



## Passion for coaching and the quality of the coach–athlete relationship: The mediating role of coaching behaviors

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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Using the Dualistic Model of Passion [Vallerand et al. (2003). Les passions de l'âme: on obsessive and harmonious passion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85, 756–767], this study examined the role of coaches' passion for coaching in athletes' perceptions of the quality of the coach–athlete relationship. Moreover, we hypothesized that coaches' harmonious and obsessive passion toward coaching should shape the manner they interact with their athletes that should, in turn, influence how athletes perceive relationship quality.

**Method:** Participants were 103 coach–athlete dyads engaged in one of several sports (e.g., gymnastics, volleyball, soccer). They completed self-administered questionnaires independently.

**Results:** Results from structural equation modeling revealed that harmonious passion for coaching positively predicted autonomy-supportive behaviors toward their athletes, while obsessive passion for coaching positively predicted controlling behaviors. Moreover, autonomy-supportive behaviors predicted high quality coach–athlete relationships as perceived by athletes that, in turn, positively predicted athletes' general happiness.

**Conclusions:** This study provides insights into the psychological factors that allow coaches to instigate high quality relationships with their athletes and the impact of the relationship on athletes' general happiness. Future research directions are discussed in light of the Dualistic Model of Passion and the coach–athlete relationship.

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Recently, the coach–athlete relationship has attracted growing attention from sport psychologists (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Wylleman, 2006; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2003; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Jowett, 2006). This surge of research may be due to the recognition that the coach–athlete relationship is a crucial antecedent of athletes' optimal functioning (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). It thus becomes important to identify the psychological factors that allow coaches to develop high quality relationships with their athletes. It is posited that passion represents such a psychological factor. Indeed, if coaches are passionate toward coaching, this could be contributing to high quality coach–athlete relationships given that they should be entirely devoted to their athletes. Thus, the aim of this paper was to

investigate the role of coaches' passion in the quality of the coach–athlete relationship and athletes' well-being.

### The dualistic model of passion

#### The concept of passion

Vallerand and colleagues (Vallerand, 2008, 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003) have recently proposed a Dualistic Model of Passion wherein passion is defined as a strong inclination toward a self-defining activity that one loves, finds important, and invests a significant amount of time and energy. The Dualistic Model of Passion further proposed that there exist two distinct types of passion, harmonious and obsessive, which can be differentiated in terms of how the passionate activity has been internalized into one's identity. Past research has shown that values and regulations concerning non-interesting activities can be internalized in either an autonomous or a controlled fashion (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994). Along the same vein, Vallerand et al. (2003) proposed that these two internalization processes could occur with interesting and loved

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activities. Moreover, those divergent internalization processes should determine the type of passion that will be held toward the activity. Harmonious passion refers to a strong desire to engage freely in the activity that one loves and results from an autonomous internalization of the activity into the person's identity. This process occurs when individuals have willingly accepted the activity as important for them without any contingencies attached to it. The activity is thus part of an integrated self-structure (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). In such a case, the activity occupies a significant but not overpowering space in the person's identity and is in harmony with other aspects of the person's life. Consequently, harmonious passion for an activity should not instigate conflict with one's other life domains. Moreover, to the extent that they are harmoniously passionate, individuals should show more openness and less defensiveness to what is occurring in the activity (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). Thus, people with a harmonious passion should experience positive outcomes during activity engagement (e.g., positive affect, concentration, flow).

Conversely, obsessive passion results from a controlled internalization of the activity into one's identity. This process originates from intrapersonal and/or interpersonal pressure either because particular contingencies are attached to the activity such as self-esteem, or because the excitement derived from activity engagement becomes uncontrollable. While this phenomenon leads the activity to be part of the person's identity, individuals with a predominant obsessive passion come to develop ego-invested self-structures toward the passionate activity (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). Thus, to the extent that activity engagement provides ego-affirming opportunities, individuals with an obsessive passion will engage in the activity with enthusiasm and strong interest. However, individuals with an obsessive passion do not experience their activity open-mindedly but mainly focus on contingency-relevant information and events. Consequently, obsessive passion for an activity forces individuals to engage in the passionate activity in a rigid and narrow-minded manner that is detrimental to positive experiences (e.g., negative affect, rumination). Moreover, when an activity is valued because it serves self-protective purposes, it is not easily put aside. Individuals with an obsessive passion thus experience an uncontrollable urge to engage in their activity; their passion must run its course as people come to be dependent on it. As a result, individuals with a predominant obsessive passion run the risk of experiencing conflict with other life domains and negative consequences during and after engagement in the passionate activity.

