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Exploring the Contribution of the Caring Climate to the Youth Sport Experience

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The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between young athletes’ perceptions of the caring climate on their soccer teams to their enjoyment, attitudes and, behaviors toward their coach and teammates, and commitment to the sport. Athletes \( N = 184 \) in a community soccer league volunteered to complete a survey. Results revealed that athletes who perceived a caring climate on their teams were significantly more likely to report higher enjoyment, more positive attitudes towards their coaches/teammates, greater commitment to soccer, and engage in more caring behaviors towards their coaches/teammates. Results suggest that a caring climate may benefit young athletes.

“What is our job?” Biff [the high school football coach] asked on behalf of himself, Joe, and the eight other assistant coaches. “To love us,” most of the boys yelled back... “And what is your job?” Biff shot back. “To love each other,” the boys responded. . . . “I don’t care if you’re big or small, huge muscles or no muscles, never even played football or star of the team—I don’t care about any of that stuff,” Biff went on to tell the boys, who sat in the grass while he spoke. “If you’re here, then you’re one of us, and we love you. Simple as that.” (Marx, 2003, p. 43)

Researchers have long investigated the role the coach plays in providing a positive experience for youth sport participants (See Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005; Horn, 2008; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Smith & Smoll, 2002; Treasure, 2001; Weiss, 2008 for reviews of this work). Much of this work has demonstrated that a coach who emphasizes positive reinforcement, provides appropriate feedback, and creates a task-involving and/or autonomy supportive climate is more likely to have young athletes who enjoy their youth sport experience, like their coach and team more, indicate a willingness to play for their coach again, and are less likely to drop out of sport (Barnett, Smoll & Smith, 1992; Balaguер, Duda, Atienza, & Mayo, 2002; Cumming, Smoll, Smith, & Grossbard, 2007; Fry & Newton, 2003; Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Briere, 2002; Sarrizin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002).
Another aspect of the climate, as indicated by the above quote, is the degree to which the coach cares for the athletes. Hellison (2000) contends that a key component of effective physical activity programs is contact with a caring adult. Additionally, Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, and Jones (2005) note that one aspect of an effective youth sport program is that it includes adults who genuinely care for the children. However, the role that caring may play in fostering a positive youth sport experience has received limited attention.

Components of caring behaviors have been explored in past sport psychology research. Some researchers (Allen, 2003; Andersen-Butcher & Conroy, 2002) have elaborated on Goodenow's (1993) notion of perceived sense of belongingness. Goodenow felt that a key to school retention and motivation was the development of a bond between the student and the school. Building upon this notion, Andersen-Butcher and Conroy (2002) explored the relationship between a sense of belongingness in a youth development program (i.e., Boys and Girls club) and retention. They reported a significant positive relationship between belongingness and self-reported attendance. Allen (2003) also investigated the role of perceived sense of belongingness along with social affiliation goals (i.e., those focused on developing and fostering relationships) on enjoyment in sport. Both a sense of belongingness and social affiliation goals were positively related to sport enjoyment for adolescent female athletes. Other researchers (Jowett, 2007; LaVoi, 2007) have explored the dyadic relationship between coach and athlete. In Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs (i.e., closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation) conceptualization of the coach-athlete relationship, closeness, denoted by mutual trust and respect, is seen as an important component of an effective relationship that allows the relationship to thrive and lead to a long term commitment among the athlete and coach that could foster psychological well-being. Thus, there is some support for the role of caring behaviors on promoting enjoyment and continued participation in physical activity. However, there is a need to elaborate on this research by exploring the caring climate that athletes perceive the coach creates within the team.

Our conceptualization of a caring climate originates from Noddings' (1992; 2003a) notion of the caring relation and Battistich and colleagues' (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Lewis, & Schaps, 1999) work on creating a caring school community. Noddings (1992) states that caring is “a way of being” in a relationship that is characterized by engrossment and motivational displacement (p. 17). Thus, the one caring in a caring relationship attends to the needs of another by listening, sympathizing, and accepting the cared for as well as focusing on helping meet the needs and fostering the progress of the cared for rather than meeting one’s own needs. Noddings hypothesizes that developing such a caring relation within the school context would foster young people’s ability to care for themselves and others as well as ignite a passion for learning.

