rc</em> = 0.72; and for 12−13 years old: Wilks’ lambda = 0.42, <em>F</em>(16, 333) = 6.67, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05, <em>Rc</em> = 0.72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lagzdins (2008)</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>Sportsmanship behaviours</td>
<td>Athletes’ perception of coaches’ sportsmanship behaviours positively predicted athletes’ sportsmanship behaviours. However, a coach’s unsportsmanlike behaviours did not predict athletes’ unsportsmanlike behaviours (<em>b</em> = 0.22, <em>F</em>(1, 250) = 11.39, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boardley &amp; Kavussanu (2009)</td>
<td><em>N</em> = 379 athletes (age range = 15−64, <em>M</em>-age = 22.2, <em>SD</em> = 6.5)</td>
<td>Pro-social and antisocial behaviour, perceived motivation, perceived coaching character building competency, and moral disengagement</td>
<td>Athletes’ perception of coaches’ character building competency was inversely related to athletes’ moral disengagement (<em>r</em> = −0.31, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05). Moral disengagement mediated the relationship to antisocial behaviours (<em>r</em> = 0.35, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05), pro-social behaviours towards opponents (<em>r</em> = −0.14, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05), and antisocial behaviours towards opponents (<em>r</em> = 0.76, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boardley et al. (2008)</td>
<td><em>N</em> = 166 male athletes (<em>M</em>-age = 26.5, <em>SD</em> = 8.5)</td>
<td>Coaching effectiveness, effort, sport commitment, enjoyment, task self-efficacy, and pro-social and antisocial behaviour</td>
<td>Athletes’ perceptions of coaches’ character-building effectiveness were related to athletes’ pro-social behavior (<em>R</em>² = 0.07, <em>F</em>(1, 155) = 11.27, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05; <em>β</em> = 0.27, <em>t</em>(152) = 3.36, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05), but unrelated to antisocial behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chow et al. (2009)</td>
<td>(See details presented above)</td>
<td>Coach-athlete relationship, moral consideration, moral agency, values, and coaching philosophy</td>
<td>Coaches perceived themselves as moral agents, but they were unsure on how to promote morality. Athletes mentioned that a coach’s moral agency was related to the quality of the coach-athlete relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagzdins (2008)</td>
<td><em>N</em> = 65 female athletes (age range = 18−23)</td>
<td>Coach-athlete relationship, moral consideration, moral agency, values, and coaching philosophy</td>
<td>Athletes ranked coaches in the first place in having influence in the way they played (<em>M</em>-age = 3.70, 83.1% of players) and in second place as having influence in the use of aggression (<em>M</em>-age = 2.76, 49.2% of players)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mugno &amp; Feltz (1985)</td>
<td><em>N</em> = 724 high school athletes (age range = 15−18) and youth league (age range = 12−14) players and non-players</td>
<td>Attitudes towards football and illegal aggression, and the amount of illegal aggressiveness observed and used</td>
<td>Athletes mentioned that a coach’s moral agency was related to the quality of the coach-athlete relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutten et al. (2008)</td>
<td>(See details presented above)</td>
<td>Coach-athlete relationship, moral consideration, moral agency, values, and coaching philosophy</td>
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</table>

