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part I

Relationships in Sport

Relationships form a central part of one's life. The saying "No man is an island" attests to the social character of our being and becoming. Although the expansion of general relationship research over the last 20 years is phenomenal, relationship-specific theory and research as it pertains to the sport context is gathering momentum. This volume begins with four chapters that highlight the interest, progress, and potential associated with this area. Two specific relationship types are addressed: coach-athlete relationships and peer relationships.

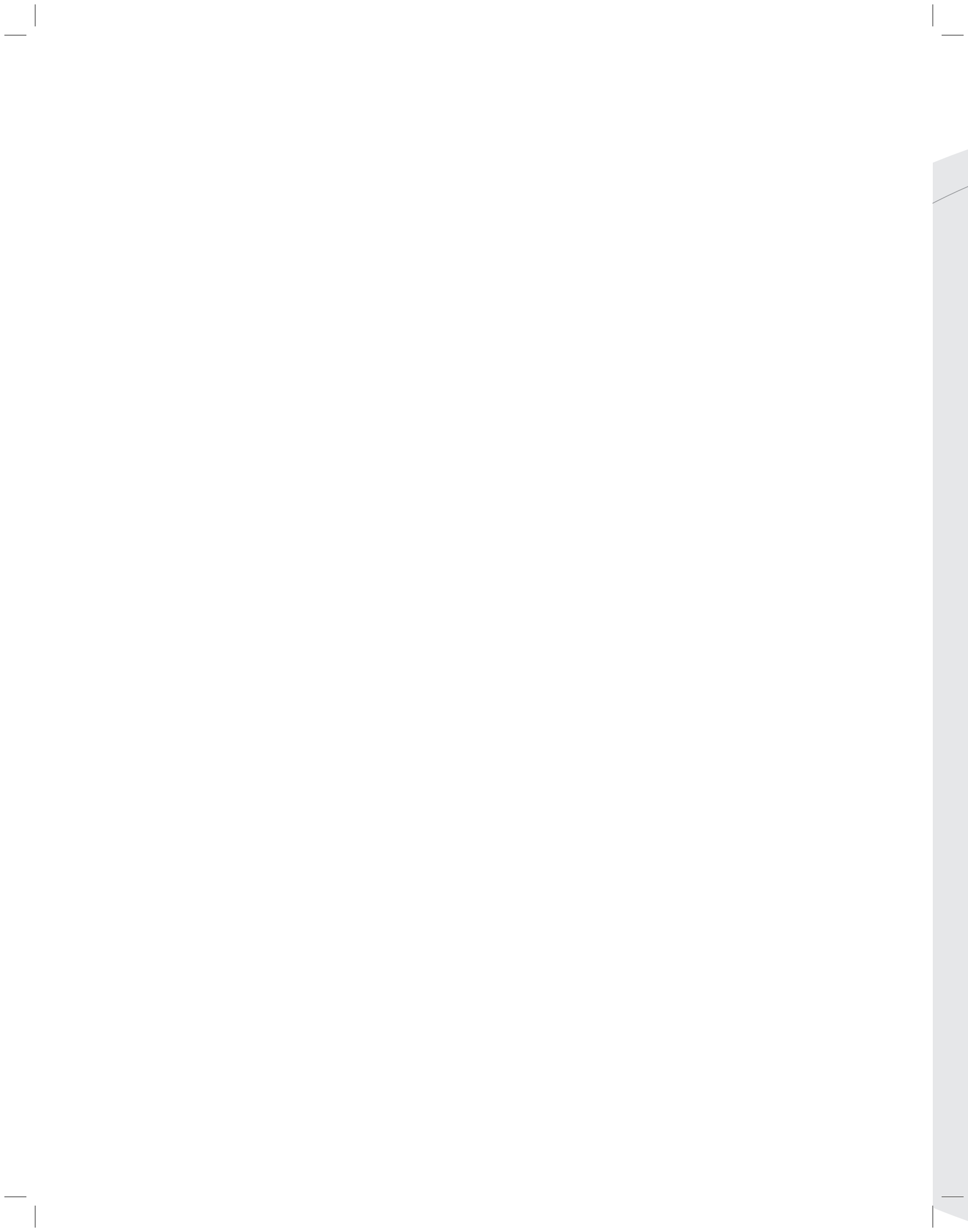
In chapter 1, Sophia Jowett and Artur Poczwadowski consider the coach-athlete relationship from a conceptual perspective. Jowett and Poczwadowski highlight the importance of precisely defining the coach-athlete relationship and introduce a taxonomy that describes the relationship in terms of their prizewinning and caring characteristics. An integrated research model that emanates from recent conceptualization of the coach-athlete relationship is offered as a medium for generating systematic, comprehensive, empirically grounded knowledge for coaches, athletes, parents, practitioners, and policy makers. The final sections on future research and practical implications underline the complexities and substance of this topic.

