



## The role of coaches' passion and athletes' motivation in the prediction of change-oriented feedback quality and quantity



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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** The provision of an autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback has been identified as a crucial coaching behaviour that is beneficial for athletes' phenomenological experience and performance. Based on past research that focused on the determinants of other autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours, the present study investigates coaches' passion toward coaching and coaches' perceptions of their athletes' motivation as potential determinants of the quality (i.e., the extent to which it is autonomy-supportive) and quantity of the change-oriented feedback that coaches provide.

**Design:** Quantitative cross-sectional study using a dyadic approach.

**Methods:** In total, 280 athletes and 48 coaches participated in this study. Coaches and athletes both filled out a questionnaire after a training session. Coaches reported their passion and evaluated their athletes' motivation, whereas the provision of feedback was assessed by athletes. HLM analyses were used to take into consideration the hierarchical structure of the data.

**Results:** HLM analyses showed that only obsessive passion was a significant predictor of change-oriented feedback quality. The more coaches reported having an obsessive passion toward coaching, the less their change-oriented feedback was autonomy supportive. Results pertaining to feedback quantity showed that the more coaches were obsessively passionate and the more they perceived their athletes as being motivated, the more they gave change-oriented feedback. In contrast, when controlling for athletes' age and gender, the more coaches were harmoniously passionate, the less change-oriented feedback they tended to give.

**Conclusions:** Results are discussed in light of their contribution to the passion, self-fulfilling prophecies and feedback literature.

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Coaches are constantly looking for ways to improve their athletes' performance, motivation and well-being. Past literature confirms that specific coaching behaviours can have important positive (or negative) consequences on athletes' phenomenological experience and performance (e.g., [Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2008](#); [Beauchamp, Halliwell, Fournier, & Koestner, 1996](#); [Blanchard, Amiot, Perreault, Vallerand, & Provencher, 2009](#); [Mageau & Vallerand, 2003](#); [Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Brière, 2001](#); [Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004](#); [Smith & Smoll, 1996](#)). Recently, a new coaching behaviour has been identified as being beneficial for athletes: the provision of change-oriented feedback

that supports athletes' autonomy ([Carpentier & Mageau, 2013](#); [Mouratidis, Lens, & Vansteenkiste, 2010](#)).

Despite the benefits associated with an autonomy-supportive feedback, little is known about what can facilitate or impede the provision of such feedback. The goal of the present study is thus to investigate the determinants of the provision of an autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback. Recent research has shown that motivational forces within both coaches and athletes can influence coaches' adoption of other autonomy-supportive behaviours (i.e., provide choice and rationales, acknowledge feelings; [Mageau & Vallerand, 2003](#)). More specifically, coaches' passion and athletes' motivation have recently been identified as important determinants of coaches' behaviours ([Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, & Carbonneau, 2011](#); [Rocchi, Pelletier, & Couture, 2013](#); [Sarrazin, Tessier, Pelletier, Trouilloud, & Chanal, 2006](#); [Sarrazin, Trouilloud, Tessier, Chanal, & Bois, 2005](#)). The present research draws on this research and investigates coaches' passion toward coaching and

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coaches' perceptions of their athletes' motivation as potential determinants of the quality (i.e., autonomy-supportive vs. controlling) and quantity (i.e., frequency without specifying quality) of change-oriented feedback.

### Change-oriented feedback

In the context of hierarchical relationships, such as the relationship between a coach and an athlete, feedback is defined as information conveyed to athletes about the extent to which their behaviours and/or performance correspond to expectations (Cusella, 1987; Hein & Koka, 2007). More specifically, while promotion-oriented feedback aims at confirming and promoting desirable behaviours (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; Latting, 1992), change-oriented feedback indicates that performance is inadequate and/or that behaviours need to be modified in order to eventually achieve athletes' goals (Bloom & Hautaluoma, 1987; Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; Cusella, 1987). Studying change-oriented feedback is crucial because, when it is given optimally, it serves two important functions (Weinberg & Gould, 2011): it *motivates* athletes by increasing their desire to perform better in the future, and it *guides* them by helping them focus on the changes they need to implement if they wish to improve.

