

Correlation Between Role Perception and Motivation in Team Athletics

Seth D. Wright

Dr. Lori Mills

Department of Psychology, Milligan University

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Collegiate athletes have a multitude of roles that ensure they are routinely busy. They have committed to being full-time students, as well as full-time athletes. They must be able to balance daily training and games with college-level coursework. On top of the full-time job of being a student-athlete, many still must find a way to deal with the financial burden of attending university. While athletic scholarships help, most athletes still have to pay a significant amount of money toward their college education. This is routinely addressed by obtaining a part-time job, university job, or taking loans. So, the decision to compete in collegiate sports may seem simple, but to continue as a student-athlete indicates a high level of motivation (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2021). Athletes must also be able to identify and understand the role they have on their team. The reasons for participating in student-athlete sports are important individually as, without a source of motivation and a sense of a role, student-athletes can burn out.

Intrinsic motivation is the most notable style of motivation in research. It is often correlated and analyzed as the most beneficial motivation to an athlete. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2021) found that the student-athlete level of commitment to multiple obligations at once, typically, indicates intrinsic motivation in college athletes. In sport psychology, intrinsic motivation is a self-determined form of motivation, associated with greater involvement, a stronger mentality, and a more secure identity (Almagro et al., 2020). Passion is the center of an athlete's behavior when an intrinsic style of motivation is used. This style will see athletes perform extra work to improve their skills, not out of a desire to win a trophy or monetary support, but to further their interests. Athletes with an intrinsic motivational mindset toward participation are more confident in their performance and have a greater level of self-defined success (Almagro et al., 2020). Furthermore, research by Schmid et al. (2019) has identified that

intrinsically motivated athletes are more likely to reach higher levels of performance/skill. If intrinsic motivation generally provides the best results, why does not every athlete practice it? Research points toward cultural values and differences in norms, personality, and environmental factors (Vallerand, 2007).

Schmid et al. (2019) supported the value of intrinsic motivation with their study on the concept of highly intrinsically achievement-oriented athletes. Their study assessed 155 young athletes on achievement goal orientations, achievement motives, and self-determination. Ultimately, their study returned positive results for the incorporation of intrinsic motivation in athletes for their success. Schmid et al. point out that a team of highly intrinsically achievement-oriented athletes achieved higher levels of success and playing opportunities. They did not focus on ways to create an intrinsically motivated environment, but the study supports the practice of athletes being motivated intrinsically.

On the other side of the motivation spectrum, athletes may value rewards, social benefits, social hierarchy, or money as incentives for motivation. This is referred to as extrinsic motivation. Vallerand (2007) addresses that extrinsic motivation is not bad, but rather another style of motivation and most individuals incorporate both styles of motivation in their efforts. Furthermore, he suggests that it would be nearly impossible to take away the innate value of earning a scholarship, desiring a higher social status, or playing time. A combination of both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation could be seen as beneficial. Extrinsic motivation becomes an issue, at least in athletics, when it is the overwhelming source of motivation. Research done by Yukhymenko-Lescroarta (2021) indicates that the reported level of competence was lower in athletes with an obsessive or extrinsic perception, leading to, athletes

with higher intrinsic motivation or harmonious passion held a higher value in their abilities and skills.

Roles are a foundation of culture and society. Uncertainty in role or role ambiguity “is a lack of clear, consistent information about the expectations associated with one’s position (Eys et al., p. 392, 2003). This current study examines, similarly to the one done by Eys et al., how an athlete views their ability to understand their role and its obligations of it. A college athlete has many roles to fill, but the one being investigated is their role on the team. The ability to understand one’s position and responsibilities is vital to team cohesion and functionality. Without an understanding and acceptance of their position, the individual can ultimately fail (Washington & Lexington, 2016). This study examines role perception according to Beauchamp et al.’s (2002) research on role ambiguity and efficacy; their research viewed role perception as how well one understands their position and confidence to perform a role. How well an athlete perceives their role is important to how well the team ultimately performs. If an athlete is unable to understand their role or responsibilities of it, they severely limit the full capabilities of the team. The most basic roles on the team are starters, impact players, and uninvolved players. Starters and veteran players tend to be the most secure in their perceived roles. Conversely, new and uninvolved players are less secure in how they view their role (Eys et al., 2003). The concept of role perception should be a priority of coaches and staff. There is only so much a coach can teach their players about the requirements of a role, so this study examines the impact of motivation on their role. Coaches may not be able to as easily adjust an environment to benefit an athlete’s role perception, but they can adjust the environment and/or coaching style to increase an athlete’s intrinsic motivation.