In chapter 2, Sophia Jowett begins by discussing the interdependent nature of coach-athlete relationships as has been viewed through the lenses of asymmetry, power and control, and parent-child relationships. Jowett proposes the application of a theoretical model to fully understand the interdependent nature of coach-athlete relationships. Principles of inter-

dependence theory are presented and the notion of interdependence is operationalized through the constructs of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. Future research directions that follow reflect the enormous scope of this theoretical model. She concludes by highlighting practical implications related to the impact of prosocial interactions in repairing dysfunctional coach-athlete relationships.

In chapter 3, Nicole LaVoi focuses on two vital factors that affect the quality of coach-athlete relationships: interpersonal communication and conflict. Definitional and theoretical issues related to communication and conflict are developed and applied to the context of the coach-athlete relationship. LaVoi presents research that addresses these vital factors and reflects on their limited theoretical and empirical breadth and depth. She discusses how effective communication can assist in managing and resolving conflict and proposes relational expertise as a set of skills that has the potential to produce positive outcomes for the athlete and the coach.

In chapter 4, Alan Smith provides a comprehensive review of the theory and research related to peer relationships, particularly those in youth sport. By summarizing conceptual and operational issues of this topic, Smith provides a platform from which the theoretical frameworks of interpersonal theory of psychiatry and attachment theory are proposed to guide empirical endeavors. Smith explains the significance of research on peer relationships in the context of youth sport and discusses the current state of knowledge. He concludes that sport matters to peer relationships and proposes future research directions in this topic.



chapter 1

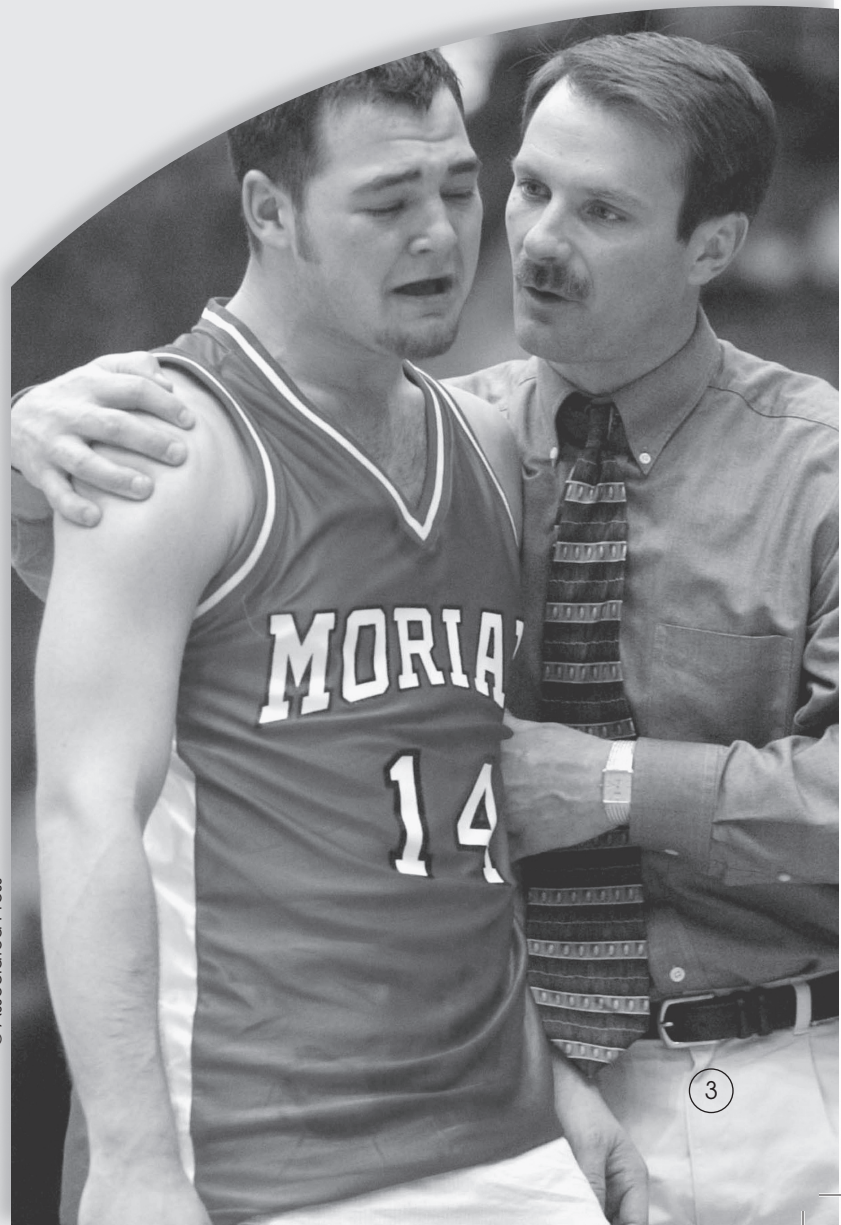
Understanding the Coach–Athlete Relationship