### Life skills

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<tr>
<th>Bhalla (2009)</th>
<th><em>N</em> = 7 Caucasian and <em>N</em> = 8 African American females (age range = 14−18, <em>M</em>-age = 15.7, <em>SD</em> = 1.00)</th>
<th>Life skills learned and psychosocial outcomes</th>
<th>Athletes reported having learned from their coaches to respect (themselves, others, and the game) and to put the sport in perspective (e.g., have a good general attitude, ignore provocation). Sometimes, according to athletes, coaches used punishment to model positive behaviours</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolter (2010)</td>
<td><em>N</em> = 30 athletes (14 females, 16 males; age range = 14−18; <em>M</em>-age = 16.1, <em>SD</em> = 0.9) and <em>N</em> = 418 athletes (207 males, 211 females; age range = 13−18, <em>M</em>-age = 16.7, <em>SD</em> = 1.2)</td>
<td>Mechanisms coaches used to influence athletes sportsmanship, pro-social and antisocial behaviour, and caring climate</td>
<td>Athletes’ perceptions that their coaches taught them to behave in a sportsmanlike way were linked to athletes who help opponents (Coef = 0.19, <em>t</em>(417) = 2.05, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05). Conversely, athletes who reported their coaches were more likely to prioritize winning (over sportsmanship) scored higher on antisocial behavior toward opponents (Coef = 0.25, <em>t</em>(417) = 3.87, <em>p</em> &lt; 0.05)</td>
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THE COACH AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO THE SOCIO-MORAL CONTEXT  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Sample Information</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Findings/Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carson (2010)</td>
<td>Case 1: N = 1 male coach and N = 4 athletes (age range = 17–18, M-age = 17.5), and N = 1 former athlete; Case 2: N = 1 female coach, N = 4 athletes (17 years old), and N = 1 former athlete; Case 3: N = 1 female coach, N = 4 athletes (age range = 15–17, M-age = 16), and N = 1 former athlete.</td>
<td>Life skills transfer</td>
<td>Current athletes described how coaches deal with life skills in their current coaching practices. Former athletes confirmed that coaches upholding principles for character building effectively developed their life skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holt et al. (2009)</td>
<td>N = 40 athletes (20 males, M-age = 22.6, SD = 1.9 and 20 females, M-age = 21.4, SD = 1.5)</td>
<td>Life skills learning</td>
<td>Athletes reported both positive (lessons about work ethic and working together as a team) and negative (pressure to win) coach’s influence concerning moral issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purdy et al. (2008)</td>
<td>N = 1 female (n.s.)</td>
<td>Power and resistance</td>
<td>The athlete narrated how the power exerted by the coach affected her both at a personal and at a sport level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duquin &amp; Schroeder-Braun (1996)</td>
<td>N = 250 participants (age range = 12–18; 93% athletes)</td>
<td>Offensive situation, objectionable, unfair or unmoral coaching behaviours, social support, and athletes’ reaction to coaching behaviours</td>
<td>Athletes’ perceptions of their coach as providers of autonomy support were positively associated with athletes’ satisfaction of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. These three athletes’ needs positively predicted autonomous motivation that was positively associated with sportsmanship and negatively associated with athletes’ antisocial moral attitudes (χ²(134) = 372.60, p &lt; 0.05; CFI (Comparative Fit Index) = 0.93; IFI (Incremental Fit Index) = 0.93; SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) = 0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ntoumanis &amp; Standage (2009)</td>
<td>N = 314 athletes (age range = 18–25, M-age = 19.67, SD = 1.59)</td>
<td>Autonomy support, autonomy, motivation, competence, relatedness, sportsmanship, and antisocial moral attitudes</td>
<td>Athletes’ individual perceptions of their coach as being a democratic leader and a provider of support and positive feedback were associated with athletes’ respect for the opponents (β = 0.13, β = 0.57, and β = 0.11 correspondingly). Conversely, athletes’ individual perceptions of their coach as being an autocratic leader were associated with athletes’ increased levels of unsporting behaviour (β = 0.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stornes &amp; Bru (2002)</td>
<td>N = 440 athletes (age range = 14–16)</td>
<td>Sportsmanship and leadership</td>
<td>Athletes reported physical (reactive and strategic) and emotional abuse from their coaches, as well as the coach use of personal power to inhibit any moral resistance on the part of the athletes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gargano (2001)</td>
<td>N = 50 athletes and N = 23 coaches</td>
<td>Sportsmanship, coach’s influence on athlete’s development, the role of television, and the governance of ethics and sportsmanship in college basketball</td>
<td>The coaches were the major sources of influence for the athletes (M-coaches = 3.70; M-athletes = 4.47). Coaches believed that due to the pressure to win they placed upon the athletes, they often compromised the athletes’ long-term interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenworthy (2010)</td>
<td>N = 48 athletes (age range = 10–13, M-age = 11.2, SD = 0.6) and N = 5 coaches</td>
<td>Sportsmanship orientation and behaviours</td>
<td>Athletes’ perceptions of their coaches negative approach towards sport (R² = 0.287, t = 2.46, B = 0.42, β = 0.36, p &lt; 0.05) and athletes’ perceptions of their coaches respect for rules and officials (r = 2.07, B = 0.38, β = 0.32, p &lt; 0.05) were significant predictors of athletes’ self-reported sportsmanship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No theoretical approach reported</td>
<td>N = 803 students (age range = 9–15, M-age = 12.2, SD = 1.15) and N = 61 coaches</td>
<td>Moral behaviour (good and poor)</td>
<td>Although athletes reported a low level of negative behaviour (e.g., “It’s ok to break rules if you can get away with it”, 14%), this behaviour was associated with the coaches’ negative reported behaviour (the same item, 3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do Coaches Contribute to the Socio-moral Context?

