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## **The Perception of Same Gender Coaches by Iranian Skaters and its Influence on Sport Achievement Motivation and Commitment**

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### **Abstract**

**Aim:** To examine the relationship between the perception of same gender coaches by male and female Iranian skaters and their sport achievement motivation and commitment. **Participants:** Fifty two female and forty two male skaters, age range 13 to 18 years, from the province of Isfahan in Iran. **Materials:** The following 3 questionnaires, tested for reliability and validity for the Iranian population and adapted for Farsi, were used: i) Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand and Briere (2001) Interpersonal Behaviour Scale to measure social support of trainers, ii) Gill and Deeter (1988) Sport Orientation Questionnaire (SOQ) to measure achievement motivation, and iii) Scanlan, Simons, Carpenter, Schmidt and Keeler (1993) Sport Commitment Model to measure sport commitment. **Procedure:** The questionnaires were administered to participants in person by the first author after training sessions in sport stadiums. **Results:** There was a significant positive correlation between perceived coaches' social support and sport achievement motivation and commitment for both male and female participants. However, on all of the above measures females scored significantly more positive ratings than their male counterparts. Results of regression analyses conducted separately for males and females showed that relatedness support is the strongest predictor for sport achievement motivation and commitment for males, whereas autonomy support was the strongest predictor for sport commitment amongst females. **Implications:** These findings are of particular interest in understanding the impact of perceived coaching support for young male and female athletes, especially if coached exclusively by the same gender.

**Keywords:** Same gender, coaches social support, achievement motivation, sport commitment, skating.

## **Introduction**

The relationship between perceived coaches' social support, sport achievement motivation, development and sport commitment in various sports has been the subject of extensive investigation across both genders, and particularly in relation to a generally young population (e.g. Black & Weiss, 1992, Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005, Shen, Sun & Rukavina, 2010, Gould & Carson 2011, Mazyari, Kashef, Ameri, Araghi, 2012, Williams, 2013). However no study has examined such relationships when the individual is coached exclusively by the same gender. Whilst there is evidence that in non-muslim countries there is a favourable view on male coaches (Lirgg, Dibrezzo & Smith, 1994; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997; Frey, Czech, Kent & Johnson, 2006) whereas in most Islamic societies women must be coached by women and in Iran it is imperative. Thus, the question raised is to what extent research amongst western and predominantly non-muslim societies would be applicable to countries such as Iran where individuals are coached by the same gender.

## **Background to studies on coaches' support and motivation**

Some researchers define social support as the kindness, companionship, care, respect, attention and aid provided by other people or other groups (e.g. family members, teachers and friends) to the individual (Sarafino, 1998). Based on the self-determination theory (SDT), teachers can influence the motivation of athletes by supporting or opposing their basic psychological needs (Reeve, 2005). According to this theory, humans have the following three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. This theory holds that thinking of oneself as competent, autonomous and related, influences intrinsic behaviour. In other words, the level of satisfaction of these three psychological needs influences intrinsic motivation. According to this theory, our behaviour is considered to be autonomous when our tendencies, preferences and wants lead our decisions on certain activities. When external forces make us think, feel or behave, we are not considered to be autonomous. Competence is also a psychological need which makes the person qualified and competent, and capable of overcoming challenges and obstacles. In order to meet the need for sports competence, the person needs to gain sports skills. A person's understanding of his/her skills influences his/her competence. Finally, the need for relatedness originates from the need for making friends and having emotional attachments (Lewthwaite & Wulf, 2012).

In one study, Shen, Sun and Rukavina (2010) indicated that a lack of social support of teachers for these three psychological needs considerably influences the lack of motivation in students to do physical exercises. Mazyari, et al (2012) carried out a study which indicated that there is a negative significant relationship between the lack of motivation in students and social support of teachers. A previous study by Toumanis (2004) also showed that the social support of teachers for physical education is related to the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of students. Satisfaction of these needs also influences the motivation of students to take part in physical activities. The existing evidence suggests that there is a relationship between the social support of teachers and satisfaction of basic psychological needs of students. Moreover, there is a relationship between the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and the motivation of students to take part in physical activities (Toumanis, 2004). Therefore in line with this research, arguably, there is a relationship between the social support of coaches and the motivation of athletes for sports achievement.

Motivation can be defined as the direction and intensity of one's effort (Sage, 1977). The direction of effort refers to whether an individual seeks out, approaches, or is attracted to certain situations. Intensity of effort refers to how much effort a person puts into a particular situation (Weinberg & Gould, 2011).

