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Article

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## Understanding the Coach's Role in Identifying and Meeting the Motivations of Soccer Players

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**Abstract:** The coach plays an important role in the type and quality of motivation exhibited by soccer players. However, limited research exists investigating if a coach is aware of the motivations held by their players. As such this study investigated the motivations of semi-elite soccer players taking part in club coaching sessions and identified if coaches were aware of these motivations. Using a qualitative approach with 21 adult soccer players and two soccer coaches, findings from this study highlight a dissonance is apparent between the coaches understanding of their player's motivational climate and the soccer player's motivation. Although the players express their motivation focused on the development of a collective social identity and the consequence experienced from playing soccer, coaches were unaware of these motivations.

**Keywords:** motivation; coaching practice; self-determination

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### Introduction

Motivation is acknowledged as being the force that triggers an individual to pursue specific behaviors, and multiple social factors existing in sport can have an effect on sports participants' motivation (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). Motivation is classified on a continuum from intrinsic, to extrinsic and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation indicators are commonly viewed as those markers synonymous with proficiency, interest and enjoyment (Deci &

Ryan, 1985). Individuals who are intrinsically motivated engage in specific activities for the pleasure and fun of participation as well as the satisfaction of learning from participating (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Vallerand and Rousseau (2001) expressed that there are three specific types of intrinsic motivation related to sport involvement and motivation. These intrinsic motivational factors are; participation in a stimulating experience, participation to gain knowledge, and participation to achieve things. In contrast extrinsic motivation is created by external sources, such as trophies, fame, money and social approval (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Individuals who are extrinsically motivated act with the enticement to achieve an anticipated palpable return for their participation or to avoid a possible penalty (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan 2000). Meanwhile amotivation is the belief of having no sense of purpose and lacking intent to engage in a particular behavior.

Male and female sports participants have been identified as having different motivations for participation in sport. Female sports participants are more motivated to participate in sport by intrinsic motives rather than extrinsic motives (Deaner, Balish & Lombardo, 2016; Gonçalves, Silva & Cruz, 2007; Holden, Pugh & Schwarz, 2017; Thout & Martin, 1998). As such females are more likely to participate in sport for a desire to socially interact as well as the achievement of learning a new skill and the physical aspect of participating in sport (Kerr, 2019; Alvehus, Boman, Soderlund, Svensson, & Buren, 2014; Kell, 2011). In contrast male sports participants tend to identify that extrinsic factors motivate their participation in sport. Male sports participants identify they are motivated to participate in sport by the potential of achieving greater "status" and the possibility to "show that I am better than others," or the opportunity to "win or defeat the others" (Gonçalves et al., 2007). Therefore, male sports participants can be seen to value the competition offered by sports participation and be said to be motivated by the opportunity to improve and develop performance in sport (Soares, Antunnes & Van Den Tillaar, 2013; Thout & Martin, 1998).

Although much of the research into sport and motivation has used a quantitative methodology and utilized participants from multiple sports including soccer (e.g. Jowett et al., 2017) some research has been carried out specifically on soccer and the motivation of soccer players. Such research has found that players who have a strong level of commitment often display characteristics of being highly intrinsically motivated (Garcia-Mas et al., 2010). Research has also been carried out on the role of the coach and motivation in soccer suggesting that soccer coaches change their behaviors to create 'a less empowering and more disempowering environment in competition compared to in training' (Smith, Quested, Appleton & Duda, 2017 p. 149). As such proposing that coaching behavior in soccer is critical to the experiences of soccer players and their motivation. However, it should be noted that much of the research carried in relation to motivation and soccer has sought to investigate either youth soccer participants (e.g. Forsman et al, 2016; Hendry, Crocker, Williams & Hodges, 2019) or link motivation and burnout (e.g. Fagundes, Noce, Albuquerque, de Andrade & da Costa, 2019; Madigan, Stoeber & Passfield, 2016).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Motivational theories can help to explain the circumstances and conditions that lead to a positive or negative sport experience (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2007) by providing a framework for investigating and understanding the interactions that act on individuals. Self-determination theory (SDT) states that when an individual participates in an activity, the reasons that underpin their decision to participate varies from being internal and incorporated within the individual's self to being related to external outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As the external reasons for participation become internalized, they become

