Bridging the gap between self-determination theory and coaching soccer to disadvantaged youth

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20   **Abstract**

21   Embedded in self-determination theory, the purpose of this study was to explore the coaching in

22   a soccer program aimed at promoting life skills to disadvantaged youth. Non-participant

23   observation and video footage of the coaching styles and behaviors, combined with interviews

24   with program participants, revealed that some autonomy-supportive strategies may be difficult to

25   employ and potentially counterproductive in some circumstances. Further, coaches who were

26   interpersonally involved with participants were able to offset some negative consequences of

27   controlling behaviors. This study gives new insight into the complex relationships that exist

28   between SDT-based coaching behaviors, positive youth development, and the soccer context.

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43   Bridging the gap between self-determination theory and coaching soccer to disadvantaged youth

44   In recent years a number of sports-based educational and diversionary programs have

45   been introduced in an attempt to tackle anti-social behavior, promote positive developmental

46   experiences, and provide a route into employment for young people (e.g., Smith & Waddington,

47   2004; Tacon, 2007). Youth from disadvantaged backgrounds may be in particular need of

48   attention because the communities that these young people live in can make positive

49   developmental experiences unlikely to materialize (Gould, Flett, & Lauer, 2012). Within this

50   youth development context, a positive relationship with non-familial adult mentors has been

51   underlined as an important social process in attempting to achieve these goals (e.g., Benson,

52   Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005).

53   Despite this proposal, scant research has explored the interpersonal dynamics between coaches

54   and disadvantaged youth that are required for positive life development to occur. To fill this gap,

55   the present study aimed to provide rich descriptions of the coaching styles and behaviors

56   witnessed in an education program that used soccer as a vehicle for life-skill development.

57   Additionally, we adopted the theoretical lens of self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan,

58   2000) to interpret and evaluate the coaching behaviors, with the aim of providing insights and

59   suggestions for the development of theory and practice.

60   The relationship between coach and participant is central to determining the effects of

61   youth sport participation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Coaches not only have the responsibility

62   to develop the sport-specific skills of a participant, their influence can also extend into other

63   areas of a young person's life (e.g., Nichols, 1997; Smoll & Smith, 1989). For example, Crabbe

64   (2000) observed a UK sports-based program that combined educational, diversionary and

65   rehabilitation elements through the use of soccer in an attempt to tackle drug use and crime.

66   Crabbe acknowledged the 'universal admiration' that the program participants had for the coach

67   as an individual, which led to participants approaching the sessions with enthusiasm and

68   dedication.

69   This example underlines the wider role coaches have to play in the growth of

70   disadvantaged adolescents. A common notion in the extant literature, however, is that merely the

71   presence of an adult in a mentoring position is enough to facilitate adaptive consequences in

72   adolescents (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). This approach is overly simplistic, for example, the

73   presence of a coach who controls, intimidates, and publicly criticises their athletes may lead to

74   negative developmental outcomes in adolescents (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thørgesen-

75   Ntoumani, 2009). Therefore, a closer inspection of the interpersonal components within the

76   coach-participant relationship seems warranted. SDT is a theoretical framework that has received

77   extensive empirical support within the sport context (e.g., Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007;

78   Mallett, 2005; Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004), and its focus on the social-contextual

79   ingredients required for optimal growth and development (Ryan & Deci, 2000) make it

80   particularly useful when studying disadvantaged youth.

81   Self-determination theorists propose that the satisfaction of three innate psychological

82   needs; namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, will lead to optimal functioning,

83   development, and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy refers to the desire to engage in

84   activities of one's choosing and to be the origin of one's behavior. Competence reflects the need

85   to have an effect on the environment and to achieve desired outcomes. Relatedness refers to the

86   desire to feel connected to valued others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This hypothesis has received

87   extensive empirical support in a variety of different contexts, such as parenting (Joussemet,

88   Landry, & Koestner, 2008), sport (Reinboth et al., 2004), education (Taylor & Lonsdale, 2010),

89   and the workplace (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). Thus, scholarly attention has been given to

90   investigating how leadership figures (e.g., parents, coaches, teachers, and managers) can fulfill

91   the psychological needs of those under their supervision.