Battistich and colleagues (1997, 1999) extended Noddings’ philosophical framework by developing a comprehensive educational program focused on satisfying children's basic psychological needs including the need to feel connected to others (e.g., relatedness; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Specifically, they assisted schools in developing a classroom climate that is characterized by warm, stable, supportive relationships that are extended to and shared by all classroom participants. They provided training to all education staff in these schools to nurture the social and ethical development of the children by instituting norms and values within the environment that revolve around respect and caring, and honoring the interests, passions, and meaning constructed by the children as they engage in the learning process. Findings from their studies note several adaptive social-psychological outcomes. Pertinent to our discussion, perceiving a sense of a caring community was associated with a greater liking of school, enjoyment of class, and enjoyment in helping others learn (Battistich et al., 1997). Therefore, providing an overarching context that is characterized by engrossment (listening, accepting,
Corresponding with the ideals articulated by Noddings (1992, 2003a) and Battistich and his colleagues (Battistich et al., 1997; Battistich et al., 1999), within the physical activity domain we and our colleagues have defined a caring climate to be the extent to which individuals perceive a particular setting to be interpersonally inviting, safe, supportive, and able to provide the experience of being valued and respected (Newton, Fry, et al., 2007; Newton, Watson, Gano-Overway, Fry, Kim & Magyar, 2007). We have also provided preliminary evidence that when youth perceive the climate to be caring it provides a more positive experience for them. For example, Newton, Watson et al. (2007) created a caring climate in a summer physical activity camp and compared it to a similar program under a standard camp curriculum. They found that the campers in the caring climate camp perceived a more caring environment and reported higher levels of empathetic concern and greater desire for future involvement in camp than those in the traditional camp program. Additionally, Newton, Fry et al. (2007) found that when individuals involved in a summer camp program perceived a caring climate they were more likely to value being part of the program as well as want to be involved in the program the following year. However, further evidence is needed to determine more specifically, how a caring climate can provide youth with an enjoyable youth sport experience.

In examining the positive role that well-structured physical activity can play for youngsters, the physical (e.g., improved cardiovascular function; reduced risk for disease), social, and psychological benefits (e.g., self-esteem, moral growth, reduced anxiety) they reap have been well-documented (Center for Disease Control, 2010; Ewing, Gano-Overway, Branta & Seefeldt, 2002). Thus, it is critical for practitioners to understand how to keep young people involved in positive youth sport programs. Center stage for youth participating in sport programs is having fun (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1996; Sallis, Prochaska, & Taylor, 2000). Thus, researchers have spent considerable time understanding how the sport environment can provide enjoyment and encourage long-term participation as well as develop other benefits for youth sport participants (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006; Weiss, 2000). An environment focused on kindness and respect with the emphasis on building a caring relationship may contribute to the sense of enjoyment and commitment to continued participation young people experience on athletic teams.

Hanson (2008) has compared the developmental benefits that youngsters receive from participating in a variety of after-school opportunities related to sports, arts, academic, community-oriented, service and, faith-based activities. He found that youngsters rated their participation in sports as providing a high level of opportunity for developing teamwork and social skills but low levels of opportunity to experience positive relationships with peers and adults or learn to help and practice helping others. Furthermore, Noddings (2003b) maintains that the most important aim of educational experiences for young people is to help them become caring human beings who genuinely respect others and treat all people with kindness. It is reasonable to expect that youngsters’ relationships in sport could be strongly influenced by the degree that they perceive a caring climate on their teams. If youngsters perceive a caring and supportive environment on their sport teams, it follows that they may be more likely to feel connected to and demonstrate caring behaviors towards their coaches and teammates.