Sports psychologists such as Gill argue that sporting situations are particularly intense and involve extremes of stress, dependency, persistence and fatigue; this is the argument for a sport-specific model of motivation (Gill, 1986).

Sport specific achievement motivation explains motivation in a sport specific context. It is seen as the desire 'to strive for satisfaction when making comparisons with some standard of excellence in the presence of evaluative others in sport'. This desire to reach satisfaction is called competitiveness. The standards of excellence can be wins [win orientation] or improvements in personal bests [goal orientation]. Diane Gill and Thomas Deeter (1988) designed the Sports Orientation Questionnaire (SOQ) to measure sport-specific motivation.

Sport orientation is the tendency to take part in competitions or winning competitions. Based on this tendency, athletes set goals for competitions and try to attain their goals. Competitiveness refers to the joy gained by the individual from competing. A competitive person loves to compete and seeks out competitions to take part in, not necessarily with an emphasis on winning, whereas winning orientation shows the importance of winning to the individual, whereas those competitors who are "winning oriented" tend to compare their performance with the performance of others. Finally, goal orientation is the importance of personal goals to a person. Goal oriented individuals focus on setting and achieving personal goals and assess their success in relation to their own abilities. In other words, they compete with their own personal standards (Gill & Deeter, 1988). Accordingly, it seems that an examination of the relationship between the perceived social support of coaches and the sports achievement of athletes is a worthy area of investigation in the present context.

Conversely, the social support of coaches may also be related to sport commitment. Wilson, Wilson, Rodgers, Carpenter, Hall, Hardy and Fraser, (2004) stated that commitment refers to the psychological attitude and condition used to describe the tendency of people to demonstrate some specific behaviours. In fact, this concept reflects the perseverance and stability of people for continued participation in some specific behaviours. Sousa, Torregrosa, Vilderch, Villamarin and Cruz (2007) approached the concept from a different point of view and stated that commitment is a sense of dependence and attachment to a specific behaviour. Leo, Sanchez, Sanchez, Amado and Calvo (2009) showed that the role of coaches is critical in the development of satisfactory sport commitment. Zardoshtian, Ahmadi, and Azadi (2012) carried out a study to determine the relationship between the autonomy-supportive behaviour of coaches and the sport commitment and motivation of female players in the premier league of handball. Their findings showed that the relationship between autonomy-supportive behaviour and intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and sport commitment of players was positively significant. Moreover, it was found that there was a negative significant relationship between lack of motivation in players and autonomy-supportive behaviour. In addition, results of multivariate regression analysis revealed that autonomy-supportive behaviour can be used to predict the sport commitment and motivation of players.

## Aims of the present study

One of the objectives of this study was to assess the relationship between social support of coaches and sport achievement for male and female skaters. Since most studies have solely examined the relationship between social support and intrinsic motivation and lack of motivation, examination of the relationship between social support of coaches and sport motivation can improve our knowledge of the impact of social support on other forms of motivation. Another objective was to examine the relationship between social support and sport commitment. Some studies have reported a positive correlation between social support of coaches for autonomy and sport commitment (Zardoshtian et al; 2012). However, it has been noted that both the gender of the individual and the gender of the coach/teacher could affect the above relationships. For example, Wigglesworth, Young, Medic and Grove (2012) reported significant differences in sport commitment and its determinants between boy and girl swimmers, with personal investment and enjoyment being significant predictors. Most importantly Nicaise, Bois, Fairclough, Amorose and Cogérino (2007) reported that physical education teachers (PE) tend to interact verbally and non-verbally more frequently with boys than girls, and similarly boys and girls had different perceived feedback from their PE teachers depending on their gender. Such considerations thus calls into question whether research on issues related to perceived coaching behaviour and sport commitment and motivation would yield different results if the athletes were coached by the same gender only. In Iran it is an expected practice that teenage girls (and women) have females as their coach and boys (and men) have predominantly male coaches. Thus another main aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between perceived coaches' social support and achievements motivation and sport commitment for male and female skaters when coached entirely by the same gender. If the result of the present study could be generalised to previously reported studies of this nature (e.g. Zardoshtian, et al; 2012) there should be significant positive relationships between social support and achievement motivation and sport commitment for both male and female participants. However, of further interest in the present study is i) if there will be gender differences in the mean ratings for each component of the questionnaires used in the study, considering the respondents were only coached in their sporting career by the same gender, ii) if the predictors of sporting commitment and achievement motivation would be different for male and female skaters considering the respondents were only coached in their sporting career by the same gender.