92   According to SDT researchers, a central component of the social context that has

93   substantial impact upon psychological need fulfillment, well-being and growth is the degree to

94   which the context is autonomy-supportive versus controlling (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

95   Autonomy support describes a broad range of behaviors (e.g. providing choice, providing a

96   rationale for tasks, and acknowledging the perspectives of others), which are posited to satisfy

97   one's need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Within

98   sport contexts an autonomy-supportive coaching style has been positively associated with the

99   psychological need satisfaction of athletes (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2007) and self-determined

100 motivation (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). In contrast, a controlling coaching style is

101 considered to be damaging to individuals' psychological health. For example, Bartholomew and

102 colleagues (2009) proposed a taxonomy of six controlling coach behaviors (e.g., intimidation,

103 excessive personal control, and the use of coercive rewards) that are hypothesized to thwart,

104 rather than satisfy, athletes' psychological needs. Research based on alternative theoretical

105 paradigms has indicated that an autocratic and negative style of coaching is linked to lower

106 athlete satisfaction with the coach and less intrinsic motivation (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Baker,

107 Yardley, & Côté, 2003).

108   This compelling empirical support for the positive effects of autonomy-supportive

109 coaching implies that these strategies should be integrated into coaching practice. Similarly, the

110 literature concerning controlling styles of coaching suggests that these interpersonal behaviors

111 should be minimized. Nonetheless, the majority of the research detailed above has examined

112 athlete self-reports of general autonomy-supportive coaching styles using cross-sectional data.

113 Thus, a greater understanding of the complexities associated with autonomy-supportive versus

114 controlling coaching in specific contexts needs to be developed. For example, is autonomy

115 support universally adaptive and controlling coaching negative, or do specific situations call for

116 some flexibility? Do the complex and dynamic relationships among coach, disadvantaged youth

117 participant, and soccer context present specific barriers to such successful implementation of

118 autonomy-supportive coaching? This deeper exploration seems particularly important in a sport,

119 such as soccer, which traditionally promotes directive and authoritarian coaching as a prevailing

120 style (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Kelly & Waddington, 2006).

121   The current study aimed to fill this knowledge gap by examining, through the theoretical

122 lens of SDT, the multifaceted relationships between coach, disadvantaged youth, and context in a

123 soccer-based life skills development program. No specific hypothesis testing took place within

124 this research; however, we aimed to explore the potential effects of SDT-supported coaching

125 styles and those practices discouraged by self-determination theorists in a range of specific

126 situations, as opposed to general autonomy-supportive coaching styles. Such effects might

127 include enthusiasm for tasks, enjoyment, boredom, or non-participation but we did not restrict

128 ourselves by looking at specific outcomes. In particular, we wished to investigate potential

129 reasons why such consequences occurred in this unique context and potential opportunities that

130 the soccer coaching context gives to integrate empirically supported coaching strategies, as well

131 as potential barriers to such implementation. In view of the exploratory methods used in this

132 study, we were also mindful of any relevant, but unexpected issues that arose during the data

133 collection phase.

134   **Methods and Methodology**

135   **Context**

136   A charitable organization that uses sport as an engagement and support tool for

137   disadvantaged youth, organized the delivery of a 12 hours per week sport and education program

138   in two venues in the west of Scotland. Participants were recruited by outreach workers who

139   engaged with local communities and referral agents, such as job centers and local youth services,

140   to identify 18 young people to attend the program. Attendees were 16-19 years old and were not

141   participating in any form of education, employment or training. The 13-week program aimed to

142   build confidence, extend social networks and develops skills, qualifications and goals for moving

143   into educational and vocational pathways. The program organizers proposed to accomplish these

144   objectives by engaging participants through the power of soccer, and developing the necessary

145   skills through a combination of soccer coaching and employability support. The significance of

146   such programs for Scotland was recognized in a UK-wide study that highlighted that the highest

147   proportion of young adults not engaged in any form of education or employment were found in

148   this area (10% of 16-19 year olds; Barham, Walling, Clancy, Hicks, & Conn, 2009). Further,

149   government statistics also revealed that this area has the highest share of the most deprived zones

150   in Scotland (Scottish Executive National Statistics, 2006).

