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Benjamin Hemphill

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Collegiate Athletes' Family Communication Styles  
And Their Preferred Coaching Styles

Benjamin Hemphill

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In Partial Fulfillment of Graduation Requirements

University of Portland

Department of Communication Studies

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## **Introduction**

Although coaching styles have a great effect on athletes' performance and experiences (Vallerand & Losier, 1999), the research regarding the factors of an athlete's preferences to different styles is sparse at best. Because family communication patterns heavily influence the children's socialization as they move into adulthood (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990), family patterns might influence a student's preference for athlete-coach relationship and communication. The previous research on family types has shown that children are more likely to be higher functioning adults, if they are raised in a concept-oriented manner (Kim, Lee & Tomiuk 2009; Korner & Eis). The literature on coach communication suggests that while many coaches use negative communication techniques to motivate their players, these strategies do not lead to better results or performances and often psychologically damage the athletes (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010; Martin, Rocca, Cayanus & Weber, 2009). The purpose of this study is to examine the correlation between collegiate athletes' family communication styles and the athletes' preferred coaching style.

First, I will focus on research from both the family and athletic genres. Next, the paper will describe the methodology used in research. Finally, the paper concludes with the results and recommendations for future studies.

## **Literature Review**

### **Family Studies**

In Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's study (1990) of family and child types, they identified two types of children and four types of families through interviews of

Wisconsin families. Socio-oriented children are more susceptible to influence from outside sources and focus on the source of the message. Due to these focuses and influences, parental authority is used to force the sons and daughters to conform to the parents' teachings. Concept-oriented children, on the other hand, pay attention to the content of the message that they receive. Because the child evaluates the number and quality of arguments in any given message, they are less likely to be swayed by an authoritarian conformity parenting style. Instead, these children are encouraged to express their own opinions and ideas through open dialogue with their parents. While socio-oriented children and their parents exhibit similar views of communication climates, concept-oriented children may diverge from their parents' views because they have their own ideas and are willing to express them.

In addition to describing the two categories of children, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (2009) defined four types of families. This model divides the family's communication according to amount of conformity the families require and the amount of conversation encouraged. This division creates four different family communication styles. Because families with children are in constant flux, and children's communication changes over time, families may drift between these four categories. A pluralistic family is high in conversation and low in conformity. Protective families do not encourage much conversation and emphasize children's obedience to parental views. Consensual families encourage conversational openness but they expect conformity to parents' way of thinking. Finally, laissez-faire families expect little communication but also do not expect conformity. We will now turn to research that has used Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's model.

Kim, Lee, and Tomiuk (2009) analyzed the impact of family communication patterns on adolescent decision-making. The researchers used adolescents' purchasing strategies to determine whether mothers' and family styles affected buying strategies. Although both the mother and father communicated with the children who participated in the study, only the mothers' orientations were significantly related to their children's purchasing techniques (Kim, Lee & Tomiuk, 2009). Adolescents whose mothers used concept-oriented communication were more likely to make utilitarian and socially conscious purchasing decisions. Mothers who used socio-oriented communication, however, raised sons and daughters who were overwhelmed by too many choices and made impulsive buying decisions. Interestingly, there were no correlations between same gender communication and impact on decision-making; for example, a mother's communication would have the same decision making effects on a son or daughter.

Koerner and Eis (2001) researched family conformity orientation. Conformity orientation is the "degree to which family communication stresses a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs" (Koerner and Eis, 2001). A high conformity family follows a traditional structure emphasizing uniformity, interdependence, conflict avoidance, and seniority. In addition, these families produce much more advice and interpretation during conversations. Also, they put more focus on coordination; therefore, there is greater use of questions and more willingness to hear input from others. A low conformity family, on the other hand, stresses individuality in all aspects of life. Furthermore, low conformity families are more concerned with confirmation and reflection in their conversations. These

characteristics lead to more divergent attitudes and beliefs with independent conversations and more competition for input. The study found that different family conformity levels could produce drastically different children.