Hypotheses

The researcher proposes the following hypotheses: Athletes that score higher on intrinsic motivation will score higher on role perception. Secondly, athletes that do not receive as much playing-time will report a greater desire to improve their involvement on the team.

Method

Participants

Participants and the frequency of sport involvement are included in Table 1. This study was based around team-involved, college-aged participants, with most participants coming from Milligan University. The survey was sent out to several universities: Milligan, East Tennessee State University, Tennessee Wesleyan University, and Reinhardt University. Only Milligan and ETSU participants returned survey responses. This resulted in 68 total responses. Participants' gender was about equal with 31 males, 27 females, and 1 identified as other. The following teams were surveyed: football, soccer, basketball, baseball, softball, and volleyball. Football and baseball responded minimally with only one participant from each. Softball returned six responses; volleyball returned 14 responses; basketball returned 15 responses; soccer returned 26 responses. The intended targeted population was college-aged athletes. Of the 68 participants, 67 respondents were 25 years of age or younger.

Instrument

To distribute, collect, and analyze the data, an anonymous online survey through Qualtrics was used. The option of an online survey increased the number of responses obtainable compared to an in-person survey. The first step in being able to distribute the survey was obtaining permission from the universities' Internal Review Boards. Once obtained, the survey was able to be distributed to athletic team coaches. Coaches then sent it out to their players. In

several cases coaches did not respond; this required an expansion of the data pool as well as a redistribution of the survey in order to get a sufficient number of participants. Several other universities' Internal Review Boards in the Appalachian Athletic Conference (the conference in which Milligan is a member) were contacted to gain approval. Tennessee Wesleyan and Reinhardt were the only schools that responded and granted permission; however, there was no response from their coaches. A final reconnection with coaches at Milligan and ETSU was required later in the summer to increase responses.

A basic demographic questionnaire was first presented to gain background information on the participants. The questionnaire included questions about age, gender, ethnicity, and sport played. A question of the level of participation (uninvolved, impact player, and starter) was included to address the investigation of involvement. Two reliable and valid scales were used to score the style of motivation and role perception. The Sports Motivation Scale (SMS-28) by Pelletier et al. (1995) was used to identify the motivational styles of individual athletes. The 28-item scale scored on levels of amotivational, extrinsic, and intrinsic motivation styles. Beauchamp et al.'s (2002) Role Behavior/Ambiguity scale was used to measure role perception. This 15-item scale scored participants on how they accept their role, the responsibilities of their role, and the implications of not performing to their responsibilities. Finally, a self-report scale on the desire to improve one's involvement on a team was utilized. The IBM SPSS Statistics program was used to run analyses.

Results

Graph 1 indicates the trend of intrinsic motivation positively correlating with role perception. This study utilized a Bivariate Correlation using a Pearson Correlation. Hypothesis 1, that athletes with a higher score in intrinsic motivation also reported a higher role perception

score, was supported by the data. The report by 68 respondents returned that intrinsic motivation had a significant positive correlation, $r(66) = 0.716$, $p < .001$.

Table 2 presents the three levels of athletes' participation (uninvolved athlete, impact athlete, and starting athlete) and the corresponding means of desire to improve their involvement in the team. Hypothesis 2, an athlete with less playing time would report a higher desire to improve their involvement, was not supported by the data. The mean of starters (4.89) was the highest. This is the opposite of what the second hypothesis predicted. The mean of uninvolved players was (3.83). Uninvolved players reported the least desire to improve their role on the team

Discussion

Intrinsic motivation was found to have a greater correlation to role perception than extrinsic motivation did. This supports previous research and this study's hypothesis; intrinsic motivation is a stronger predictor of more awareness of one's role on a team. It should be vital for coaches and players to be aware of this impact for a better athletic environment. Coaches can create an environment of joy, passion, and achievement, which supports an intrinsic style of motivation within players (Boll, 2017). This includes valuing a player's contribution, efforts/passion, and struggles. It can be difficult to consciously strive for an intrinsically motivating environment as intrinsic motivation is generally innate; however, it can be stimulated by an environment. A player can easily lose passion due to a lack of involvement, uncertainty, and harsh conditions. As college athletes have other responsibilities, coaches need to examine the effects athletic commitment has on an athlete's academic life (Washington & Lexington, 2016). With many roles and responsibilities to fulfill, an athlete can be overwhelmed. By being overwhelmed by other obligations, athletes can begin to fail in certain role or become uncommitted from their responsibilities. A negative mentality resulting from an inability to

fulfill responsibilities can breed amotivation and disengagement from one's passion or their sport.