## Method

*Participants.* Overall 94 (42 male and 52 female) skaters aged between 13 and 18 years were selected randomly and employed in this study. They were all members of the semi-professional and professional skating teams of the city of Isfahan.

*Materials.* The following instruments were used in this research: Interpersonal Behaviours Scale (IBS) by Pelletier et al. (2001); Sport Orientation Questionnaire (SOQ) by Gill and Deeter (1988); and Sport Commitment Model (SCM) Scale by Scanlan et al. (1993).

The interpersonal Behaviours Scale (IBS), which was developed by Pelletier et al. (2001), was used to assess the levels of social support. This scale consists of 12 questions and the following three components: autonomy support, competence support and relatedness support. This scale was formulated based on the five-point Likert scale including the following options: 1) Never, 2) Rarely, 3) Sometimes, 4) Often, 5) Always. Mazyari (2012) reports that

the face validity of the questionnaire was approved by sport management Iranian experts with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.78. In addition, Kashef, Maziyari, and Amiri (2012) obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.72, 0.77 and 0.73 for the autonomy support, competence support and relatedness support subscales, respectively.

The Sport Orientation Questionnaire (SOQ) was used to measure achievement motivation. This questionnaire is composed of 25 questions and the following three subscales: competitiveness, winning orientation and goal orientation, it is based on a five-point Likert scale varying from Fully agree (5) to Fully disagree (1). The competitiveness subscale includes 13 questions with the minimum score being zero and the maximum being 65. This subscale reflects the person's feeling for competing with others. The winning orientation subscale includes 6 questions with the minimum and maximum scores being zero and 30, respectively. This subscale shows the person's feelings for satisfactory sports performance. By summing up the scores of these three subscales it is possible to calculate the individual's sport achievement motivation. In a study by Marsh (1994), the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.90, 0.80 and 0.90 were obtained for competitiveness, winning orientation and goal orientation, respectively. In Iran, Bahram, Shafizadeh, Khalaji and Sanatkaran (2002) carried out a study in which they approved the reliability and validity of this questionnaire whereby the construct validity of the questionnaire was confirmed via confirmatory factor analysis. Moreover, the internal consistency and temporal consistency of the questionnaire were also confirmed employing the Cronbach's alpha method and re-test method, respectively. The temporal reliability values obtained for sport orientation, competitiveness, winning orientation and goal orientation were 0.90, 0.93, 0.76 and 0.63, respectively. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire were 0.89, 0.86, 0.74 and 0.61 for sport orientation, competitiveness, winning orientation and goal orientation, respectively (Bahram et al., 2002).

The sport commitment questionnaire is a self-assessment scale composed of five components. This questionnaire reflects the person's tendency to keep participating in sport activities. The indices covered in this questionnaire include sport enjoyment, involvement alternatives, personal investments, social constraints and involvement opportunities. The statements for each index are in the form of questions or predictive sentences.

In 1993, Scanlan et al. employed several samples comprised of different gender, race and age (varying between 9 to 20 years) to assess the reliability and validity of the sport commitment model. In general, results of separate studies showed that the scale used to assess the sport commitment model was reliable (Scanlan et al., 1993). The reliability and validity of this questionnaire was confirmed by Mir Hussein, Hadavi and Mozafari (2012) for the Iranian population.

*Procedure.* Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Islamic Azad University in Isfahan. Data was collected through responses provided to the research questionnaires. To this end, the researcher visited the respondents individually and explained to them the research objectives and nature of the questionnaires. The researcher then asked them to fully read the questionnaires and answer by marking one of the answers.



## Results

Results of Pearson's correlation coefficient conducted between social support and the two other measures, namely achievement motivation and sport commitment, are shown in table 1.

**Table 1.** Pearson's Correlations between Social support with Achievement motivation and sport commitment as per male and female participants in the study

<i>Social support</i>	Male	Female
Achievement motivation	0.490**	0.467**
Sport commitment	0.543**	0.455**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level

As can be seen in table 1, significant positive relationships exist between social support and achievement motivation and sport commitment for both male and female participants in the study.

The mean ratings, together with the corresponding standard deviations as per male and female participants for all the questionnaires used in the present study, are shown in table 2.

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviations (in brackets) as per male and female participants in the present study

<i>Questionnaires</i>	Male	Female
Autonomy support	2.70 (0.59)	3.16 (0.61)
Competence support	2.88 (0.51)	3.17 (0.46)
Social support	2.99 (0.43)	3.22 (0.56)
Achievement motivation	4.09 (0.48)	4.38 (0.46)
Sport commitment	4.04 (0.50)	4.37 (0.46)

As can be seen in table 2, there are overwhelmingly higher ratings (more positive) to all questionnaires used in the present study, namely autonomy support, competence support, social support, achievement motivation and sport commitment by the female participants.