consistent with the values held by the individual resulting in a greater chance that the individual will become intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT identifies three universal, innate and psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness. Competence focuses on the desire of individuals to successfully interact with their environment and develop desired outcomes. Competence allows an individual to believe that they can succeed in a specific environment or situation. Within a sport context competence is extensively viewed as being central to the expression of motivation (Reinboth & Duda, 2006). Meanwhile autonomy is the universal urge to be in control of the course of one's own life (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and relatedness is the universal desire to interact and have close, caring relationships with others. Within sport relatedness can be discussed as the sense of belonging experienced by being a part of a team and the connection experienced when engaging in shared experiences with others (Vallerand & Losier, 1999). The essential principle of SDT is that humans fundamentally and inherently are motivated by activities which allow them to satisfy the three needs of competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As such the three needs enable the adoption of behaviors and actions that allow for their fulfilment. Individuals who experience higher levels of fulfilment of these three fundamental needs express greater self-determined forms of regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT has been successfully applied to a wide variety of contexts, including sport (Vallerand, Deci & Ryan, 1987), to explain the 'why' of behavior. The relationships that are outlined in SDT suggest a player's basic psychological needs can be promoted and developed by various social conditions including specific coaching behaviors (Alvarez, Balaguer, Castillo & Duda, 2009). As such, all three psychological needs are positively associated with a sports coach displaying behaviors such as provision of choice, acknowledgement of individuals feelings and perspectives, as well as providing opportunities for initiative taking (Adie et al., 2008; Balaguer, Castillo, Cuevas & Atienza, 2018). However, it has been highlighted that a motivational climate that does not value cooperation and instead promotes competition and comparison, may undermine the development of the three human needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, and as such the self-determination of individuals may be adversely affected (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999).

A coach has a key role in influencing the psychological experiences sports participants gain from playing sport and the influence of the coach is one of the most important factors in sports participants experiences of sport (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). A player's psychological needs have been seen to be positively influenced by specific coaching behaviors that have been collated and categorized as autonomy supportive coaching (Amorose & Horn, 2001). The different elements of autonomy-supportive coaching have been identified as (a) the coach providing opportunities for players to take the initiative, (b) the coach providing players with choice and decisions, (c) the expression of concern for the player both in competition and training and away from competition and training by the coach, (d) provision by the coach to their players of a justification for their actions and behaviors, (e) use of a democratic leadership style by the coach (f) provision of feedback that is constructive and helpful, (g) development of a sports participation environment that is task-oriented (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

It has been recognized that the role of a coach is significant in the development of soccer players through the organization and coordination of the playing and training environment, regardless of the age and ability level of players or the competitive level of soccer teams (Amorose, 2007; Cushion, 2010; Cushion, Ford & Williams 2012). However, despite this recognition of the importance of the role of the coach, Partington and Cushion (2013) carried out research with elite soccer coaches identifying 'The coaches...

demonstrated low self-awareness about their behavior' (Partington & Cushion, 2013, p.381). This highlights that coaches may not be aware of what they do even if they are aware of the importance of their role as a coach. Coaching behavior is understood to be 'the pedagogical strategies used by coaching practitioners within the practice environment' (Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002 p. 184). With only a limited understanding of their coaching behaviors, practices planned and delivered by coaches are often carried out that are contra to the philosophies of the coach (Partington & Cushion, 2019; Partington & Cushion 2013). However, despite this conflict in the intended coaching behaviors of a coach and the behaviors displayed, research has established the link between the motivation that is experienced by a sports participant and a sports coach's behavior (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Such research has identified that player's basic psychological needs and motivation can be developed by the management of numerous social conditions by a coach including the use of specific coaching behaviors. However, further research is required into the motivation of soccer players and the role of the coach in the management of the environment in which soccer takes place. To this end, the current study had two aims; A) to identify semi-elite soccer players motivation for attending and participating in club coaching sessions. B) to assess if soccer coaches are aware of the motivation their players have to play soccer and investigate the way coaches manage coaching sessions to meet the motivations of their players.

## **Procedures**

### **Setting and Participants**

For the purposes of this study semi-elite clubs were classified as those semi-professional clubs who participated in the tier below the top standard possible in their sport i.e. elite clubs were deemed to be those who play in the top national league and semi-elite at the level just below this (Swann, Moran & Piggott., 2015). As such purposeful sampling was used to identify semi-elite soccer clubs in the North West of England who met the following criteria. The inclusion criteria for the clubs was (a) involvement in semi-elite adult soccer (b) head coach has been in post for minimum of 18 months (c) minimum of 10 and maximum of 12 contact hours of coaching and match play per week for players and coaches. This selection criteria allowed the coaches and players to discuss common experiences within the club and also meant that the clubs who were recruited played at a comparative level across male and female soccer. The female club in this study participated in step 3 of English women's soccer pyramid and the male club participated in step 7 of the English Football League and as such are classified as semi-elite when using Swann et al., (2015) categorization.