Currently, research has not fully investigated how the caring climate may be related to these attributes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between young athletes’ perceptions of a caring climate on their soccer teams to their enjoyment, attitudes and behaviors toward their coach and teammates, and commitment to their sport. Based on previous work on relatedness and the caring climate, it was postulated that perceptions of
a caring climate would be positively associated to athletes’ enjoyment of soccer and their continued commitment to the sport. Additionally, it was hypothesized that perceptions of a caring climate would be positively related to the athletes’ positive attitudes towards and self-reported engagement in caring behaviors with their teammates and coaches.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants were members of a community soccer program who all reported themselves to be competitive athletes. The 184 youth athletes ranged in age from 10–17 years ($M = 13.19, SD = 1.83$), and were healthy middle ($n = 130$) and high school ($n = 52$) students with approximately 8 years of playing experience ($M = 8.14, SD = 2.37$) and had been playing for this particular soccer program for approximately 4 years ($M = 3.66, SD = 2.41$). Both males ($n = 39$) and females ($n = 145$) participated in the study. The athletes were predominately Caucasian American ($n = 165$, Asian American = 5, Hispanic American = 4, African American = 3, Native American = 1, 5 indicated other, 1 did not respond).

**Procedure**

Permission to conduct the study with the soccer program was first received from the director of the program. Upon receiving approval, individual coaches were contacted regarding appropriate times to have researchers administer a survey to the athletes near the end of soccer practice and parents were informed about the nature and purpose of the study. After scheduling a time with the coach and receiving parental assent, a researcher or trained graduate student came to a practice toward the end of the spring season to insure that athletes had sufficient opportunity to judge the climate created by the coaches. The researcher explained the general purpose of the study and every athlete on the team was invited to participate. Those athletes who consented to participate completed a survey which contained items related to demographic information as well as measures assessing their perceptions of the caring climate, caring behaviors, attitudes toward their teammates and coaches, level of enjoyment, and level of commitment to playing on their soccer team. The survey was completed near the end of their practice session without coaching staff present and took approximately 15–20 min to complete.

**Measures**

**Demographic Questions**

Participants were asked to complete items identifying their age, gender, race, grade in school, level of soccer (i.e., recreational or competitive), years involved in soccer, and years played in this particular soccer club.

**Caring Climate Scale**

The Caring Climate Scale (CCS; Newton, Fry, et al., 2007) was used to assess the extent that the athletes and coaches on their team value, care, and respect one another. The items represented a general sense of caring that the youth perceived on their team (e.g., “On this team, athletes are treated with respect” and “On this team, athletes feel welcome everyday”) representing a single scale. As youth read each of the 13 items on the scale they were asked to consider how much they believed each item adequately described their team and respond using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A mean CCS score is created for each athlete.
Newton, Fry et al. (2007) report that the CCS was initially developed by identifying 30 items that were based on the literature related to caring (e.g., Cohen, 2001; Hellison, 2003; Noddings, 1992, 1995, 2003a) and seven researchers who had practical experience working with youth. The final instrument was reduced to 13 items based on two distinct data collections with youth involved in a summer sport camp that explored the factor validity of the instrument. The confirmatory factor analysis of the final scale demonstrated an adequate fit to the data, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = .037, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .96, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .95, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .06 (90% confidence interval = .05 – .07). Additionally, the CCS was found to have strong internal reliability (α = .92) and demonstrated convergent validity with a task-involving climate (r = .56) and discriminant validity with an ego-involving climate (r = -.36). Within the current study an exploratory factor analysis confirmed the factor validity (i.e., all factor loadings were greater than .50) and reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alpha revealed strong internal consistency (α = .91).

**Attitudes toward Team and Coach**

Five items were included to assess athletes’ attitudes toward their coaches and teammates. Smith, Smoll, and Curtis (1979) developed these items as independent measures in their work with coaching behaviors in Little League baseball. These items were adapted by Fry and Newton (2003) to form three short scales (comprised of seven items) in their study with young tennis players. Two of these scales were utilized in the present study. The scales assessed attitudes towards their coach (3 items, “How much would you like to have the same coach again next year?”, “How much do you like playing for your coach?”, and “How much do you like your coach?”) and their teammates (2 items, “How much do you like the other athletes on your team?”, “How well do the athletes on your team get along?”). Athletes responded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot). The reliability for attitude toward team (α = .73) and attitude toward coach (α = .91) was found to be adequate.