151   Sessions were delivered by two coaches, John and Dan (pseudonyms are used

152   throughout), who worked full-time for the organization and also worked with professional soccer

153   clubs in the west of Scotland in a part-time capacity. John was 29 years old and had been

154   working for the organization for four years, beginning as an apprentice coach and working as a

155   full-time employee for the last two years. Dan was 30 years old and worked as a part-time coach

156   during his first year and as a full-time coach for the past two years. Both coaches held national

157   governing body qualifications in coaching youth soccer players, while supplementary training

158 was provided by the organization which exposed the coaches to the additional skills required to

159 work with disadvantaged youth. A typical week at the program would involve four practical

160 soccer sessions delivered by the coach, each with a pre-planned theme (e.g., communication,

161 dribbling skills, creativity).

162 **Procedures**

163   Approval from a university ethics committee was granted and full consent was obtained

164 from the coaches and program participants prior to data collection. It was explained to program

165 attendees that nonparticipation in the study would not impact upon their involvement in the

166 program. Further, both coaches were informed that the intention of the study was not to identify

167 weaknesses in their coaching, nor would comments on any individual coach be communicated

168 back to the management of the organization.

169   This study answers the call for diverse research methods in coaching research

170 (Poczwardowski, Barott, & Jowett, 2006) and builds upon the largely participant self-report

171 evidence base by utilizing multiple sources of data to investigate how SDT can inform soccer

172 coaching to disadvantaged youth. Specifically, an instrumental case study (Stake, 2000) was

173 undertaken in which the first author engaged in non-participant observation of the coaching

174 sessions, which included collection of video footage and field notes without actively taking part

175 in the sessions. Instrumental case studies are particularly suitable when the aim of the research is

176 to shed light on a wider issue or to redraw a generalization, rather than exploring 'the case' itself

177 (Stake, 2000). In line with this notion, the soccer program itself plays a supporting role to the

178 more broad aim of a greater understanding of SDT-based coaching to disadvantaged youth

179 (Stake, 2000).

180   Our case study was embedded in a wider interpretivist paradigm which assumes that

181   multiple realities exist (i.e., a relativist ontology) and that researcher and participant create

182   meaning collaboratively (i.e., a subjectivist epistemology; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Employing

183   an instrumental case study embedded within interpretivist traditions allowed us to question

184   generalizations held within positivist SDT-based research, such as the assumption that

185   autonomy-supportive (versus controlling) coaching is adaptive (versus maladaptive) (e.g.,

186   Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Couching the study within subjectivism allowed us to merge the

187   experiences and beliefs of the participants with our experiences and pre-existing knowledge

188   regarding coaching and SDT to create subjective meanings of the coaching context.

189   Utilizing these largely naturalistic methods allowed the first author to gather firsthand

190   information to help understand and capture the context that the coaches and participants

191   interacted within, although we acknowledge that the presence of a researcher may not permit a

192   fully naturalistic study to unfold (Patton, 2002). This was facilitated by maintaining openness to

193   adapting inquiry as situations emerged that were not expected (i.e., emergent design flexibility;

194   Patton, 2002). Observations of the sessions began on the arrival of the first participant, and

195   ended when the coach dismissed the participants. These sessions lasted between 45 minutes to

196   one hour on one or two days per week during the 13 week period. The video footage was

197   collected during eight sessions over the duration of the program and enabled the first author to

198   recap on incidents that had occurred and allowed the second author to offer his reflections on the

199   coaching behaviors. During the first session at each location the coach introduced the first author

200   to the program participants as a former coach within the organization who had extensive

201   knowledge of soccer coaching. This helped to create a rapport with the program participants that

202   facilitated the data collection process. From the observations and video footage, written field

203   notes were formed which included details of the session environment, content and observations

204   regarding coach behaviors, participants' reactions and contexts that they took place in. After

205   each session, the first author re-examined, reflected, and added depth to the shorthand field notes

206   to create a more detailed picture of the observed session.