The coaches were required to work with the first team and be the lead coach while the players were required to have been involved in the first team for 18 months. Following initial discussions with eight football clubs, two clubs, 1 male and 1 female club, were selected to participate in the study. From the two participant clubs 21 adult soccer players and two soccer coaches in total took part. The 21 players were randomly selected from the 39 players in the two squads (20 male players and 19 female players made up the two squads of players). The random selection took place by the lead researcher, following the 29 players in both squads being presented with information on the study and expressing their interest in being involved with the research. The 21 players selected represented a selection of playing positions. 10 male soccer players and 11 female soccer players ranging from 17 to 32 years old ( $M = 23$ ) were interviewed, all players competed for the clubs first team. Both

coaches (1 male / 1 female) were the lead coach for their club and played an active role in planning and delivering club coaching sessions that took place at their club. The female coach was Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) B license qualified, had 10 years coaching experience and worked with the female players as their team manager. In contrast the male soccer coach was The Football Association (FA) Level 2 qualified, had 7 years coaching experience and worked with the male players as their head coach. Although the male coach was FA Level 2 qualified, he had completed the UEFA B license course and was due to have his assessment shortly after the data collection. As such it was deemed that the coaches worked in similar environments and their coach education experiences were comparable. The coaches and the players were not paid for study participation.

## Methods

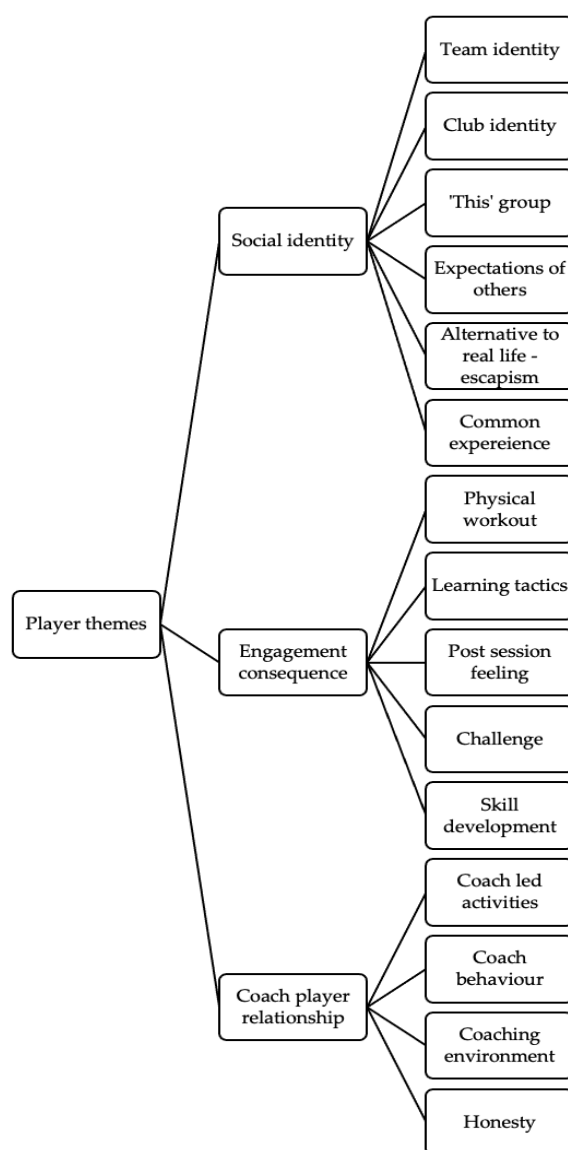
Ethical approval was gained from the University Ethics Panel who granted permission to proceed with the research. A qualitative method was employed in this study to allow the players motivations to be explored and for an investigation to take place into the awareness coaches had of their players motivations. A provisional semi structured interview guide was developed for the players based on the findings from the literature review and included questions related to the motivation of elite athletes to participate in sport (Mallet & Hanrahan, 2004), the role of the coach in creating the motivational climate (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003) and the importance of social factors in motivating players to participate in soccer (Alvarez et al., 2009). The interview guide for players consisted of 4 sections; players sporting experience, the experience of the player at their current club (e.g. Why do you want to attend the coaching sessions and matches at your current club?), reasons for participation in soccer (e.g. Why do you play soccer? Why did you start playing soccer?), and aspects of soccer the player enjoyed and disliked (What does the coach do that makes you enjoy some coaching sessions more than others?). This provisional interview guide was then adapted to be used with the coaches and focused on their identification and management of player motivation (e.g. What do you believe are the positive reasons players participate in the coaching sessions you run? and how do you try to create an environment where individuals can learn). The interview guide for the coach focused on getting the coach to reflect on their practice and how they created and managed the coaching environment. The interview guides were piloted on four soccer players and two soccer coaches who were involved in recreational soccer and not semi-elite soccer as such the results were not used in this study. The pilot study allowed researchers to make appropriate adjustments to the interview schedule to ensure the narrative of the guide was consistent. The principle changes made to the interview schedule were minor changes to the order of questions and the addition of several probing questions.

The interviews took place in a location of the interviewees choice and lasted between 35 - 52 minutes (coaches M – 47, players M – 40) following the interview the lead author transcribed all the interviews with member checks then taking place in order to develop trustworthiness in the data. The member checks took place in two stages; at the end of the interview where discussions were reviewed and after transcription when transcribed texts were sent back to the coaches and players for verification to ensure no information was miss interpreted or transcribed incorrectly. All interview transcripts were returned without edits.