**Caring Behaviors**

Six items from the CCS (Newton, Fry, et al., 2007) were adapted to measure the athletes’ perceptions of their own engagement in caring behaviors with the coaches and teammates. Sample items included the following: “I treat my teammates and coaches with respect”, “I care about my teammates and coaches,” and “I treat my teammates and coaches with kindness.” Individuals were asked to consider how they act toward their teammates and coaches and then respond to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This measure demonstrated good reliability (α = .84) within this study.

**Enjoyment**

Five items developed by Duda and Nicholls’ (1992) were used to measure athletes’ perceptions of their enjoyment of being on their soccer team. The measure asked participants to consider how much fun they had on their soccer team when responding to each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items include, “I usually enjoy playing soccer” and “I usually find soccer interesting.” The measure has been supported with strong factor validity and reliability coefficients (i.e., enjoyment/interest α = .94 in Duda & Nicholls, 1992). For this study the measure was also found to be reliable (α = .86).
EXPLORING THE CONTRIBUTION OF CARING

Commitment

A six-item measure of commitment developed by Scanlan, Simons, Carpenter, Schmidt, and Keeler (1993) was employed to measure the athletes’ commitment to soccer. The measure asks youth to consider how much they would like to keep playing on this soccer team (e.g., “How hard would it be for you to quit soccer?” and “What would you be willing to do to keep playing soccer?”). Athletes responded using a 5-point rating scale with the responses varying for each question (e.g., not at all hard to very hard; nothing at all to a lot of things). Scanlan et al. (1993) as well as Weiss, Kimmel, and Smith (2001) reported acceptable reliability of the measure which was confirmed in this study (α = .91).

Data Analysis

To explore the hypothesis that the perceived caring climate would be positively related to attitudes toward teammates and coaches, caring behaviors, enjoyment, and commitment, Pearson Product Moment correlations were conducted. Prior to performing this main analysis, statistical assumptions were tested (i.e., outliers, normality, linearity) and descriptive statistics were carried out.

RESULTS

Statistical Assumptions

Prior to running the main statistical tests, the statistical assumptions were tested. Scatterplots of the relationships between the independent variable and dependent variables revealed linear relationships. Inspection of standardized z scores revealed eight potential outliers with scores greater than 3.29. Investigation of the potential outliers revealed that they represented valid responses from participants and were therefore retained. It should be noted that the inclusion of the outliers did not alter the main statistical tests. Examination of the skewness and kurtosis of the variables revealed significant negative skewness and high kurtosis. Therefore, the data was transformed to bring it closer to normal using procedures provided by Tabachnick and Fidell (2006). The transformation was successful but examination of the main statistical tests revealed the findings only demonstrated minute changes. Thus, to maintain the interpretability of the results the original data was used in all subsequent analyses.

Descriptive Statistics

Exploration of the descriptive statistics revealed that athletes perceived the climate created on their soccer teams was caring and perceived that they themselves engaged in caring behaviors (see Table 1). Additionally, soccer players indicated that they enjoyed participating in soccer and they liked their coach and teammates a lot. Finally, the athletes indicated that they were committed to their soccer teams.

Relationship between Caring Climate and Attitudes, Caring Behaviors, Enjoyment and Commitment

Examination of Pearson Product Moment correlations revealed moderate to strong positive correlations between the caring climate and each dependent variable (i.e., caring behaviors, attitudes toward the coach, enjoyment, and commitment to playing soccer). The caring climate only had a small positive relationship with attitudes toward teammates. Additionally, it was found that caring behaviors were also positively related to attitudes toward the coach and...
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Select Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Caring Climate</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Attitude Toward Coach</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Attitude Toward Teammates</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Caring Behaviors</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Enjoyment</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Commitment</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All correlations above .28 are significant at \( p = .001 \).

team, enjoyment, and soccer commitment. Finally, enjoyment was positively correlated with commitment to continued involvement in soccer (see Table 1).