In summary, these studies suggest that family communication styles interact with two types of children, socio and concept oriented (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Because socio-oriented children are taught through strict instruction and obedience, they struggle to adapt to new environments and develop their own worldviews. Although there is not a consensus among all the studies, the majority argues that concept-oriented children are better equipped to handle the rigors of the real world.

### **Athletics and Family Communication Studies**

In one of the few studies to incorporate both family and coach communication, Holt et al. examined how parenting styles related to their children's participation in youth sports. Using Grolnick's (2003) parental theories of psychological control or autonomy and autocratic or democratic communication, the researchers were able to identify effects of different family communication patterns. Families that use democratic communication while encouraging autonomy amongst all family members are characterized as pluralistic or laissez-faire. Protective and consensual families, on the other hand, emphasize parental control through autocratic communication methods. Before making generalizations, it is important to note that some families experienced inconsistencies between the mother and father and that parenting strategies varied depending on the situation (Koerner & Eis, 2001). The study found that autonomy supportive parents (much like Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's pluralistic families) had open communication with

their children and provided the proper structure for support and decision-making. In contrast, controlling parents (akin to protective families in the Fitzpatrick and Ritchie model) had closed communication with their children and were both unsupportive and insensitive to their emotions.

Jowett and Timson-Katchis' (2005) article about the relationships between athletes, athletes' parents, and coaches found that an athlete's dedication to improvement in sport was generally dependent on support from both parents and coaches. There are three major influences on the parent-coach relationship: opportunity, information, and support. *Opportunity* reflects that parents have their own criteria for their children's coaches and are happier when coaches meet this criteria and provide constant feedback. *Information* consists of interactions between parents and athletes or coaches. These interactions can be about practical topics such as progress reports or match preparation, or general ideas such as nutrition or coping methods for frustrating times. Parents show general or emotional *support* for players and coaches. Emotional support consists of unconditional love and care, regardless of the result. General support, on the other hand, refers general positive statements towards the athlete such as "good game." The most effective type is emotional, because it includes statements of encouragement, empathy, and approval.

Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) also found that as the athlete-coach dyad develops, the relationship takes on more intimate characteristics. This development can have a positive effect on athletics, but a potentially negative effect on family communication and satisfaction. The study found that some parents became

disgruntled or offended by their children developing closer relationships with their coaches, because they felt left out of parts of their children's development. The three elements determining the quality of an athlete/coach relationship are closeness, commitment, and complementarity (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005). Feelings of closeness, or lack thereof, are respect, care, dislike, and disappointment.

Commitment focuses dedication, sacrifice, and satisfaction. Finally, complementarity handles the roles and demeanor of the coaches and athletes; specifically, compadability of the coaches and athletes in terms of athletics, interpersonal interactions, and objectives. It is important to note that while the athletes perfect their skills with their coaches, their foundations come from a strong and supportive family.

In conclusion, these studies suggest that family communication can impact coach-athlete relationships. We turn now to examine coach-leadership behaviors and their impact on athletes.

### **Coach Leadership Behavior**

P. Chelladurai and S. D. Saleh of the University of Western Ontario and the University of Waterloo, respectively, examined the study of leadership in sports. In their study, sports teams are seen as formal organizations with the coach as management. Instead of analyzing coaches' personalities or communication strategies, Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) studied leadership behaviors. Their study produced the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) consisting of five leadership factors: instruction, autocratic behavior, democratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). This scale is based on other leadership



satisfaction matrices that typically apply to formal organizations. The study also stresses that varying conditions can drastically change how athletes view their coach and consequently how the scale evaluates his or her leadership attributes.