In all reviewed studies, the coach’s personal attitudes (e.g., respect) and behaviours (e.g., disregard of the rules), either reported by the coach or perceived by the athletes, had an impact on the athletes’ moral outcomes (see Table 1). The coach’s contribution was positive or negative. For example, athletes acknowledged that coaches promoted moral values, such as respect for the rules; however, sometimes, when performance results were needed, the coaches created a certain moral ambiguity by calling for, allowing, or not condemning, negative moral behaviours (Guivernau & Duda, 2002; Long, Pantaléon, Bruant, & d’Arripe-Longueville, 2006; Stornes, 2001). Lagzdins (2008) explained that in all teams she followed, an athlete took over moral guidance if the coach did not assume this moral responsibility. Also, the athletes were more prone to accepting their coach’s moral standards when they had an enriching coach-athlete relationship (Lagzdins, 2008; Rutten, Stams, Biesta, Schuengel, Dirks, & Hoeksma, 2007). In a different vein, Duquin and Schroeder-Braun (1996) showed that coaches may negatively react towards athletes not agreeing with their moral standards. More precisely, the athletes reported that their moral conscience was jeopardised because their coach’s power inhibited their acts of resistance through reactive abuse (e.g., pushing), strategic abuse (e.g., forcing athletes to play with an injury), and emotional abuse (e.g., humiliation).

This evidence opens the doors for posing questions. First, what other elements, besides an enriching coach-athlete relationship, may facilitate an athlete’s acceptation of moral standards? Also, Carson (2010) interviewed three current coaches and one former athlete per coach. The three interviewed athletes acknowledged that they had been morally influenced by the three coaches participating in the study. Therefore, a second question is whether all coaches contribute to the socio-moral context in which the athletes participate, and if yes, to what extent. Also, it would be interesting to know: How is the socio-moral context co-created between the coach and the athlete? How are meanings negotiated? How is a common moral viewpoint created? And, what is the best way to co-create morality?

How Do Coaches Contribute to the Socio-moral Context?

The coaches contributed to the socio-moral context through four main strategies: (1) creating a socio-moral context; (2) modeling; (3) teaching moral skills and values; and (4) discussing with the athletes about moral issues.

The creation of a socio-moral context was mainly studied under the umbrella of the constructs of “moral atmosphere” and “motivational climate”. Kohlberg and colleagues (Higgins, Power, & Kohlberg, 1984; Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989) found that as a result of social interactions, the members of a group developed their own culture and a shared understanding of the norms that ruled them. Instead, motivational climate refers to the contextual goal structured (i.e., performance or task) and emphasised within the team environment and perceived by the members of the group (Ames, 1992). The perceived motivational climate contributes to moral atmosphere, because it refers to athletes’ perceptions about how far their coaches’ and peers’ will go to attain a desired outcome. In the studies falling into this group, the main research strategy was to relate and compare coaches’ and athletes’ moral behaviours. For example, Chow and colleagues (Chow, Murray, & Feltz, 2009) examined the relationship between a coach’s moral judgment and the athletes’ likelihood to aggress.

Role modeling was described as entailing four main steps: (1) attention to the observed model; (2) retention of information; (3) reproduction and performance of the observed behaviour; and (4) motivation based on the reinforcement received for having accomplished the task (Bandura, 1986). In the studies in which role
modeling was assessed, the coach’s self-reported behaviour (Chow, Murray, & Feltz, 2009), or a coach’s behaviour as perceived by the athlete (Kavussanu & Spray, 2006), and the athlete’s observed (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, & Hegreness, 2009), or self-reported (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009) behaviour were examined.