Indeed independent samples t-test shows statistically significant differences for gender ratings as follows: for autonomy support  $t(92) = 3.65$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ , for competence support,  $t(90) = 2.79$   $p < 0.006$ , for relatedness support,  $t(91) = 3.24$ ,  $p < 0.002$ , for social support,  $t(92) =$

2.2,  $p < 0.03$ , for achievement motivation  $t(92) = 2.98$ ,  $p < 0.004$  and for sport commitment  $t(92) = 3.25$ ,  $p < 0.002$ .

Results of multiple regression analyses for sport achievement motivation and sport commitment based on perceived coaching support are shown in tables 3, 4, 5 and 6.

As can be seen in table 3, amongst the variables examined in the regression analysis, relatedness support is the best predictor of achievement motivation for male participants.

**Table 3.** Results of multivariate regression analysis for predicting achievement motivation (sport orientation questionnaire) based on social support components for male participants

<i>Statistic/Variables</i>	$\beta$	t	P
Autonomy support	.045	.254	.801
Competence support	-.249	-1.382	.175
Relatedness support	.352	2.035	.049

As can be seen in table 4, none of the variables reached statistical significance in the analysis for female participants.

**Table 4.** Results of multivariate regression analysis for predicting achievement motivation (sport orientation questionnaire) based on social support components for female participants

<i>Statistic/Variables</i>	$\beta$	t	P
Autonomy support	.320	1.811	.077
Competence support	-.154	-.961	.341
Relatedness support	.177	.939	.353

As can be seen in table 5, amongst the variables examined in the regression analysis, autonomy support is the best predictor of sport commitment for females.

**Table 5.** Results of multivariate regression analysis for predicting sport commitment based on social support components for female participants

<i>Statistic/Variables</i>	$\beta$	t	P
Autonomy support	.344	1.988	.053
Competence support	-.225	-1.437	.157
Relatedness support	.210	1.132	.263

As can be seen in table 6, among the variables examined in the regression analysis, relatedness support is the best predictor of sport commitment for male participants.

**Table 6.** Results of multivariate regression analysis for predicting sport commitment based on social support components for male participants

<i>Statistic/Variables</i>	$\beta$	t	P
Autonomy support	.075	.428	.671
Competence support	-.263	-1.473	.149
Relatedness support	.368	2.144	.039

## Discussion

One aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between perceived social support of coaches and two other measures, namely sport achievement motivation and sport commitment. A positive significant correlation was found between social support and sport achievement motivation for both male and female skaters in Iran. This is in line with previous studies of this nature involving different populations and sports. For example, Olympiou, Jowet and Duda (2008) examined the dual psychological relationship between coaches and athletes as well as the relationship between sport climate of sport teams and coaches and athletes. These researchers found that the relationship between coaches and athletes influences the achievement motivation of athletes in sport teams. Maziyari (2012) also carried out a study to investigate the relationship between the social support of physical education teachers and the lack of motivation of students for taking part in physical education activities in schools. He concluded that there is a negative significant relationship between lack of motivation and social support. Results of the research by Hassandra, Goudas and Chroni (2003) showed that social factors and personal differences (such as perception of competence and autonomy) influence intrinsic motivation. Hagggar, Chatzisarantis and Harris (2006) also studied the effect of autonomy-supportive behaviour of coaches on the motivation of students attending a physical education course, they concluded that autonomy-supportive behaviour influences the motivation of students attending such courses. Geme (2010) also found that there is a positive significant correlation between the autonomy-supportive behaviour of



coaches and motivation of participants. In their study, Pelletier et al. (2001) stated that coaches who provide more support for autonomy can train athletes equipped with higher levels of intrinsic motivation. A study by MacDonald (2010) also revealed that the behaviour of coaches influences the motivation of sport teams. He also concluded that the motivation-supportive behaviour of coaches adds to the achievement motivation of athletes. Therefore, results of the present study comply with results of the aforementioned studies. Apparently, coaches can increase achievement motivation by creating a proper motivational climate and providing social support, which includes the following components: encouraging athletes to use their maximum potential; creating opportunities for creativity and participation of athletes in decision making; establishing friendly intimate relationships; and comparing the achievement made by each player against the player's potentials.