Kimberley J Bartholomew, Nikos Ntoumanis, and Cecilie Thøgersen-Ntoumani of the University of Birmingham developed and validated the Controlling Coach Behaviors Scale (CCBS). Unlike the LSS, which focuses on instruction and feedback, the CCBS is concerned with autonomy, supportiveness, and controlling behaviors. By using self-determination theory as a lens, a coach's behavior can be seen as two distinct interpersonal styles – autonomy supportive and controlling (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010). The authors suggest that autonomy- supportive coaches enhance their athletes' motivation by appealing to their psychological desires; controlling coaches, however, have predetermined concepts of players and use coercion and other authoritarian methods to motivate them. The study identified four controlling tactics used by coaches: rewards, negative conditions, intimidation, and personal control (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010). The study concluded that controlling coaches devalue their athletes' individuality through use of these four factors.

Renate Bark and Valentin Bucik, from the University of Zagreb and University of Ljubljana respectively, examined the coaches' contributions to motivational structures for athletes in team sports. Democratic coaches, who are characterized as supportive, task-oriented, and instructive, create intrinsic motivational structures. Extrinsic motivational structures are created by autocratic coaches who are not supportive, ego-driven, and less task-oriented. Bark and Bucik (2009) discovered

that intrinsically motivated athletes devoted more time to practice and enjoyed their sport more than extrinsically motivated athletes. In addition to instruction and leadership, coaches have a great influence over the motivation of their athletes (Bark & Bucik, 2009). They analyzed the athletes' goal orientation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and the motivational structure resulting from their coaches' behavior. According to the study, supportive, democratic coaches contributed to intrinsically motivated players; while autocratic coaches created an environment for extrinsically motivated athletes. Although neither style of coaching nor motivation was typical to a particular sport, intrinsically motivated athletes playing with democratic coaches would be the ideal combination (Bark & Bucik, 2009). This combination creates a mastery motivational climate, which is conducive to hard work, task-orientation, and teamwork. A mastery motivational climate is one in which athletes are motivated, both intrinsically and extrinsically, to develop complete physical and mental skill sets in their sport. In addition to having a more effective motivational and athletic environment, the researchers found that players were more satisfied and responded better to democratic coaches.

Martin, Rocca, Cayanus, and Weber (2009) surveyed high level athletes using a behavior analysis technique (BAT) and verbal aggression in elite sport. Behavior can be positive or negative depending on the type of leadership power used. Sources of power are based on French and Raven's (1959) study on the five types of power: coercive, reward, reference, expert, and referent. Positive techniques use referent and expert power. Examples of positive BATs are reward from behavior or others, self-esteem, and altruism. Negative techniques, such as punishment from behavior

or others and guilt, are derived from coercive and legitimate power. The researchers concluded that positive BATs led to an athlete having a greater liking for his or her teammates, coaches, and sport. When negative techniques are used, however, players reported less motivation and a higher fear of failure.

In addition to BATs, Martin, Rocca, Cayanus, and Weber (2009) explored the use and effectiveness of verbal aggression in athlete/coach relationships through athlete self reports. Verbal aggression is the act of a coach verbally attacking a player while in a practice, game, or some other team event. Every athlete surveyed had a negative response to verbal aggression. Athletes claimed that coaches that used those methods were perceived as autocratic which created an environment less conducive to learning. Athletes also viewed these coaches as less credible, less friendly, less competent, and low in character. Although it is stereotypical for coaches to berate and insult their players as a form of motivation, this study found that neither negative BATs nor verbal aggression motivated or inspired athletes to do better on the field of play. The researchers concluded that the authority of coach does not motivate players; rather, they are encouraged to be better athletes by a positive relationship with their coach.