The teaching of moral skills and core values also contributed to the athletes’ character development. The focus of the studies in which this strategy was examined was on the implementation of a specific curriculum aiming at developing youth personal and social responsibility (e.g., Bolter, 2010). Finally, in some studies, it was reported that coaches contributed to the socio-moral context through the discussion of moral issues. According to Bhalla (2009), these discussions between coaches and athletes accompanied the coaches’ provision of social support to overcome moral challenges the athletes faced.

In light of this evidence, we identified some questions that remain unanswered. For example, do coaches devote time to purposefully contribute to the socio-moral context? If yes, how do coaches balance the time to work on technical-tactical issues and moral issues? Is the attention coaches devote to moral issues systematically planned?

How Have the Studies Been Theoretically Framed?

Three main theoretical perspectives have been used (see Table 1). The structural development theory (Kohlberg, 1984) and its related theoretical contributions (Haan, 1991; Rest, 1984) aimed at studying the cognitions underlying moral behaviour. Besides divergences among scholars, there is a shared agreement that social interaction allows moral balance which is reflected in hierarchically ordered stages of moral development. Of note, within this theory, the positive side of morality has been studied (e.g., justice); however, in the reviewed studies, only the negative components of morality (e.g., cheating) were assessed (Shields, LaVoi, Bredemeier, & Power, 2007).

The social cognitive theory acknowledges the cognitive and social components of moral action (Bandura, 1986), and understands morality as: (1) being dual (proactive (pro-social, positive) or inhibitive (antisocial, negative)); and (2) resulting from internalization of socially accepted values and behaviours (Bandura, 1991). Although one central component of this theory is that an individual’s self-abilities (e.g., self-efficacy) allow a balance between the individual cognitions and behaviours, as well as the environmental influences, none of the reviewed studies addressed this relationship.

The studies that examined the role of the coach in promoting life skills (see Table 1) were aligned within the “positive youth development” approach (Lerner et al., 2005). This approach proposes that under proper adult-supervised programmes, youth can learn social, emotional, behavioural, and even moral skills (Danish, Nellen, & Owens, 1996; Gould et al., 2009). The studies using this theoretical approach examined athletes’ perspectives concerning how their coaches influenced their sportsmanship attitudes and behaviours.

In a different vein, Purdy and colleagues (Purdy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008) framed their study within the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) and Duquin and Schroeder-Braun (1996) developed a framework building upon the relationship between empathy and pro-social behaviour (Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, & Knight, 1991; Hoffman, 1991), and social power (French & Raven, 1959). Ntoumanis and Standage (2009), using the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002), examined whether social-contextual and personal motivation variables predicted sportspersonship and antisocial moral attitudes in sport. In addition, Stornes and Bru (2002) assessed how the players’ perceptions of coaches’ leadership were associated with athletes’ moral outcomes. Finally, Kenworthy (2010) framed her study in the “model of coaching effectiveness” (Horn, 2002; 2008) to
study the relationship between coaches’ and athletes’ sportsmanship orientations and behaviours. Only one study did not explicitly present a framework (Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, & Power, 2005).

None of the reviewed studies considered morality in its philosophical sense, nor entertained the possibility of contributing to a theory of sport morality. Except for a few exceptions (Boardley, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2008; Carson, 2010; Goeb, 1997; Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black 2009; Long et al., 2006; Mugno & Feltz, 1985; Purdy et al., 2008), multiple theories were used to frame the studies. Also, in addition to the concepts discussed in our conceptual framework, Duquin and Schroeder-Braun (1996) and Purdy et al. (2008) referred to power and resistance. In only a few studies was the same concept consistently used throughout the work (e.g., Buford-May, 2001; Duquin & Schroeder-Braun, 1996; Goeb, 1997; Holt et al., 2009; Mugno & Feltz, 1985). An example of the indistinctly used concepts is the study conducted by Rutten and colleagues (2008) who framed the study as related to pro-social and antisocial behaviour, but used one instrument to measure fair play and another instrument to measure socio-moral reasoning.

We observed the use of different theoretical approaches and different concepts within the context of a same study. While this is not problematic per se, it requires proper integration, a task that was not clearly achieved in some papers (e.g., Duquin & Schroeder-Braun, 1996; Rutten et al., 2008; Rutten et al., 2007). This trend may suggest either that existing theories should probably be revisited and integrated into a compelling model or there is a need to develop a more comprehensive framework that integrates different viewpoints and allows for the consideration of a wide arrangement of elements (e.g., power).