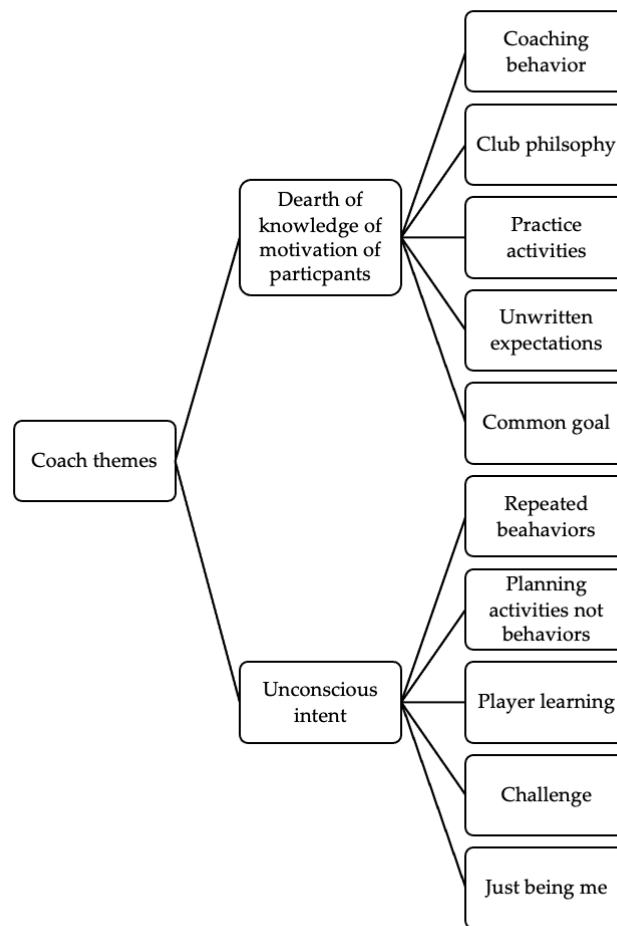
During the transcription stage of data analysis all coaches, players and clubs received a pseudonym (e.g. Player Jonny, Coach Michelle) and in the results section of this study only these codes are used.

## Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage process of thematic analysis was used to identify latent themes from the data. The first stage of thematic analysis involved the lead researcher transcribing verbatim all the interviews and included in the transcription were all verbal and non-verbal expressions such as pauses and sighs. This allowed the interview transcripts to retain a 'true' reflection of the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second stage of analysis involved the lead researcher generating initial codes by coding the interview transcripts line-by-line for as many potential themes and patterns as possible. These individual codes were then sorted, by the lead researcher, into categories that exposed underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations in the third stage of data analysis. The categories and the raw data were then re-examined and reviewed by the lead researcher in stage four of data analysis, and the categories were finally named in stage five of data analysis with three themes and 15 sub themes identified for the players and two themes and 10 sub themes identified for the coaches (see table one and two). Finally, in stage six the lead researcher selected concise and logical examples from the code transcripts to provide evidence to support each theme.



**Figure 1.** Player themes.



**Figure 2.** Coach themes.

### **Player Theme One - Social Identity**

In support of previous research that has highlighted the significance of collective social identity to sport participants' motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan et al., 1995) the first higher order category describes the importance of identity to motivating the players within this study. As such the primary motivation for players within this study to participate in soccer with their club was the collective social identity garnered from being a part of a group. The collective social identity of being a part of team was a key motivation to the players participating in soccer. Kelly exemplified this opinion by discussing the feelings she experienced by being a part of the squad and explained the feeling of togetherness that she experienced. Kelly stated

We are like a little family, everyone is, like, don't get me wrong, people give each other stick but it's nice. I find myself going to work nine till six and then I come straight to [soccer] and if I have had a bad day you forget about it.

The use of the term family as seen above was used by the players to explain the principle motivation for the players participating in soccer. The collective social identity of being a part of a team was integral to why players regularly participated in soccer. In terms of SDT the discussion of a collective social identity presented by the soccer players within this study aligns to Ryan and Deci (2003) suggestion that the development of identities is done to satisfy the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. As such



through the development of a collective social identity the soccer players in this study further enhanced their intrinsic motivation to participate in soccer.

The collective social identity of being a part of a group was further explained by Jodie who discussed the role of social relationships in developing the collaboration that she experienced. Jodie emphasized the way in which the players had strong social relationships by stating “The team now, are a lovely bunch of girls, we don’t get paid... this team is something special.” The stress on the fact that the squad did not get paid despite being semi-elite but were still a close unit highlights that the close personal relationships and strong collective social identity played a large role in motivating the players’ commitment to play soccer.

The players also discussed their feelings towards the current club and how the close relationships and collective social identity was different to other clubs that they had been a part of. Jonny highlighted the difference between attending his current semi-elite clubs and previous clubs’ competition at a lower level. Jonny stated

I feel like when you go to a Sunday league session, it’s kind of with your mates, you grow as a mate, but in here you grow as a team. So it’s more like commitment and it’s a better tempo.