Ruggiero and Lattin (2008) studied coaches' verbal aggression with female collegiate teams. The most commonly used verbal aggression tactics in female collegiate sports were threats, debt, negative self-feeling, aversion stimulation, activation of impersonal commitments, and activation of personal commitments (Ruggiero & Lattin, 2008). Coaches used threats, such taking away an athlete's scholarship, to motivate the young women to perform better. In addition to

threatening to remove an athlete's scholarship, coaches acted as if they owned the athletes because they awarded them a scholarship. Athletes reported that coaches created negative self-feelings through abusive language, cursing, name-calling, and accusations (Ruggiero & Lattin, 2008). According to Ruggiero and Lattin (2008), aversion stimulation is essentially the coach punishing his or her athletes for not performing appropriately; for example, putting athletes through extra conditioning because the team lost a game. These communication techniques do not yield greater motivation; rather, they damage the athletes mentally and emotionally as well as compromising their performance (Ruggiero & Lattin, 2008).

Ruggiero and Lattin (2008) describe the final two aggressive behaviors as socialized. Activation of impersonal commitments is coaches attempting to appeal to an athlete's intrinsic commitments, such as telling the athlete that she is letting herself down and ruining all her hard work after one poor performance. Coaches desire to make comments that resonate with their athletes and are not easily forgotten. Activation of personal commitments, on the other hand, occurs when coaches attempt to use an athlete's commitment to others to motivate them. In these situations, the coach will use the athlete's team, parents, or program to enhance performances. The study reveals that coaches utilize too much power and aggressive language when motivating their athletes, and these errors negatively impact their athletes and teams' results.

In summary, there are two types of coaches, democratic and autocratic, and only one consistently creates good relationships and results. Democratic coaches are emotionally supportive, less likely to use negative behavioral analysis

techniques, less controlling, and motivate their athletes intrinsically. Autocratic coaches use negative or threatening methods to extrinsically motivate their players, are not task oriented, and attempt to control their players every move. These studies found that democratic coaches had happier athletes.

### **Rationale**

While the importance of parental support to coaching has been addressed, no research exists about family patterns and any relationship they might have to athletic outcomes. We could speculate that if an athlete grew up in a family whose norms enforced high conformity and low conversation the athlete might be very comfortable with an autocratic coach. Similarly, if one grew up in a pluralistic family, an autocratic coach would not be a good match. The relationship between one's family communication style and preferred coaching style has not been studied,

The rationale for my study is rooted in the facts that athletes come from different backgrounds and families, and a coaching style with which one is familiar may be a comfortable fit. In other words, if one has been raised in a protective family, an autocratic coach that uses a negative BATS might work well. . My study examines the relationship between family and preferred coach types, Due to my personal athletic experiences in coaching and playing, I believe that more male athletes will be accepting of autocratic coaches than females.

### **Research Questions:**

1. Is preferred coaching style correlated with gender (male vs. female)
2. Is preferred coaching style correlated with age (upperclassmen vs. lowerclassmen)?

### 3. Is preferred coaching style correlated with family communication style?

#### **Hypothesis:**

1. Protective family communication will be correlated with preferred autocratic coaches
2. Consensual or pluralistic family communication will be correlated with preferred democratic coaches
3. There will be a significant difference between male and female preferences in coaching.
  - a. A greater percentage of males will prefer autocratic.
  - b. A greater percentage of females will prefer democratic
4. There will be a significant difference in preferred coaching style between lower (freshmen and sophomores) and upper classmen (juniors and seniors)

#### **Methodology**

##### **Sample**

The sample (N=121) was made up of student-athletes from a variety of West Coast and Midwestern universities. The athletes were both male (n=52) and female (n=69) and participated in 17 different NCAA sanctioned sports (n=*survey not closed yet*). The athletes all participate in NCAA Division 1 or 2 conferences. They range in age from freshmen (>17 years of age) to seniors (<23 years of age).

##### **Procedure**

Approval was obtained from the University of Portland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study. The study consisted of Ritchie and Fitzpatrick's Revised

Family Communication Patterns Scale (RFCP) (1990) and the Controlling Coach Behaviors Scale (CCBS) (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010). The questions from both scales used a 5-point Likert-format, which ranged from never to rarely to sometimes to often to always. In addition to these closed questions, I added three open-ended questions that allowed the participants to articulate their feelings on their best coach, worst coach, and family's influence on athletics. Both the RFCP and CCBS have been proven as reliable and valid over several previous studies.