Even though intrinsic motivation indicates a better relationship with role perception, extrinsic motivation did have a significant, albeit smaller, relationship with role perception. Vallerand's (2007) research on motivation indicated that a typical style of motivation incorporates both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation styles. Humans are naturally very social and at times materialistic. Extrinsic motivation's significant correlation with role perception indicates that internal drive is not an exclusive factor. Specifically, playing time investigated in this study was a related factor to role perception in other studies. Playing time is identified as an extrinsic style of motivation by Vallerand (2007) as it is a means to an end. Typically, playing time is viewed as a reward or a benefit that goes against the concept of intrinsic motivation's style of doing an action for the enjoyment of a task. That being said, athletes still want to receive game time because they enjoy the sport. So high competitiveness of college athletes may limit playing time, leading to a more extrinsic style of motivation. This can be compensated by coaching efforts and direct communication with a player. By communicating thoughts of improvement and basic coaching practices, coaches are able to fulfill other basic psychological needs of belongingness and self-esteem (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2021). If athletes are more confident in their belongingness on the team and are praised for their natural efforts, coaches can create a higher intrinsically motivated team.

The results of the research indicated that a higher level of role perception was found in individuals with greater intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is usually seen as a healthier or more effective form of motivation. Individuals who possess intrinsic motivation are more secure in their actions and efforts toward a goal. Ultimately by understanding the value of intrinsic

motivation, teams and companies can develop programs and offer learning opportunities to improve intrinsic motivation. Additional research should be directed at other populations and/or larger participant studies, as well as other factors that stimulate a passionate and meaningful athletic environment.

Limitations and Future Research

While this research yielded significant data, certain limitations may impact the validity of the findings and further research should be pursued. Firstly, this study targeted a specific population, and it may not be indicative of the total population of other groups. Most of the responses came from a private Christian university and an average-sized public university. The lack of responses from more public-sectored schools can limit the generalizability of these findings to the collective of collegiate athletes. The student athletes at a private Christian school can have ungeneralizable perceptions to nonreligious/non-Christian student athletes as well. Christian perceptions about how God's will may affect their outlook on how winning and losing can be addressed. As well, the Christian value of not being materialistic may contribute to a higher score in intrinsic motivation. Secondly, there is also concern about the usage of the anonymous, online questionnaire format of the study. Individuals may be biased in their responses and report inaccurate responses on their role or efforts in their sport. However, previous research has found significant results in identifying motivation and role using the same questionnaires (Clancy et al., 2016). Thirdly, the genders of basketball, volleyball, and soccer were not split. The survey only polled basketball, soccer, and volleyball as a collective, rather than separating it into women's and men's respective sports. This contrasts with the natural gender separation of softball, baseball, and football. Men and women may have different perspectives or values on a style of motivation. It is important to be able to apply results to both

men and women, as results may not be significant towards one or the other. Several participants did not complete the study, leading to invalidated responses, which could have shown statistically significant data. While there was no significant data, there was a trend for less involved players to report a smaller desire to improve their involvement. The lack of motivation to improve one's position indicates an amotivation/lacking style of motivation. These players potentially could feel a sense of hopelessness in their situation.

In conclusion, college athletics is a highly competitive environment, but the concept of team unity applies to all players, involved or not. Continuing research in the field of motivation and role is necessary to better understand players and create a stimulating environment. By creating a motivating environment coaches can improve the functionality of a team and team cohesion.

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Table 1

Participant and Their Frequency of Sport Played

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	31	45.6
Female	27	39.7
Other	1	1.5
Missing	9	13.2
Total	68	100

Sport Played	Frequency	Percent
Soccer	26	38.2
Basketball	15	22.1
Football	1	1.5
Baseball	1	1.5
Softball	6	8.8
Volleyball	14	20.6
Missing	5	7.4
Total	68	100

Table 2

Athlete Involvement and Desire to Improve Means

	Starter	Impact Player	Uninvolved	Average score
Volleyball	8	4	1	4.73
Softball	3	2	NR	3.5
Baseball	NR	NR	NR	NR
Football	NR	NR	NR	NR
Basketball	4	7	1	5
Soccer	14	9	1	4.31
Average Score	4.89	4.21	3.83	NR-no response

Figure 1

Scatterplot Indicating the Correlation Between Intrinsic Motivation and Role Perception