Under What Philosophical Assumptions and Paradigms Have the Studies Been Conducted?

In only two studies was the paradigm reported or appropriately used. Buford-May (2001) framed his study within the social constructionism and conducted a prolonged observation of how a coach-athlete interaction led to a given socio-moral context. Purdy et al. (2008) framed their study within the post-modernism and articulated stories coming from different sources to show and tell their material. A direct problem associated to non-reporting of a paradigm is that it prevents readers from understanding the researchers’ methodological decisions.

How Have the Studies Been Designed?

Twenty-three studies used a quantitative design, five studies used a mixed design (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, & Hegreness, 2009; Bhalla, 2009; Bolter, 2010; Carson, 2010; Duquin & Schroeder-Braun, 1996; Lagzdins, 2008; Stornes, 2001), and six studies used a qualitative research design (Buford-May, 2001; Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009; Kenworthy, 2010; Long et al., 2006; Purdy et al., 2008; Stornes, 2001). The relative imbalance in research designs is a cause for concern as the ultimate goal of quantitative research is to test theory (Taylor, 2005), and given the lack of theoretical integration some studies presented, the path of evidence for theory generation is likely to remain disconnected. Also, in quantitative research, it is the researchers’ perspective, rather than the participants’, which is represented.

Concerning the temporal nature of the designs, only four studies were longitudinal (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Buford-May, 2001; Purdy et al., 2008; Stornes, 2001). It can be argued that since the main interest of developmental theories is the explanation of how development occurs (Lerner, 2006), the representation of moral influence requires longitudinal designs that allow for the examining of the coach’s socio-moral contribution as a process. Instead, as the majority of studies used a cross-sectional design, a specific stage of development and an association between studied variables were reflected.
What Types of Samples Have Been Used in the Studies?

Sample strategies consisted of: (1) athletes, to study athletes’ experiences and perceptions on how they have been morally influenced by their coaches; or (2) athletes and coaches, to have both viewpoints and compare them. The first strategy was used by the majority of scholars. In general, the studies did not provide in-depth descriptions of the coaches. However, the information concerning the athletes was appropriate. The athletes ranged from 9 to 34 years old (the most sampled age group was 12–19 years old). Two studies sampled athletes participating at a summer camp (Guivernau Rojas & Duda, 2002; Stephens, 2001), one study observed participants being part of a community recreation league (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009), and one study was an auto-ethnography of an international competitive rower (Purdy et al., 2008). The rest of the studies used participants enrolled in competitive sport settings, either community leagues or leagues in which only educational institutions participated (e.g., school league). All studies used convenience sampling. While this may be appropriate for qualitative where other purposive sampling logics were not warranted, it is not ideal for quantitative studies, as it limits generalizability.

How Was Data Collection Addressed in the Studies?

Except for two studies that only used observation (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Buford-May, 2001), all studies collected demographic data (e.g., age, sex, socio-cultural background, and sport experience) to describe their populations (see Table 1). Three main strategies of data collection were used: (1) administration of questionnaires; (2) semi-structured interviews; and (3) observations. The strategies of data collection were appropriated for the inquiry process and fitted the overall design of the studies. When data were collected for both coaches and athletes and then compared between them, evidence indicated that athletes perceived more negative behaviour from their coaches compared to the coaches’ self-reported behaviour (Lagzdins, 2008; Shields, Bredeemeier, LaVoi, & Power, 2005). Among the studies which did not offer the possibility to compare information among participants because they only sampled athletes, eight studies did not triangulate information through the use of different instruments (Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009; Long et al., 2006; Mugno & Feltz, 1985; Stephens & Bredeemeier, 1996; Stephens & Kavanagh, 2003; Stornes & Bru, 2002; Stuart & Ebbeck, 1995).

Instruments used to collect data also varied from study to study. The JAMBYSQ (Judgments About Moral Behavior in Youth Sports Questionnaire) (Stephens, Bredeemeier, & Shields, 1997), the instrument that was most frequently used, was utilized in six studies (Chow, Murray, & Feltz, 2009; Guivernau & Duda, 2002; Stephens, 2000, 2001; Stephens & Bredeemeier, 1996; Stephens & Kavanagh, 2003). This instrument consists of different scenarios followed by questions to assess judgments concerning lying, hurting, and cheating.