Participants were recruited through their athletic departments with anonymous emails and a Facebook posting linking to surveygizmo.com. The study was briefly described and each survey began with a copy of the IRB Consent Form. The online survey maintained the anonymity of the participants and the results were shredded after the data was coded and analyzed.

The data was analyzed using independent t-tests and bivariate correlation analyses. The t-tests were used to compare gender with each of the five factors of the CCBS and age with each of the five factors independently. Bivariate correlation tests were run to determine a relationship between family communication pattern an athlete experienced as a child and how much the athlete preferred controlling coaching behaviors. Controlling coaching behaviors were determined as a combination of the five factors in the CCBS.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

## Results

### *Research Question 1:*

Controlling use of rewards refers to coaches who motivate athletes by rewarding them for good performances. These coaches use rewards and praise to make athletes train harder and force them to stay on task during training. Men and Women were compared on controlling use of rewards and no significant difference was found (males,  $m=5.78$ ; females,  $m=5.62$ ).

Negative conditional regard refers to coaches who are less friendly, less supportive, and pay less attention to athletes who not performing well or displeasing them. When men and women were compared on their responsiveness to coaches who used negative conditional regard, no significant difference was found (males,  $m=5.69$ ; females,  $m=5.10$ ).

Intimidation refers to coaches who shout or yell at players in front of the rest of the team. This type of coach would use the threat of punishment and intimidation tactics to keep players in line. Men and women showed significant differences in responsiveness to coaches' intimidation with males more likely to prefer coaches who used intimidation (males,  $m=5.48$ ; females,  $m=4.62$ ;  $p<.024$ ).

Excessive personal control refers to coaches who expect athletes to put their sport in front of other important areas of life. Such coaches may try to control what the players do in their free time or interfere with aspects of their life outside of sport. Though not quite reaching the level of significance (males,  $m=5.25$ ; females,  $m=4.65$ ;  $p<.08$ ), men were more likely to prefer a coach who used excessive personal control.



Judging and devaluing refers to coaches who are judgmental and overly critical of athletes when they perform poorly. These coaches give negative evaluations to underperforming athletes and undervalue their contribution to the team. Men reported higher preference than women for coaches who judged and devalued their athletes (males,  $m=8.8$ ; females,  $m=7.10$ ;  $p<.001$ ).

*Research Question 2:*

Despite the age differences between upper (juniors and seniors) and lower class (freshmen and sophomores) collegiate athletes, there were no significant differences found when judging and devaluing, excessive personal control, intimidation, or negative conditional regard were compared. There was, however, an almost significant difference between upper and lower class athletes with respect to the controlling use of rewards (lower class,  $m=5.46$ ; upper class,  $m=6.06$ ;  $p<.077$ ).

*Research Question 3:*

A Pearson bivariate correlation was run to see if socio-orientation (family preference for conformity) might be related to preferred coaching style. A small but significant correlation was found ( $r=.374$ ;  $p<.001$ ). Athletes who perceived their families to be high in conformity preferred a more authoritarian coaching style.

A Pearson Bivariate correlation was run to see if concept-orientation (family preference for conversation) was related to preferred coaching style. A small but significant negative correlation was found ( $r=-.226$ ;  $p<.013$ ). In other words, athletes who perceived their families to be high in conversation least preferred an authoritarian coaching style.

## **Discussion**

This study was conducted to determine if there was a correlation between the family communication pattern experienced by an athlete growing up and their preferred coaching style. The results of the bivariate analyses confirmed hypotheses and revealed small but significant correlation between family communication patterns and preferred coaching styles. According to the study, athletes coming from families who emphasized conformity had greater preference for authoritarian coaches; on the other hand, athletes coming from families who emphasized conversation had least preference for authoritarian coaches. Although the correlations were small, this study provides more information to the family and coach communication fields as well as creating new areas for study regarding the link between to the two topics.