Findings of this study also revealed a positive significant relationship between social support of coaches and sport commitment for both male and female skaters. Similarly previous studies, such as the one by Norouzi Seyyed Husseini, Kuzehchian, Ihsani, Feyz Asgari, and Norouzi Seyyed Husseini (2012), had examined the relationship between autonomy-supportive behaviour of coaches and sport commitment of Iranian elite swordsmen. Results of these studies revealed that coaching behaviour directly influences the motivation, self-perception, success perception, and sport commitment of athletes. Zardoshtian et al. (2012) also assessed the relationship between autonomy-supportive behaviour and coaches with intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and the sport commitment of players, they found this relationship to be positive and significant. Norouzi Seyyed Husseini, Fathi, and Sadeqi Boroujerdi (2012) carried out a study to examine the effect of the leadership behaviour of coaches on sport commitment, achievement motivation and satisfaction of premier league Iranian judo athletes. They found that the leadership behaviour of coaches influences sport commitment and achievement motivation of athletes. Hence, it seems that coaches can reinforce the sport commitment of athletes by establishing intimate human relationships with them, properly reacting to the satisfactory behaviour of athletes (so that they can feel competent) and providing them with freedom of choice. Players with satisfactory sport commitment tend to commit to certain goals and tasks and take part in activities that lead to their goals and fulfillment.

### *Gender differences in ratings*

Another aim of the present study was to see if indeed the ratings given for the 3 Psychometric measures taken are different between genders, given the fact that all skaters were coached by the same gender. Previous research had shown differences in ratings between genders. For example, males consistently scored higher on competitiveness, perceptions of enjoyment, benefits, and perceived obligation win orientation than females did and reported more competitive activities. However, females were equally high on non-competitive achievement orientation and were just as likely as males to report non-competitive sport activities and non-sport achievement interests (Gill, 1988, Weiss & Halupnik 2013). However, there are also studies suggesting that there may be a gender preference for a male or a female coach amongst athletes, hence affecting the relationship effectiveness between athletes and coaches (Lirgg et al; 1994, Medwechuk & Crossman, 1994, Frey et al; 2006). The present results would be a test of how athletes' responses to the measurers of perceived coaching and sport commitment and sport motivation may differ between genders in view of the fact that all respondents have been coached by the same gender. The results showed an overwhelming

significant difference between genders, with females showing more positive ratings for items such as "my PE teacher encourages me to be myself," "the feedback that I get from my PE teacher makes me feel confident in my ability to learn in PE" and "I feel that my PE teacher sincerely cares about me". Females also showed more positive ratings on social support, competing and sport commitment than their male counterparts. Considering the female-female coaching/athlete pairings such findings thus give rise to the benefits of female coaches and arguably, in particular, that not all sports participants like to be coached by men. Therefore by bringing more women into the coaching domain it may very well increase the number of participants into the sport.

#### *Predictors of sport commitment and sport achievement motivation*

Results of regression analyses conducted separately for males and females showed that relatedness support is the strongest predictor for sport achievement motivation and commitment for males, whereas autonomy support was the strongest predictor for sport commitment amongst females. Hence, it seems that skating coaches can increase the achievement motivation and sport commitment of adolescent skaters by establishing intimate positive relationships with their charges. Jowett, Paull and Pensgaard (2005) introduced the notion of the coach-athlete relationship as an important foundation for successful coaching. According to these researchers, the nature of this relationship determines the motivation, satisfaction, commitment, self-confidence and performance of athletes. Autonomy support and competence support are the two components that cannot be considered predictors of social support. Professional and semi-professional athletes may first feel competent in order to gain professional skills, therefore coaches' support for athletes' competence is not a significant predictor of achievement motivation and commitment. In future studies, it is recommended to assess the capability of social support components for predicting achievement motivation and sport commitment in relation to skills, this way it is possible to discuss these effects based on more researched evidence. Furthermore, as reported by Wilson, Williams, Evans, Mixon and Rheume (2005) boys give more favourable ratings to sporting activities such as basketball, and football whilst girls favour sports such swimming and roller skating. Thus it is possible that the nature of sporting activity in relation to gender preference may have an effect on the pattern of results reported here.

#### *Summary*

In summary, the present results generalised a positive significant correlation between social support of coaches and athletes' sport commitment and achievement motivation for both male and female Iranian skaters. However, more important in this investigation was the fact that significant relationships were reported considering that all the skaters in the study had predominantly been coached by the same gender. More significantly, it was found that females were indeed reporting significantly more positive ratings to all the measures taken than male athletes. This finding seems to be a particularly encouraging outcome for the role that female coaches may play in a supporting role in sporting activities.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors have not declared any conflicts of interest.

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