This collective social identity was both what players sought to be a part of by participating in soccer and also what set their current club apart from other clubs that the players had played for.

The collective social identity that was the motivation for players to play soccer was developed through shared common experiences. Rebecca discussed the way in which communal experiences brought the players together. Rebecca stated “It’s being with people and the up and downs... It brings people together, the environment generally and that’s a big part of being here... The game brought us together and we clicked.” The common experiences that were discussed by players included failure to get promotion and winning cup finals as well as losing important matches such as semi-finals or derby matches. Participation in such experiences was described by the players as “cementing” a collective social identity and drawing the players closer together, this togetherness was then the essential element that drew the players to soccer.

The soccer players in this study identified that they were motivated both by the affiliation and also the social validation of being involved in soccer which allowed them to experience being a part of a close-knit group. Ryan et al., (1995) suggest that social connections are important to achieve optimum psychological functioning a factor which could be deemed crucial to achieving success as a sports team. As such the soccer players in this study displayed clearly that the feeling of belonging to a close-knit group was an important factor in motivating them to participate in soccer and as such in motivating them to develop as a team and achieve success as a team. This adds to knowledge in the area of motivation and sports participation, suggesting that unlike previous research in elite sport, which proposes female sport participants have greater motivation through group identity than male athletes (Nien & Duda, 2008), this study suggests both male and female sport participants are motivated to play soccer by the development of a strong group identity.

## **Player Theme Two - Engagement Consequence**

The second higher order theme was engagement consequence as players identified their enjoyment in working hard and the satisfaction gained by giving full effort in training motivated them to attend coaching sessions and play soccer. Whilst this aligns with previous research that has highlighted the importance of fitness to the motivation of male sports

participants (Gonçalves et al., 2007; Thout & Martin 1998) it is a somewhat new finding in relation to female sports participants, particularly in relation to team sports. Players also identified the motivation they gained by learning, this was both in terms of the development of individual technical skills and the development of tactical knowledge that took place during training sessions. Both the satisfaction in giving full effort and the effect of learning new skills and developing tactical knowledge acquired from participation in training sessions were identified by both male and female players as the secondary motivation for their regular and consistent participation in soccer. This motivation for participation was exemplified by Paul who discussed the desire to feel like he was working hard and leave a coaching session having gained new knowledge. Paul stated “It’s good to have a laugh but it’s also good learning something and working hard and without learning something and working hard there’s not really a point... It’s good to get the most out of every session”. This concept of developing as a player by learning as well as working hard both physically and being tested mentally during training sessions was further developed by Vicky who discussed her desire to be pushed in training sessions. Vicky stated “I like challenges... they [coaches and other players] push you if you are not doing the right thing.. Me being a youngster, getting advice... [the head coach] will put the better players against me and I like that.” It was clearly explained by the players that the coaches carried out specific actions during training sessions which engaged the players and enticed the players to continue attending training sessions.

The female players discussed in detail their motivation to participate in coaching sessions in which they worked hard physically. The female players expressed their aspiration to leave a coaching session knowing they had worked hard and experience physical exertion as part of the coaching sessions. This was demonstrated by Rachel who discussed the coaching sessions she enjoyed by saying “[I like] ones [coaching sessions] that make you sweat... like [an] actual work out... I quite like passing sequences... It’s just dead good. The tempo is high.” This enjoyment of coaching sessions was specifically related to soccer coaching sessions that allowed the players to experience physical exertion and as such this motivation was not replicated if physical exertion was experienced during a gym session. This can be seen by the players use of specific soccer examples that lead to physical exertion, such as the passing sessions discussed by Rachel, where the players worked hard in soccer specific activities. This was further developed by Lisa, a goalkeeper who said, “I enjoy when it [coaching session] is a shooting drill or a reaction drill when I am working hard for a short amount of time and I get reactions or saves... working hard”. Players expressed clear motivation and desire to attend coaching sessions from which they left and felt they had worked hard and learnt something. These noticeable repercussions of attendance and participation in a coaching session were an attraction to players because of the feelings of developing as a player be it physically developing or tactically and technically developing. Both the male and female players discussed the outcomes they experienced from playing soccer and which subsequently motivated them to play. The soccer players in this study discussed a range of consequences that they experienced when playing soccer and which subsequently motivated them to attend future coaching sessions in the expectation of experiencing such consequences again. The two clearest examples of motivational consequences were the physical consequence of participating in soccer and the cognitive consequence of learning and being challenged. Previous research has displayed the motivation of female sports participants to enhance muscular strength (Kell, 2011) and muscle mass (Alvehus et al., 2014). Similarly, the soccer players in this study recognised their desire to experience the consequence of feeling like they had worked hard as a key

factor in their enjoyment of soccer. This factor then motivated the players to play soccer in their desire to achieve the feeling of having physically worked out.