**DISCUSSION**

The coach is a key player in making the sport experience positive for young people. Much research has indicated that creating a task-involving, autonomy-supportive climate provides athletes an enjoyable experience and they come to appreciate their coach and teammates and want to continue within the sport (Cumming et al., 2007; Fry & Newton, 2003; Pelletier et al., 2002; Sarrizin et al., 2002). Although autonomy supportive and competence supportive (i.e., task-involving climate) climates have been investigated within the literature, less emphasis has been placed on relatedness supportive climates, like the caring climate. Therefore, the intent of this study was to investigate whether the caring climate as perceived by youth soccer players would positively influence sport enjoyment, sport commitment, and positive attitudes and caring behaviors toward their coach and teammates. Clear support was found for the caring climate contributing positively to the youth sport experience.

Young athletes’ perceptions of a caring climate were positively associated with their attitudes and caring behaviors toward their coaches and teammates. It appears, therefore, that an environment that is perceived to be inviting, supportive, and respectful can provide a sense of belongingness that leads youth to like their teammates and coaches more. Additionally, it is possible that when young athletes see their coach engaging in caring behaviors, it leads them to model those behaviors with the coach and their teammates. This finding supports Noddings’ (2003a, 2003b) contention that a caring relation can provide an opportunity for individuals to care for others. Thus, similar to the task-involving climate which was found to be related to positive coach ratings (Balaguer et al., 2002) and coach effectiveness training where athletes positively evaluated teammates and coaches (Barnett et al., 1992; Smith, Smoll, Barnett, & Everett, 1993; Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979), the caring climate also contributes to positive evaluations of and exhibiting caring behaviors toward one’s coaches and teammates.

Youth sport participants’ perceptions of the caring climate were positively associated with their enjoyment. An environment characterized by warmth, safety, acceptance, and a willingness to help seems to provide opportunities for an enjoyable experience. Thus, this is similar to the educational environment where researchers have found a positive link between the caring community and liking of school and enjoying a class (Battistich et al., 1997; Battistich et al., 1999). Furthermore, if children have more positive attitudes toward the coach and teammates
it seems to reason that their sport experience would be more enjoyable. This corresponds to research exploring the developmental significance of friendship in youth sport. Specifically, Weiss and Smith (2002) found that greater friendship quality, in the form of having things in common, engaging in companionship and play, and resolving conflicts, positively predicted enjoyment. It is possible that a caring climate may nurture this friendship quality leading to greater enjoyment. The caring climate, therefore, seems to complement the mastery approach to coaching, based on the task-involving climate and coach effectiveness training, in providing an enjoyable experience for youth (Cumming et al., 2007; Fry & Newton, 2003).

Previous research exploring the commitment of youth to continue their participation in sport has found that the coaching climate plays a key role. Specifically, coaches trained in the coach effectiveness program have been found to have reduced attrition rates among youth baseball players (Barnett et al., 1992). Additionally, a perceived task-involving climate positively predicted perceptions of competence and autonomy which in turn negatively predicted dropout status among female handball players (Sarrizin, et al., 2002). Finally, athletes who dropped out of sport had lower perceptions of an autonomy-supportive climate (Pelletier et al., 2002). This study further supports the role of the coaching climate in that youngsters’ perceptions of a caring climate were positively associated with sport commitment. It follows that when athletes perceive a caring climate in which the coach wants to help them, is kind and caring toward them and the team, and teammates exhibit acceptance and respect for each other that the climate is a desirable environment in which the athletes would like to continue to be involved. Research on friendship quality provides insight into this speculation. Specifically, Weiss and Smith (2002) found that greater friendship quality positively predicted commitment in sport. Additionally, Ulrich-French and Smith (2009) found that friendship quality also predicted continuation in a youth soccer program one year later. So it appears that friendship quality that encourages play and companionship can add to the benefits experienced in sport not only making it a more enjoyable experience for young people but also strengthening their commitment to participate. We would hypothesize that establishing a caring climate on a team may foster the development of these high quality friendships which would in turn positively influence sport enjoyment and commitment.