Conclusion

With regards to the primary purpose of this review, our results offered support to previous literature suggesting the coach is a main contributor to the socio-moral context (Kavussanu, 2007, 2008; Shields & Bredeemeier, 2007; Weiss et al., 2008). The coaches used four main strategies to promote athletes’ morality, being: (1) the creation of a socio-moral context; (2) role modeling; (3) teaching moral skills and values; and (4) the discussion of moral issues. An enriching coach-athlete relationship tended to enhance an athlete’s openness to accept his or her coach moral standards. In a different vein, athletes who refused to accept their coaches’ moral standards reported the coaches used their power to prevent the athletes’ resistance.
Athletes interviewed by Long et al. (2006) acknowledged that coaches promoted moral values; but, in some cases, they created a moral ambiguity by calling for or accepting negative moral behaviours. Athletes having an enriching coach-athlete relationship were more open to accepting a coach’s moral structuration of the socio-moral context. This confirmed that the way the sport context is structured may enhance or hinder the athletes’ moral development as well (Holt & Jones, 2008; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009; Weiss et al., 2008). However, even when the coach plays a crucial role in structuring the socio-moral context in which sport situations occur, the athletes’ moral development is based on co-action, co-creation, and collaboration (Gergen, 2009).

Limitations and Strengths

This review has some limitations. First, due to space constraints, some issues have not been criticized in-depth (e.g., the role of gender). Also, as this represents the first purposeful peer review dealing with the role of the coach as a contributor to the socio-moral context, we presented the context in which the reviewed studies were conducted, but we did not analyze the validity of them. However, this review has some strengths as well. First, it represents an updated version of previous reports; Second, we made our search trail and decisions explicit for the interested reader; Third, we conducted an in-depth and inclusive review that considered the research contributions from different types of research designs. By including qualitative research in our review, we exceeded the presentation of the largely discussed causal-relationship between the coach’s and the athlete’s moral attitudes and behaviours; And fourth, we briefly depicted the context in which the reported studies were conducted. By doing this and as well raising questions, offering reflections on a study impact, and suggesting the pendent topics that need to be answered by future research; we provided a better understanding of the issue we reviewed and we offered a hallmark for future research and applied interventions.

Future Research

This review identified areas that still need to be explored. First, future research needs to use longitudinal, qualitative, and mixed design studies. This is important if we aim at understanding both the process through which the coach contributes to the socio-moral context and the way the athletes’ morality develops; Second, it would be interesting to sample coaches along with other potential sources of moral influence to compare the socio-moral interactions that take place from a broader perspective. This strategy was used in some of the reviewed studies, and though it was not considered here, it provided an insightful view (Bhalla, 2009; Stuart & Ebbeck, 1995); Third, this review indicated that a more in-depth theoretical integration needs to be done to generate a more comprehensive framework for explaining the nature of morality in sport. This can be achieved through more collaborative and concentrated efforts on the establishment of the reliability and validity of measures of morality and moral influence. In this vein, research endeavours to develop theory grounded in the field of sport (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) are recommended to better reflect the specificities of the field; Fourth, future research should replicate available studies to obtain more sustainable evidence and measures. This is important if considered in light of methodological issues pointed out in this review; Finally, because analyzed pieces of work informed about athletes that were currently involved or former athletes contacted thanks to the coach’s suggestion (Carson, 2010), the voices of athletes who withdrew the sport remain still unrepresented. Then, it would be of interest to sample athletes who withdrew from the sport setting and explore whether moral issues led to this decision.
Practical Implications

Evidence suggests that the coach is a main contributor to the socio-moral context, and therefore, plays a crucial role in an athlete’s moral development. This was illustrated by the fact that when the coach does not enact his or her moral responsibilities, the athletes seek out support from teammates. This evidence is important if considered across the wide age range (9–34 years old) of athletes who report being a moral influenced by their coaches. Given that the ultimate purpose of sport participation is to foster an individual’s personal development, the coaches need to both be sensitised about the role they play and be aware of the associated impact and risk that a negative moral attitude and behaviour may have on the athletes. In sum, morality needs to be included as a key component in the preparation of coaches to better frame the athletes’ sport experience.

References


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