### **Player Theme Three – Coach Player Relationship**

Relatedness is the universal desire to interact and have close, caring relationships with others (Vallerand & Losier, 1999) and this was expressed as being created in different ways by the male and female players. All players in this study discussed their belief that the coach player relationship was crucial to their motivation to play soccer. Both male and female players discussed that their coaches created sessions that were interactive and developmental as well as displaying coaching behaviors including feedback and instructions that helped to keep them motivated. Tim spoke about the way in which the coaches reacted if you did something wrong and how this would trigger further explanation and encouragement. Tim stated “I think with the coaches they are very understanding about if you do something wrong. They will try to put it in a different [way] or write it out on the board.” The implication from Tim is that without such support and nurturing behavior displayed by the coaches he would be less inclined to continue attending coaching sessions. The relationship between the coach and player that the male players discussed was focused on the players enjoying the inclusive, patient and nurturing behaviors shown by the coaches.

Similar to the male players who were engaged by open and inclusive coaching styles the female players were motivated by relatedness because of the close personal relationship developed with their coach. Jodie explained that the coaches formed close working relationships with the players and discussed how these relationships formed a key part of being a part of the team and attending coaching sessions. Jodie said “The coaches, as well as being coaches, they are a friend. You respect them as a coach but also a person to get along with.” This close personal player-coach relationship is different to the teacher-student relationship described by the male players. Kelly further discussed the close personal relationship developed between the coach and player and her club by saying “I couldn’t imagine being a part of another team. They [coach / manager] just know you. They know when something is wrong. They will ask questions. They care about you. It’s not just about them”. The close personal relationship described by the female players in this study relates to the personal relationship developed between the players and coach. This close personal relationship was focused on developing the player as a person and was a crucial motivation for why the players relished playing soccer. The players discussed their personal belief that they held a close bond with coaches which they believed was built from the coaches developing them holistically.

### **Coach Theme One - Dearth of Knowledge of Motivations of Participations**

The coaches within this study displayed a lack of knowledge of the motivations of their players to participate in soccer and while this did not detract for their role to develop players it shows a lack of awareness. While the players highlighted the importance of a collective social identity, Nick, the coach of the male players, spoke about the attraction of players to attend because of a multitude of diverse reasons. Nick stated “Some of the coaches have known the players for a long time so the relationship is one [primary reason for attending]... the badge number two [reason for playing soccer] .. Some I think see it as a stepping stone.” The three reasons outlined by Nick included the coach-player relationship, the draw of playing for a well-known club and the potential of the club to be a launch pad to a higher level of playing. While Nick acknowledged the importance of the

coach-player relationship in motivating players limited details were discussed as to what this meant and how this was developed.

In contrast the coach of the female players, Michelle, discussed the philosophy and ethos that surrounded the club at which she coached and how this was the motivation that tempted her players to play. When asked what drew her players to regularly train and play Michelle stated "Is it a culture? I'd like to think so... is it purposefully created? I don't have a template. We just have it". Unlike her players who highlighted a collective social identity as a motivation for participating in soccer Michelle discussed the ways in which her players were motivated by discussing her players passion and desire for soccer. Michelle said

First and foremost... because of their love of soccer... I think they do it because they love soccer... [at this club] they are valued, they get ownership, they value what is provided for them and the time and effort everyone puts in for them.

In contrast the female players discussed their motivation was acquired from their enjoyment of working hard, learning, being challenged and being a part of a club with a collective identity. Michelle continued to discuss the way she developed a strong coach-player relationship without highlighting how the collective identity which her players were so motivated by was created. Michelle said

How do I ensure it works between them?... The one common goal... Is to work hard to achieve the goal we set... I would suggest I as a manger invest a lot of time to get to know the players... I can ask how their job is going... and I pride myself on getting to know the players.

The values of ownership and investment from staff are discussed as reasons that motivated players to participate in soccer by Michelle, more than the concept of a collective identity or the physical and learning effects of playing soccer in training and matches.

When the coaches were provided with the motivations that their players had discussed the coaches displayed an agreement and lack of surprise at any of the motivations their players had despite not being able to outline them. Nick exemplified this reaction when presented with one of the primary motivations for his players as being to develop technically and tactically as soccer players by saying "That is the aim! The developing side, that is the main aim of it all. Again, I think there are many things that come with it, social side, how to speak to people. It's a package [that we coach]." Both coaches acknowledged general, vague motivations for participation they believed their players held but the coaches were unable to pin down any specific motivations that clearly reflected the motivations that were identified by the players involved in this study.