Overall, a caring climate, as perceived by soccer athletes is associated with a positive sport experience characterized by liking one’s coach and teammates, extending caring behaviors toward the coaches and teammates, enjoying playing soccer and wanting to be involved in soccer in the future. Therefore, by providing a caring environment coaches may encourage more involvement in sport and have fewer athletes drop out. This greater involvement is important if we hope to have young people reap the benefits of engagement in a sport environment that fosters positive youth development and promotes lifelong physical activity. Interestingly, preliminary research seems to suggest that the perceived caring climate is positively linked to the ability to empathize with others and control one’s emotions as well as to engage in prosocial behavior (Gano-Overway, Newton, Magyar, Fry, Kim, & Guivernau, 2009). Therefore, coaches are encouraged to create a caring climate to not only foster a positive sport experience but also to help athletes develop social and psychological competencies.

Noddings (1992, 2003a) provides insight into creating a caring relation by noting that the one caring should model caring behaviors, discuss caring actions and dilemmas, help individuals practice caring behaviors, and praise caring in action. To exhibit caring Noddings suggests that individuals engage in engrossment and motivational displacement. Though Noddings specifically addresses the school setting, research in sport psychology is revealing how relevant her conceptualization of caring is in the physical domain.

It should be noted that this study is not without limitations. Although this sample includes a wide age range of youngsters, the numbers in each developmental category were not adequate to investigate developmental differences in how perception of the caring climate may have
influenced the variables under investigation. Therefore, future research should more closely consider possible developmental differences. In addition, the single assessment correlational design does not provide insight into the cause and effect relationship between caring and the positive youth sport experience. It could very well be that liking one’s coach and teammates and enjoying the sport lead to greater perceptions of caring. Future prospective studies are needed. Furthermore, the study only speculates at how caring might be exhibited by coaches based on educational research; therefore, qualitative work needs to be conducted to determine what caring looks like in the sport domain. Finally, it would be beneficial to explore the caring climate along with the task-involving and autonomy-supportive climates to determine the collective, interactive, and unique effects of these aspects of the climate on the youth sport experience. As Cox and Williams (2008) suggest, a task-involving climate may incorporate aspects of caring because to encourage an individual to strive for excellence and assist them in their endeavor to improve exemplifies one aspect of caring noted by Noddings (2003a), motivational displacement. Additionally, Olympiou, Jowett, and Duda (2008) found that the relationship between a task-involving climate and the coach-athlete relationship (in terms of closeness [trust], commitment, and complementary behaviors that indicate a close relationship) was positive and that there may be interdependence between the two.

Another extension of this research would be to examine whether the positive outcomes identified in a sport context (e.g., athletes’ engaging in caring behaviors towards their coaches and teammates) may generalize to other life domains (e.g., school, family). Smoll, Smith, and Cumming (2007) recently provided preliminary evidence to suggest that athletes who played on teams where the coach received training to create a task-involving climate on their basketball teams were more likely to report higher task orientation at the end of the season in both the sport and academic contexts, than those athletes who played for coaches that received no training. It is possible that interventions aimed at helping coaches create a more caring environment on their sport teams could provide a context for teaching youngsters important life lessons that transcend sport.

In summary, this study, despite its limitations, does provide additional evidence to the growing body of research in sport psychology that a caring climate is a salient factor in the youth sport context and contributes to a positive youth sport experience. Sport psychology practitioners should begin to work with coaches to explore the possibilities of creating a caring climate on their sport teams. This continued line of research will be particularly helpful if specific and practical strategies can be highlighted that guide coaches in creating such an environment for their athletes.

REFERENCES