The child who grows up in a socio-concept family is used to being directed and not having a say in decision-making. If the child's views do not coincide with the parents' view of the world, the child is reprimanded. The pressure for conformity in such a family is high. While some children may rebel, conformity is the norm. Hence, comfort with a coach who employs similar communication tactics may be a comfortable fit.

The child who grows up in a concept-oriented family was encouraged to participate in family discussion and decision-making. These families exerted very little pressure for conformity. Due to this conversation based family pattern, these children would be comfortable with coaches who used more democratic methods.

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

Because athletes preferred similar coaching styles to the family communication patterns they experienced (authoritarian with socio-oriented and democratic with concept-oriented), the participants may have created symbols for authority figures. Symbolic interactionism is defined as “the process of interaction in the formation of meanings for individuals” (Nelson, 1998). Nelson (1998) proposes that there are three principles to the theory: meaning, language, and thought. The study suggests that children create symbols of power and authority through their perceptions of their parents. Therefore, an athlete identifies the authoritarian coaching styles as legitimate because it mirrors their parents communication style. Conversely, the study claims that children from concept-oriented families cultivate symbols of authority figures as people who encourage dialogue and shared decision-making. These children grow into athletes who view democratic coaches as a source of legitimate power and have developed a preference for this style of coaching.

In addition to investigating family and coach communication styles, the study examined the relationships between gender and specific coaching strategies. We’ll review the findings of t-tests that were significant, those that approached significance, and finally those that were not significant but interesting, nonetheless.

Males reported significantly higher preferences than females towards coaches using judging and devaluing and intimidation tactics. These findings suggest that face threats are viewed more positively by males than females.

## **Facework**

Males reported significantly higher preferences towards coaches who were judging and devaluing and intimidating than women. In addition to the element of coercive power, these results suggest that males have a more positive response to face threats than females. Communication in which communicators build, maintain, protect or threaten their own or another's self image. Facework theory "involves the enactment of face strategies, verbal and nonverbal moves, self-presentation acts, and impression management interaction" (Ting-Toomey, 1994, p.1). When one's face is threatened, by intimidation or judgement for example, it is human nature to defend one's image against the incoming criticism and judgmentalism (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006). Intuitively, one suspects that when a coach threatens an athlete's face, he or she is expecting that the athlete will correct their actions in a positive manner. Domenici and Littlejohn (2006), however, describe positive responses as "acknowledging, calm, solution oriented, and understanding" and negative responses as "emotional, defensive, blaming, rude or even violent" (p.76). The findings suggest that males are more likely to acknowledge the face threat and search for a solution, while females are more likely to become off-task and defensive. Because face threats create highly aversive behavior, coaches tend to use them as a technique to discourage athletes from doing certain things. Moreover, this preference may point to male athletes preferring simple instruction conveyed through harsher communication.

Despite not reaching significance, when asked about coaches' attempts to control life outside of the sport, the results approached significance, (males,  $m=5.25$ ; females,  $m=4.65$   $p<.08$ ); men preferred this coaching style more than

women. In trying to understand this result, we know that boys tend to be more hierarchical in their play than girls and are more used to taking orders (Tannen, 1990). This may account for their responsiveness to these demands.

### **Power**

How players respond to intimidation tactics stem from the coach's perceived power. Research has identified five basic power resources: coercive, reward, liking, expert, and legitimate (French & Raven, 1958). Intimidation is categorized as coercive power, because it strives to make others to act in a certain through emotional or physical force. Males reported a greater preference for coaches who use intimidation than females. This result may also be explained by males comfort with hierarchy as mentioned above.

Interestingly, there were no significant differences between male and female responsiveness to negative conditional regard and controlling use of rewards. These findings may be a result of self-disclosure differences between anonymity and face-to-face communication among male and female athletes. The results of these analyses contribute to the existing literature regarding similarities and differences across genders.