Although it is feasible given the responses of the coaches during the interviews to suggest that the coaches within this study were unaware of motivations their players held for participating in soccer, due to the reasons the coaches outlined they believed their players had for playing soccer. Given the players responses and enthusiasm for soccer it appears unlikely that the coaches were categorically unaware of their players' motivations. Sports coaches are one of the most significant influences in framing the experiences of sport participants because of the critical role they play in determining the psychological experiences that their participants have (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Ames (1992) suggests that the key engineer of the motivational climate in sport is assumed to be the coach. Within this study the players identified the coach as a crucial facilitator of the motivational climate for a soccer team. The players recognised that the coaches created and managed the training environment to make it inclusive, challenging, and enjoyable meaning they were more motivated to keep attending coaching sessions and matches.

According to Duda and Hall (2001) the motivational climate that is established and shaped by a sports coach is important for the quality of motivation exhibited by players.

This is significant within this study as the coaches were unaware of the motivations of their participants and could not describe how they as coaches facilitated the motivational climate. The motivational climate that is created by the coach can have a mastery or a performance focus. A motivational climate that purported a mastery climate focus would demonstrate clear learning goals, encourage effort, and focus on the development of capability and enjoyment (Reinboth & Duda, 2006). In contrast a motivational climate with a performance focus would, give emphasis to outclassing others as a goal, a motivation previously associated with participation of males in sport (Gonçalves et al., 2007). Within this study the coaches were discussed by the players as creating a motivational climate that had a mastery focus. The key factors in facilitating this environment were the coaches focusing coaching sessions on clear goals that aimed to develop the soccer players technically and tactically. Alongside this the soccer players within this study emphasized that the motivational climate created by their coaches also helped players to develop socially and psychologically both on and off the soccer field and both individually and as a squad.

### **Coach Theme Two - Unconscious Intent**

Although the coaches in this study appeared aware of their role in the development of players they failed to be able to accurately describe their coaching behaviors in relation to the coaching session and the impact on players (Partington & Cushion, 2013). The coaches recognised that they believed they did the same thing each coaching session in terms of coaching behaviors but stated that this was not done to specifically meet the motivations of their players. Similar to previous research which linked coaching practice and coaching philosophy (Lyle & Cushion, 2016) the coaches suggested it was their coaching philosophy that guided their coaching practice and coaching behaviors thus implying there was an unconscious intent to meet the motivations of their players. Nick discussed his determination to be inclusive and adaptive in his coaching. Nick stated “I think you have to integrate them all [every player]... Have authority but flexibility. You are not constantly strict. You’ve got to get the best of both.” This flexible approach to coaching behaviors displayed by Nick suggests a coach keen to meet the needs of his players but offers little suggestion of the specific behaviors he displayed that matched the motivations of his players. Nick continued to discuss his coaching behaviors and the impact that his coaching behaviors could have on the players he worked with. Nick stated

I think you’ve got to be enthusiastic as a coach, if I am very laid back, they see it... they can read you straight away and see if you are here for the sake of being here or if you want them to progress... You’ve got to show your enthusiastic for them to be [enthusiastic].

The connection between Nick’s coaching behaviors and his players’ enthusiasm was made however this was never linked to the motivations identified by the players. Nick failed to explain explicitly the methods he used and the coaching behaviors he displayed that allowed him to meet the motivations of his players. Even when he was provided with the motivations of his players, Nick could not state clearly how he met these motivations and how he adapted both his coaching behaviors and the content of his coaching sessions to meet these motivations.

In contrast Michelle discussed the way that the players have developed their own focus and how there was no conscious behavior or intent from her to install specific behaviors or actions by carrying out specific actions. Michelle said

What is very, very clear to see, they are all having a bit of a laugh and a giggle [at training]... but on a match day they just know and that is not something I have had to

instill in to them... I'd like to be able to say it is all my guidance and leadership, but I just don't know.

Michelle, when the motivations of her players were presented to her, continued to discuss how the players created their own culture and failed to acknowledge the role she played in creating a collective identity. Michelle said "They don't get any extrinsic reward other than their own accomplishments. So, I don't know... We just have it... As a team they are very tight, at soccer. Outside of soccer there are not, not many of them that socialize." This recognition from Michelle hints at the belief that the players she worked with held a collective identity whilst at soccer and was formed from being a part of the same club. This perception was supported by no explanation of how Michelle contributed to this collective identity by her own behaviors and own management of the training environment. Despite the coaches being praised by the soccer players in this study for creating and managing a mastery motivational climate the coaches could not describe how they did this. The coaches in this study acknowledged little conscious effort was spent on creating motivational climate or planning and delivering coaching sessions to the motivations of their players. With regards to coach behavior and a coach's awareness of this behavior this research supplements research by Partington and Cushion (2013) identifying a coach's lack of awareness of their behaviors. Similarly, the soccer coaches in this study were unaware of how they created the motivational climate that they did and expressed that meeting the motivational needs of their players was done through unconscious intent.

## **Discussion**

The aim of the present study was to establish what motivated male and female soccer players to attend club coaching sessions. The second aim was to assess if soccer coaches possessed an awareness of their players' motivations and thirdly to see the methods and practices employed by coaches to manage coaching sessions to allow their players motivations to be met.