207   After the 13 week program had ended, semi-structured interviews that were based on the

208   field notes and observations were arranged with three attendees who agreed to discuss their

209   experiences of the program. Two of the interviewees, Billy and Stewart, were both 17 years old

210   and had been unemployed since leaving school at the age of 16. On completion of the program,

211   Billy was appointed the role of an assistant coach within the organization due to his performance

212   in the program. The third interviewee, Craig, was 18 years old and had just received

213   confirmation that he had been accepted to study sport coaching at a local college. The main

214   purpose of the interviews was to supplement the first author's observations, therefore, providing

215   an opportunity to clarify and further discuss the participants' reactions to the coaching. The

216   interviewees were purposively selected based on critical incidents that were observed during the

217   coaching sessions (Patton, 2002). Such careful selection of participants is in accordance with a

218   number of qualitative perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and emphasizes our commitment

219   to interpretivism by permitting the participants to convey meaning behind the human action

220   under investigation (Schwandt, 2000). Following a brief overview of the purpose of the

221   interview, the interviews covered such topics as participants' perceptions of their coaches'

222   behaviors, their reactions to these behaviors, and how the coaching helped teach skills that they

223   could transfer into education or employment. Combining interviews with observations represents

224   a worthy empirical coupling (Lofland, 1971), as they provided an opportunity to gather first hand

225   participant responses regarding opinions, feelings and experiences concerning key incidents and

226   allowed the interviewer to clarify preliminary speculations (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Each

227   interview was digitally recorded and lasted between 25 to 40 minutes. The triangulation of the

228   data yielded from interviews, field notes and video footage provided a comprehensive insight

229   into the existing issues and permitted meaningful interpretations to emerge (Patton, 2002).

230   When interpreting the data, we followed common interpretivist approaches to analyzing

231   interview and observation data by moving through three phases of analysis (e.g., Hammersley &

232   Atkinson, 1995). The first and second authors independently created loose annotations

233   representing what we perceived as incidents of interest arising from the data. Second, these

234   preliminary notes were then aggregated into a set of superordinate themes relevant to the

235   research questions. Finally, the first and second authors collaboratively moved from description

236   to our research goal by couching these themes within the SDT-framework. The first and second

237   authors encouraged reflexivity throughout this stage by challenging the participants and each

238   others' acquisition of knowledge (Patton, 2002). During the data collection and analysis, the first

239   author was embarking on a psychology-based PhD on the broad topic of coaching soccer to

240   disadvantaged youth. In addition, he had six years of experience in coaching soccer and two

241   years within the specific program under study. The second author was the PhD supervisor and

242   had published extensively on the topic of SDT (the third and fourth authors were not involved in

243   analyzing the data). These positions clearly shaped our interpretations and how our knowledge

244   was acquired, thus, they should be kept in mind when reading our analysis. For example,

245   selected coach behaviors were interpreted as autonomy-supportive if they were in accordance

246   with SDT definitions (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Rather than viewing these pre-determined

247   biases as a weakness, however, they enabled the complex interactions between coach,

248   participant, and context to be compared to previous SDT-based research. Hence, our overall

249 approach may be described as abductive in nature as the classification of data into themes served

250 as a dialogue between our interpretations and theory, which enabled us to achieve our research

251 aim (Levin-Rozalis, 2004). The discussions between the first and second author helped achieve

252 what Angen (2000) calls 'substantive and ethical validation' by embracing and acknowledging

253 our own and the participants' subjective bias, and accepting moral responsibility for the topics

254 we explore.

<div align="center">**Results and Discussion**</div>

256 **A Lack of Decisional Autonomy Support**

257   Over the course of the 13 week program, participants were very rarely provided with the

258 opportunity to choose the activity that they took part in, or involved in any decisions regarding

259 the design of the sessions and how to solve game-related problems. What little choice the

260 participants did receive was minor, such as occasionally selecting their own teams and deciding

261 what foot to strike the ball with. The following scenario, in which John stopped a game-related

262 activity, was typical of the coach-led environment.

263   To the group: "Freeze. Freeze there. Put the ball back. Stay where you are, stay

264   where you are. Put the ball back, put the ball back. OK, wait there."