### **Self-Disclosure**

Although men and women reported similar preferences for controlling use of rewards and negative conditional regard, which is consistently supported by self-report research, society intuitively believes that males would have a higher preference for these conditions. A possible explanation for the discrepancies between society's beliefs and self-report studies is that males typically exhibit less

self-disclosure when in groups (Collins & Miller, 1994). Although males do not value coaches who use these tactics, their social rules of self-disclosure may prevent them from saying so. Self-report questionnaires provide anonymity, which masks males' reluctance to self-disclose and allows them to openly report their feelings without the burden of societal expectations.

In the final analysis, t-tests were used to examine the relationships between age and coaching strategies. The participants were divided into two different age groups: lower class, which consisted of freshmen and sophomores; and upper class, which consisted of juniors and seniors. Contrary to hypotheses, there were no significant differences between the two classes in any of the five categories. There was, however, a nearly significant difference with respect to controlling use of rewards in which upper class athletes reported a higher preference.

The results of this study have the potential to influence the family communication, coach-athlete relationship, coach communication, and athlete satisfaction genres of communication study. The research can be used to explain certain athletes behaviors and preferences and instruct coaches how to best communicate with their players. The results support popular literature (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2010; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Ruggiero & Lattin, 2008; and Martin, Rocca, Cayanus, & Weber, 2009), which broadly states that positive and supportive coaching behavior leads to healthy relationships and happy players.

## **Conclusion**

### **Limitations**

Because this study examined player satisfaction through self-report, there were a few limitations. Most glaringly, it is impossible for the researcher to know if the participants are reporting truthfully. Although honesty and integrity are assumed, there are no ways to ensure that surveys are filled out in good faith. In terms of application, this study is limited because it does not take into account athlete and team performances. While the importance of athlete satisfaction cannot be underestimated, coaches and athletes are ultimately judged by their results. Even if athletes prefer a certain coaching style, it does not mean that it will produce the best performance in competition. History is full of stories of athletes who were disgruntled with team management, but still played at elite levels. For example, Allen Iverson repeatedly clashed with head coach Larry Brown during his successful tenure with the Philadelphia 76ers. Their relationship experienced heightened friction in the 2001-2002, when Iverson showed up late to practices and often questioned Brown in the media (Wood, 2002). Despite all the tension and dissatisfaction, the 76ers went to the playoffs and Iverson led the NBA in scoring with 31.4 points per game (NBA Statistics - 2002, 2002).

The greatest challenge facing this area of study is that it is not a laboratory study; rather, it is a study in bona fide groups. This means that athletic teams are not zero-history groups, there are historical, geographical, economic, and cultural elements that affect the players and coaches (Frey, 2003). In order to generate significant and applicable results, this study cannot be done using the container model, which features closed boundaries and fixed identities (Frey, 2003). Instead, it would require a coach adopting a specific style of coaching for the entire season

and regularly comparing the athletes' reported satisfaction and preferences with the team's results. Despite the potential for this study, it is highly unlikely that any coach would subject his team to only one style of communication at the risk of damaging the team's performance and results. In order to compensate, one could study a coach who has consistently employed similar communication tactics throughout his or her career and assess the players' preferences. For example, Phil Jackson has historically used a democratic and relaxed communication style with his players, while Bobby Knight is recognized as a coach who rules with an iron fist and demands conformity from his players. Comparing the satisfaction of players from these two coaches and comparing it with the teams' performances would be as close as a researcher could get to studying coach preferences in a bona fide group setting.

### **Future Study**

After discovering the various correlations between gender and coaching preferences, it would be interesting to study which coaching behaviors were preferred regardless of family style. Also, researchers should explore other variables that affect athletes' coaching preferences such as sport, race, socio-economic status, sexuality, and nationality. Finally, studying the preferred coaching styles of professional athletes in relation to family communication style would be beneficial because there are additional factors such as large amounts of money and inflated egos that impact interpersonal relationships.

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