Research has provided empirical support for the passion conceptualization. Results from exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses supported the two-factor structure of the Passion Scale (e.g., Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 1; Vallerand, Rousseau, Grouzet, Dumais, & Grenier, 2006, Study 1). Furthermore, harmonious and obsessive passion have been found to be positively correlated with measures of activity valuation and of the activity being perceived as a passion. However, the two types of passion have been found to lead to different predictions with respect to various outcomes (Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 1). Harmonious passion was positively correlated with general positive affect and psychological adjustment indices (Philippe, Vallerand, & Lavigne, 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 2; Vallerand et al., 2006, Study 3) and positively associated with positive emotions and flow during activity engagement (Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lorimer, 2008, Study 2; Mageau, Vallerand, Rousseau, Ratelle, & Provencher, 2005; Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 1; Vallerand et al., 2006, Study 2). On the other hand, obsessive passion has been found to be either negatively related or unrelated to indices of psychological adjustment (Lafrenière, Vallerand, Donahue, & Lavigne, 2009; Vallerand et al., 2006, Studies 3) and positively correlated with negative

affect during activity engagement (Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 1; Vallerand et al., 2006, Study 2).

### *Passion and interpersonal relationships*

The Dualistic Model of Passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) posits that having an obsessive passion toward an activity should lead to interpersonal conflict in other life domains, whereas this should not be the case for harmonious passion. Several studies have provided support for this hypothesis. For instance, Séguin-Lévesque, Laliberté, Pelletier, Vallerand, and Blanchard (2003) showed that controlling for the amount of time that individuals engaged in the Internet, obsessive passion for the Internet positively predicted conflict with couple relationship, while harmonious passion was negatively related to conflict. Similarly, Vallerand et al. (2008, Study 3) showed that obsessive passion for being a soccer fan predicted conflict with one's romantic relationship that, in turn, predicted lower quality relationships. Conversely, harmonious passion for being a soccer fan was unrelated to conflict with one's relationship.

The above findings provide support for the Dualistic Model of Passion regarding the role of passion in interpersonal relationships experienced outside the passionate activity. Lafrenière et al. (2008) have addressed whether one's passion can influence relationships within the purview of the passionate activity. In Study 1, it was found that athletes' harmonious passion toward sport positively predicted high quality relationships with one's coach. On the other hand, athletes' obsessive passion was unrelated to various indices of relationship satisfaction with their coach. In addition, the results of Study 2, conducted with coaches, replicated Study 1's findings. Furthermore, it was found that coaches' harmonious passion toward coaching positively predicted the quality of the relationship via positive emotions experienced while coaching. Moreover, Philippe, Vallerand, Houffort, Lavigne, and Donahue (2010) have replicated the findings of Lafrenière et al. (2008) with prospective designs and with objective ratings of interpersonal relationships quality. Furthermore, Philippe et al. (2010) demonstrated the negative mediating role of negative emotions between obsessive passion and the quality of interpersonal relationships. In sum, past research demonstrated that passion matters with respect to the quality of relationships within the purview of the passionate activity with harmonious passion predicting better quality relationships than obsessive passion.

### **The coach–athlete relationship**

Over the years, the interpersonal dynamics between coaches and athletes have attracted a steady stream of theoretical and empirical research within sport and exercise psychology literature. Early attempts to conceptualize and measure the interpersonal dynamics between coaches and athletes were marked by their emphasis on coach leadership (Chelladurai, 1990) and coach behaviors (Smoll & Smith, 1989). More recently, attempts to conceptualize and measure the coach–athlete relationship include the application of motivational theoretical approaches (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), a reversal theory framework (Shepherd, Lee, & Kerr, 2006), social exchange theories (Poczwardowski et al., 2003), interdependence theory (Jowett, 2007), and interpersonal theory (Wylleman, 2000). This sustained interest may reflect the importance that has been attached to coach–athlete relationships for effective and successful sports coaching (Lyle, 2002), as well as for athletes' and coaches' well being (e.g., Chelladurai, 1990; Jowett, 2005; Smoll & Smith, 1989). Indeed, coaches' and athletes' reciprocal respect, trust, and communication have been found to be important interpersonal factors that contribute to healthy and

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