265   To Andrew: "Go back (John points where he wants Andrew to move to)."

266   To Derek and Tim: "Move in, move in (John ushers them to move towards the

267   goal)."

268   To Kevin: "Here (John points to where he wants Kevin to stand)."

269   To Barry: "Come across a bit. Now there's an option down the line."

270   To the group: "Now, the ball gets played in to Kevin."

271   To Nigel: "Cover (John points to the area that Nigel should be covering)."

272   Within this scenario, John had several opportunities to involve the participants in

273 deciding how to alter and improve their strategy and positioning but did not take them. Similarly,

274 the coaches did not involve participants in the design of the sessions. For example:

275   "We're going to do a warm up which we must do, so, I've set two lines of cones

276   out. That's a line. Set another four cones out here. You're just going to be

277   working back and forward between the two lines, doing the movements that I'm

278   showing you." (John).

279   In contrast to this environment, the autonomy support literature suggests that involving

280 athletes and participants in decision making processes is crucial for maintaining adaptive

281 motivation and positive consequences (e.g., Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Mageau & Vallerand,

282 2003). For example, Mallett (2005) detailed how providing choice in a number of circumstances

283 played a significant role in the success of two men's relay teams competing at the Athens

284 Olympic Games. However, this body of research is grounded on the assumption that participants

285 have the necessary competencies and confidence to make the appropriate decisions. The realities

286 of coaching soccer to disadvantaged youth may be somewhat different. Indeed, PE teachers have

287 shown to believe that the provision of choice is somewhat dependent on the characteristics of the

288 student (Xiang, Gao, & McBride, 2011). Many of the participants in this program were soccer

289 novices who lacked confidence and self esteem, a common characteristic in disadvantaged youth.

290 On the isolated occasions that participants were encouraged to be autonomous, employing these

291 types of strategies seemed to be counterproductive because participants lacked the belief and

292 knowledge to seize opportunities to take leadership roles, responsibility and make appropriate

293 choices. The following interaction, taken from field notes, is an example of such an event:

294   Jonny was asked to take the role of the coach by communicating to the group who

295   was to enter the practice area during a goal scoring exercise. Jonny's insecure

296   body language suggested that he was not comfortable with having to address the

297   group as a whole and lacked the confidence to continue with this role. After two

298   minutes, in which Jonny tentatively issued instructions to the group, John resumed

299   control of issuing instructions to the group.

300   In addition to the competencies of the participants, the logistics of the program, which

301   was typical of many soccer coaching sessions, also presented a barrier to giving participants

302   choice during the session. At both program venues there was only ever one lead coach, and

303   between 12 and 18 participants attended the program each day. The coaches delivered a pre-

304   planned curriculum in a limited time period which reduced the opportunities for participant

305   involvement in the decision making process. For example, common coaching tasks, such as

306   session organization, instructing and explaining drills, providing demonstrations and feedback

307   can be time consuming for a coach, and make the provision of choice a difficult strategy to

308   implement, especially in a limited time period with large participant numbers.

309   **Providing a Rationale**

310   Of course, there are other coaching strategies that can be used to support participants'

311   autonomy than those detailed above. Indeed, giving students choice has been the subject of much

312   debate in the educational literature and may be more relevant for some individuals than others

313   (Xiang et al., 2011). For example, Katz and Assor (2007) proposed that choice is only motivating

314   when the choices are in line with students' goals and values and are not too complex.

315   A prevalent strategy that was observed in the program was the provision of a rationale for

316   activities. This motivational strategy has consistently received empirical support (e.g., Deci,

317   Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994) and may be particularly useful when coaching disadvantaged

318   youth by allowing participants to build a link between the soccer program and their life goals.

319   Specifically, the aim for participants in the program was to develop the necessary skills to

320   transfer into employment, education or training. Throughout the observation period, John

321   regularly reminded participants of this aim by providing an appropriate rationale for activities

322   within the program. In the following example the theme of the session was focused on passing,

323   communication and teamwork and John is summarizing the session.

324   "During the possession drill, it was important that when possession of the ball was

325   lost, that everyone in the team worked hard for each other to win the ball back. If

326   somebody makes a mistake in an office, and you need to help them catch up with

327   work, just go and work hard and put the effort in. This is teamwork."