Past studies on change-oriented feedback in various life domains have shown that such feedback is sometimes linked to motivation and performance improvements (Cusella, 1987; Ilgen & Davis, 2000; Latting, 1992; London, 1997), but that it can also be associated with decreased levels of performance, motivation and self-esteem, impaired coach–athlete relationship, and greater feelings of incompetence and helplessness (Baron, 1988; Fisher, 1979; Jussim, Soffin, Brown, Ley, & Kohlhepp, 1992; Latting, 1992; Mikulincer, 1988; Sansone, 1989; Tata, 2002; Wortman & Brehm, 1975). Recent findings in the sport domain suggest that these conflicting findings may be explained by the fact that the quality of the provided feedback was not evaluated in these studies. When change-oriented feedback quality is assessed in addition to its quantity, providing a high quality change-oriented feedback is consistently linked to positive athletes' outcomes (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; Mouratidis et al., 2010).

As it is the case for numerous coaching behaviours, to be of high quality, change-oriented feedback must be autonomy supportive (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; Mouratidis et al., 2010). Indeed, according to self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), humans' psychological health and optimal functioning are facilitated by interpersonal contexts that support the basic psychological need for autonomy, i.e., the universal desire to feel that one is at the origin of one's actions and that one's actions are concordant with one's values. Specific autonomy-supportive behaviours adopted by coaches have been identified, such as providing choice within specific rules and limits, acknowledging athletes' feelings, giving a rationale for tasks and limits or providing athletes with opportunities for initiative taking and independent work (see Mageau & Vallerand, 2003, for a review). These behaviours have in turn been linked to many positive consequences for athletes such as more self-determined motivation, higher self-esteem and greater well-being (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Gagné, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003; Quested & Duda, 2010; Reinboth et al., 2004).

Recent research has shown that autonomy-supportive coaches also provide change-oriented feedback differently than more controlling coaches (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; Mouratidis et al., 2010). Specifically, Carpentier and Mageau (2013) showed that coaches characterized by the classic autonomy-supportive behaviours (i.e., those who provide choice and rationales and who acknowledge their athletes' feelings) also provide change-oriented

feedback that is 1) empathic, 2) accompanied by choices of possible solutions to correct the problem, 3) based on clear and attainable objectives known to athletes, 4) free from person-related statements, 5) paired with tips, and 6) given in a considerate tone of voice. Importantly, results also showed that the more coaches provide feedback characterized by these six dimensions, the more their athletes report high perceptions of autonomy (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013), confirming that this type of change-oriented feedback is indeed more autonomy supportive.

Autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback has been linked to positive consequences above and beyond what can be explained by the adoption of other autonomy-supportive behaviours (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013), which confirms that providing change-oriented feedback is a distinct and crucial autonomy-supportive behaviour. Athletes who receive a more autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback are more motivated, report higher levels of well-being and self-esteem and a greater satisfaction of their basic psychological needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy, and experience less negative affect and amotivation (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013; Mouratidis et al., 2010). Results also showed that athletes' performance is positively linked to receiving a more autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013).

Given the pivotal role of an autonomy-supportive change-oriented feedback in athletes' optimal functioning, it is imperative to identify the factors that facilitate or impede the provision of such feedback. Recent studies have shown that the type of passion that coaches have toward coaching can predict the adoption of other autonomy-supportive coaching behaviours (Lafrenière et al., 2011). In light of these findings, it is posited that coaches' passion may also influence their provision of change-oriented feedback.

### The concept of passion toward an activity

For many years, psychologists interested by the concept of passion focused mainly on passion in romantic relationships (e.g., Hatfield & Walster, 1978). When discussing an intense commitment to an activity, many researchers have preferred the use of concepts such as personal interests (e.g., Krapp, 2002), serious play (e.g., Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 1993), vital engagement (e.g., Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003), personal expressiveness (Waterman, 2004), or undivided activity (Dewey, 1913). Despite their different names, all those concepts have in common an engagement toward an activity, an emotional component attached to the activity, and some kind of valuing of the activity. However, these constructs are not sufficient to adequately define passion toward an activity because they only apply to positive types of sustained engagement whereas passion has also often been portrayed as a negative force. Indeed, philosophers such as Spinoza (e.g., Spinoza, 1632–1677) argued that passion entails a loss of reason and a suffering. Research on intense involvement (e.g., Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000; Glasser, 1976; Sacks & Sachs, 1981) also suggested the presence of both a proactive and reactive form of activity engagement.

Vallerand et al.'s (2003) dualistic model of passion best captures the nature of passion by proposing both a harmonious passion, based on previous definitions of positive forms of sustained engagement (Dewey, 1913; Krapp, 2002; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 1993; Waterman, 2004), and an obsessive type of passion, which represents a more reactive form of activity engagement. Within this model, passion is defined as a strong inclination toward an activity that one finds important, likes (or even loves), and to which one devotes a significant amount of time and energy. Vallerand et al. (2003) propose that activities are passionate when they acquire

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