In this study both the male and female soccer players identified that social identity and the feeling of belonging to a group was a key motivating factor to them participating in soccer. Similarly, both male and female players highlighted they were motivated to attend coaching sessions and matches that allowed them to gain a form of consequence in the form of learning, developing as a player or feeling like they had worked hard, aligning well to the competence need within the SDT (Reinboth & Duda, 2006). This finding shows a difference from previous literature including Smith, Thurston, Green and Lamb (1997) who suggested young people varied significantly and differentially according to gender in terms of the form of participation in sport. It has been suggested that male and female sports participants have different motivations for participation in sport and different outcomes they wish to gain from their sports participation (Gonçalves et al., 2007; Thout & Martin 1998). Prior research has suggested that female sports participants are motivated to participate in sport intrinsically such as friendship, enjoyment, and collective identity rather than extrinsically (Gonçalves et al., 2007; Thout & Martin 1998). In contrast it has been proposed that male sports participants tend to be motivated by competition and improvement in performance in sport (Thout & Martin, 1998). The contrast with the findings from this study with Gonçalves et al., (2007) and Thout and Martin (1998) could be explained by use of semi-elite adult soccer players in this study. The participants in this research highlighted that both adult male and female players who participate at the semi-elite level are both motivated by the effective consequence gained from participation and the common social identity offered

by being a part of a team, highlighting the participation level of players may influence their motivation.

Previous research has acknowledged the significance of the role of the coach in establishing and managing the experiences of sport participants (Smith, Quested, Appleton & Duda, 2017) and within this study the players identified the coach as a crucial facilitator of their motivation. This finding is due to the coach playing a key role in determining the psychological experiences that their participants have (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003) and as Ames (1992) suggests this study further recognizes that the key engineer of motivation of sports participation in sport is the coach. However, interestingly this research found that the coaches were unaware of their players' motivations and that they lacked an understanding of the way in which their coaching behaviors affected the players and their motivations. It should be noted that this lack of awareness of motivations of players does not mean the coaches were unsuccessful or that the coaches in this study failed in their role to develop players and the team. Instead it shows that the coaches in this study created environments which allowed their players to be motivated without being aware of the motivations of their players.

The lack of ability to accurately discuss the coaching behaviors, that they as a coach showed when coaching, is not a new finding in soccer and sport coaching research (Partington & Cushion, 2013) however the lack of understanding of players' motivations by coaches offers new insight. Previous research has recognized the importance of the coach in affecting the motivation of sports participants (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Such research has suggested that the development of a mastery motivational climate by a coach can lead to an increase in intrinsic motivation by sports participants, which in turn encourages higher levels of enjoyment of a task alongside changing perceptions of competence of learners and players (Roberts, Treasure & Conroy, 2007). Similarly, this research has highlighted the importance of the role of the coach on soccer players' motivation however, finds that the coach may be unaware of the role they play in motivating their players and creating a motivational climate. It could therefore be suggested that formal coach education programs could integrate the subject of motivation and the creation of a motivational climate not only into their syllabus but also into the assessment process. This would have the potential of giving coaches greater knowledge on how to recognize their players' motivations and how to manage the motivational climate of their training sessions. Thus, allowing coaches to plan and deliver coaching sessions which actively aim to create a motivational climate for players which allows for the psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and psychological relatedness to be developed.

It is however important to recognize that it may be possible that the coaches within this study lacked the appropriate terminology to discuss and describe the motivation of their players to play soccer and such a lack of skill may appear as a lack of knowledge. As such the coaches' responses could be explained by their acceptance that a coaches role is to develop players technically and tactically, plan coaching sessions that are engaging and challenging and foster the coach-player relationship. So, when asked the specific motivations of the players these responsibilities of a coach are accepted as a normal part of coaching practice so the coach seeks further reasons or explanations as to how their players are motivated.

Although the results of this study provide important insight into semi-elite soccer, the motivational climate experienced by soccer players in this environment and the role of the coach in establishing and maintaining the motivational climate, the limitations of the study need to be acknowledged. The methodological approach in this study only used interviews and an ethnographic approach including participant observation as well as interviews could

have been beneficial to investigate soccer coaches and players within their environment. This would have given a more complete picture of the coaches practice and allowed it to be viewed more holistically in terms of the players' motivations.

In conclusion the soccer players in this study identified that key motivations for attending and participating in soccer revolved around the collective social identity of being a part of a club as well as the affective consequence of coaching sessions and the climate created by the coach. Although the soccer players in this study could comprehensively discuss their motivation for participating in soccer, the coaches in this study were unaware of the motivation their players had for participating. Despite this the soccer players in this study identified that their coach's actions, positively impacted on their desire to participate in soccer and recognized the coach as the key facilitator of the motivational climate that was experienced.

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