328   During a subsequent interview Billy, who was a participant and became an assistant

329   coach with the organization after the program, discussed how this coaching increased his

330   confidence in pursuing training for employment.

331   "It's opened my eyes, at the start of the course I would never have thought of becoming a

332   coach, but now I'm thinking about finishing this coach assistant job then going over to

333   America, getting my coaching badges…I now wouldn't have a problem taking charge of

334   a group I didn't know."

335   Although providing choice seemed to be a difficult autonomy-supportive strategy to

336   employ and even maladaptive in some contexts, the provision of a meaningful rationale seems to

337   be somewhat easier to implement and beneficial to participants. Communicating the benefits of

338   participation in activities may allow attendees to identify with the task which, in turn, may lead

339   to increased participant effort (Reeve, Jang, Hardre & Omura, 2002).

340   To summarize the role of autonomy support in this context, some strategies such as the

341   provision of choice appear to be uncommon, and when promoted in this context may lead to

342   maladaptive consequences due to the competencies of the participants. Further, program logistics

343   present a barrier to the implementation of autonomy support, however, the provision of rationale

344   seems a particularly suitable strategy to implement when coaching soccer to disadvantaged

345   youth.

346   **The Importance of Humor with Controlling Coaching**

347   Dan's sense of humor played a significant role in his coaching style over the 13-week

348   program. For instance, he would frequently issue public fun forfeits to participants during his

349   sessions as outlined from field notes below:

350   11 participants are moving freely around an area in close proximity to the coach.

351   Dan shouts out the number five, signaling the group to get into groups of five.

352   Two groups of five are created, leaving one participant (Steve) without a group.

353   As a forfeit for not finding a group, the coach asks Steve to perform a

354   'mushroom' in front of the group; however, it is evident from Steve's reaction he

355   is unsure what is meant by this. To demonstrate, Dan performs the movement

356   (crouched down into a ball, hands on ankles bounding around anti-clockwise

357   whilst chanting in a high-pitched voice, "I'm a mushroom, I'm a mushroom").

358   Steve then performs the 'mushroom' to applause and laughter from the group.

359   As well as this positive group response, the participant Stewart had this to say about Dan:

360   "To begin with he was just another coach but when he brought out his funny side

361   you felt he was getting personal to you. You felt if you needed someone he would

362   be there for you."

363   In addition, Dan engaged in humorous one-to-one interactions with the participants throughout

364   the program. For example, on one occasion he made a public joke towards one of the participants

365   regarding his hair color:

366   Dan: "...If you do well Billy, I'll say well done, ginger."

367   Billy: "cheers fat boy."

368   Billy was later interviewed about this mutual teasing and his relationship with Dan:

369   "I wouldn't have got away with calling Dan fat boy at the start of the program, but

370   he wouldn't have called me ginger either. It was because he got to know us as a

371   group and as individuals he knew how we would take it…It brings us closer to

372   him, instead of just your coach he becomes your friend as well. You can approach

373   him, tell him anything, it brought us together."

374   Taken out of context, both of the coaching examples described above may be

375   categorized as theoretically maladaptive. For example, Bartholomew and colleagues

376   (2009) highlighted public evaluation, normative comparison, the threat of physical

377   punishment, and verbal abuse as coaching strategies that would undermine athletes'

378   psychological needs. However, judging from the participants' response to the mushroom

379   forfeit, as well as Billy's and Stewart's reflections, their psychological needs were

380   satisfied rather than forestalled.

381   Despite Dan's relatively controlling style, his use of humor helped to develop an

382   emotionally involved relationship with the participants that satisfied their need for relatedness

383   (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Research outside of SDT has similarly suggested that coaches' use

384   of humor can help foster a positive coach-athlete relationship (Burke, Peterson & Nix, 1995;

385   Grisaffe, Blom & Burke, 2003) and create an appropriate working environment by developing

386 cohesion and integration within soccer teams (Cushion & Jones, 2001). Overall, these findings

387 imply that a sense of humor may be a potent weapon in a coach's repertoire that may satisfy

388 participants' need for relatedness, and buffer the potentially damaging effects of a controlling

389 coaching style.

390 **When the Humor Disappears and Control and Ego-Involvement Remains**

391   Despite our proposal that controlling strategies can sometimes be offset by a humorous

392 and emotionally-involved coaching style, the absence of such a positive interpersonal

393 environment may have drastic consequences for the participants. Below is a scenario that took

394 place during a session focused on speed and agility.

395   John (to Garry): "Garry, in you come to the front. I don't want you to do anything,

396   what I want you to do is listen. You're just stepping up there like. 'when's

397   lunchtime?', Honestly it's like 'when's our next break' What did I tell you to do

398   the last time?"

399   Garry shrugs his shoulder.

400   John (to the group): "There you go, perfect example"

401   It is apparent that Garry cannot perform the speed ladder-based activity, and John

402   explains that Garry must place two feet in each space of the ladder "... or you

403   don't get to play football for the rest of the week". Garry subsequently fails in the

404   challenge to the hilarity and dismay of both the coach and the on looking

405   participants.

406   12 minutes later, Garry has stopped participating and is sat down on the edge of

407   the pitch.

408   John (to Garry): "Garry, you should be taking part in this, unless you are unfit"

409   Garry murmurs something under his breath to which John responds "what do you

410   mean no?"

411   Garry (to John): "No, I'm not taking part in this anymore"

412   In this particular example, John engages in a typical ego-involving coaching strategy that

413   emphasizes public evaluation and normative comparison (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999). Such

414   environments have been associated with enhanced threat to one's self-esteem because a positive

415   sense of self is dependent on normative performance criteria (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Sport-specific

416   research has also linked ego-involving environments to negative consequences, such as lower

417   autonomous motivation (Duda, Chi, Newton, Walling, & Catley, 1995), poor quality coach-

418   athlete relationships (Olympiou, Jowett, & Duda, 2008), and even depression (Krane, Greenleaf,

419   & Snow, 1997). Within the scenario presented here, the observed consequences were only short-

420   term and behavioral, yet it highlights the fragility and sporadic dropout patterns associated with

421   young people (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Romi & Marom, 2007). In addition, the

422   potentially damaging cognitive, affective and behavioral effects of these experiences in the long

423   term should not be overlooked.

424   As well as ego-involving coaching environments, both coaches displayed highly

425   authoritarian coaching styles throughout the program. Although Dan's use of humor and his

426   rapport with participants counteracted these theoretically maladaptive behaviors, John's

427   approach was somewhat different:

428   John (to Paul): "switch on, you're standing against the wall day dreaming... this is

429   for your benefit, not me. You need to start listening in."

430   Shortly after, John is standing at the side of the practice area, arms crossed,

431   vigorously chewing gum whilst shouting instructions to the group who are

432   performing dynamic stretches.

433   John (to James): "James, it's not a carry on, make sure you are doing this

434   properly."

435   The participants' heads are down and they are performing the instructions with

436   little enthusiasm. They have become bored of this particular environment.

437   Cushion and Jones (2006) similarly observed highly authoritarian and controlling

438 coaching practices in professional academy soccer; a way of interacting that is deeply rooted in

439 soccer culture (Kelly & Waddington, 2006). Although the participants under investigation here

440 were not being trained to become professional soccer players, the coaches both worked in the

441 professional game outside of the program. Thus, it seems that this authoritarian coaching culture

442 also exists in a non-elite setting. Although we have proposed that controlling coaching behaviors

443 do not always lead to negative consequences, it would be foolhardy to suggest that attempts to

444 reduce these coaching practices should not be made. However, the prevalence of controlling and

445 authoritarian coaching behaviors within this program and beyond intimate that a cultural shift is

446 needed for change to occur.

447 **Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions**

448   Using Gubrium and Holstein's (1997) common threads of qualitative research as a

449 benchmark, we feel the present study has several merits. First, we have made a commitment to

450 close scrutiny by adopting an immediate proximity to the coaching context over a significant

451 period of time. This scrutiny was further aided by the video footage enabling in-depth

452 exploration of the world of the coaches by more than one researcher. By making this

453   commitment, we were able "to look closely at social phenomena to see that which other kinds of

454   inquiry may have missed" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; p.11). Similarly, we have explored the

455   qualities of SDT-advocated social phenomena without the assumptions that quantitative,

456   positivist research is based upon. For example, the mixed consequences of a controlling

457   interpersonal style was a common theme in the data, and goes beyond the proposal that

458   controlling behavior leads to negative outcomes.

459   Gubrium and Holstein (1997) also proposed that qualitative research should concentrate

460   on how actors construct and experience their lives with a complementary appreciation for the

461   subjectivity of such experiences and the researchers' interpretations. By collecting data by means

462   of observations, field notes, video footage and participant interviews we attempted to build a

463   comprehensive and plausible picture of the coaches and participants' experiences. At the same

464   time, our interpretations were framed within SDT and based on significant personal coaching

465   experience; therefore, studies using different theoretical perspectives may interpret coaches'

466   behaviors differently.

467   Perhaps most importantly, we feel that the present study has a 'tolerance for complexity'

468   (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997) and the findings should be digested with similar broad-mindedness.

469   For example, we provide examples where theoretically ego-involving coaching leads to negative

470   consequences in one situation, such as the non-participation of Garry, yet laughter and

471   enjoyment results when Steve was made to do a mushroom forfeit. We also suggest that some

472   behaviors conceptualized as autonomy-supportive may be beneficial in this unique setting while

473   others may be counterproductive. It is precisely these complex interactions between theory,

474   coach, participant, and context that we aimed to describe in the hope of producing a meaningful

475   dialogue between theory and practice.

476   As well as these perceived strengths of the study, several limitations exist that are worthy

477   of mention. First, it is plausible that the coaches altered their interpersonal style in the presence

478   of a researcher. The consistent manner in which the coaches approached the sessions appeared

479   natural, which would suggest that the observed sessions were a true reflection of their actual

480   coaching style. Further, both coaches were informed that the results of the study would not be

481   reported back to the organization and that only the research team would have access to the data.

482   Therefore, we suspect that the coaches felt no pressure to behave differently. Second, the

483   coaches were not asked to provide reasons why they employed those coaching styles. Future

484   research may wish to examine coaches' justifications of their use of various coaching behaviors.

485   Third, study participants were both male coaches delivering coaching sessions to young people

486   not in education, employment or training in the west of Scotland. Future studies could widen the

487   study sample by exploring the coaching behavior of those working in a program that targets

488   youth from other disadvantaged backgrounds, such as homelessness or those with drug or

489   alcohol addictions.

490   **Conclusions**

491   To summarize, the aim of this study was to examine, through the lens of SDT, the

492   multifaceted relationships between coach, disadvantaged youth, and context in a soccer-based

493   life skills development program. Much of the previous research has examined general autonomy-

494   supportive and controlling coaching styles using athlete self-report methods, rather than specific

495   situations and behaviors. In some circumstances, giving choice and responsibility may have been

496   counterproductive because participants lacked the belief and knowledge to seize opportunities to

497   take leadership roles, responsibility and make appropriate choices. Other autonomy-supportive

498   strategies, such as providing a rationale, seemed somewhat easier to implement within this

499   context and benefitted attendees within the program. Further, coaches who were interpersonally

500   involved with participants, in particular those who successfully built relationships through the

501   use of humor, were able to offset some negative consequences of controlling and theoretically

502   maladaptive coach behaviors. These findings add to the extant literature by offering an

503   alternative and idiographic perspective of SDT-based coaching that contrasts with the

504   generalizations offered by the dominant positivist body of evidence. In particular, researchers

505   and practitioners should be mindful of situation-specific factors when broadly proposing the

506   positive effects of autonomy support and admonishing controlling coaching. The descriptions

507   contained in the study also show evidence of logistical, personal and cultural barriers that may

508   impede the effective implementation of autonomy-supportive coaching in disadvantaged youth

509   contexts. Overall, this study gives new insight into the complex relationships that exist between

510   SDT-based coaching behaviors and the influence that the soccer context may have on these

511   relationships.

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