Sophia Jowett, PhD, and Artur Poczwardowski, PhD

Learning Objectives

On completion of this chapter, the reader should have

1. knowledge of major definitional dimensions in coach–athlete relationships;
2. understanding of the critical link between theory and research and the possibilities for basic and applied research;
3. knowledge of current conceptual models of coach–athlete relationships;
4. familiarity with the application of an integrated conceptual model in accelerating research on coach–athlete relationships;
5. understanding of the importance of a dependable knowledge base for analyzing coach–athlete dyads in sport; and
6. knowledge of problems related to the study of coach–athlete relationships.



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Coaches and athletes often form relationships, alliances, or partnerships through which instruction, guidance, and support are provided to the athlete. In reflecting on athletic success, sport directors and managers, the media, and coaches and athletes themselves have directed public attention to the significance of the coach-athlete relationship. Mutual trust, respect, belief, support, cooperation, communication, and understanding are considered among the most important relationship components that contribute to performance success and satisfaction (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Poczwadowski, Henschen, & Barott, 2002; Wylleman, 2000). In contrast, lack of trust, lack of respect, excessive dominance, and blind obedience as well as verbal, physical, and sexual exploitation are considered to be components that undermine coaches' and athletes' welfare (e.g., Burke, 2001; Jowett, 2003; Nielsen, 2001; Ogilvie, 1995).

Both *performance enhancement* as well as *psychological well-being* lie at the heart of the coach-athlete relationship. Well-being has generally been viewed from either its hedonic characteristics of pleasure attainment as opposed to pain avoidance or from its more subtle eudemonic characteristics of self-realization (e.g., experiencing personal growth and development; see Waterman, 1993). The manner in which either a sole focus on performance enhancement or a combined focus on sport performance and psychological well-being promotes or thwarts coaches' and athletes' development are areas that have been recently explored (e.g., Miller & Kerr, 2002).

In order to develop a sound understanding of what makes coaches and athletes emphasize performance enhancement or psychological well-being in their partnership, scholars should attempt to fully understand the predictive and explanatory functions of the coach-athlete relationship. To that end, the content of the relationship must be described and classified. The aim of this chapter is to explore the possibilities for advancing the study of coach-athlete relationships by building on the existing knowledge. More specifically, the coach-athlete relationship as a psychological concept will be defined as we highlight its pivotal role in athletes' growth and development. Critical issues surrounding research, theory, and practice will be discussed and an overview of recently developed conceptual models will be offered. Finally, the presentation of a research model will provide an opportunity to integrate current thinking on coach-athlete relationships.

Coach-Athlete Relationship Defined

The question "What is a coach-athlete relationship?" is a central issue to both researchers and practitioners in sport psychology. Questions like this help us understand

what is involved in a psychosocial phenomenon under investigation. They help us clearly and unambiguously define the *problem* and its boundary conditions. They help us identify the broad spectrum of issues and the processes involved. A definition of the coach-athlete relationship needs to be both sufficiently general in order to contain all facets of the phenomenon but also specific enough to permit rigorous testing and to be of practical use.

In this chapter, the coach-athlete relationship is broadly defined as a situation in which a coach's and an athlete's cognitions, feelings, and behaviors are mutually and causally interrelated (e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett, Paull, & Pensgaard, 2005; Poczwadowski, Henschen, & Barott, 2002; see also chapter 2). According to this definition, a relationship is dynamic and therefore may be viewed as a state. Its nature is expected to change over time in response to the dynamic quality of human cognitions, emotions, and behavior shaped through the interaction of the relationship members. In turn, the state in which the content and nature of the relationship resides is determined by the combined interrelating of coaches' and athletes' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

For example, a gymnast who is committed and trusts her coach (cognitions and feelings) is likely to respond to the coach's instructions more readily (behavior). In turn, encouraged by the commitment, trust, and responsiveness of the athlete, the coach feels compelled to reciprocate these sentiments by showing a greater interest in the gymnast as an athlete and person. In this example, the relationship outcomes are positive because the coach is in a good position to nurture the athlete's potential. This scenario would be very different, however, if the athlete or the coach were less committed, less trusting, and less cooperative. Consequently, the coach-athlete relationship is characterized by high levels of interdependence that can have positive or negative ramifications depending on how interdependence is experienced (see chapter 2).

Motivations for Initiating and Maintaining a Coach-Athlete Relationship

We would like to argue that the motives for initiating and maintaining a coach-athlete relationship include an attempt to achieve (a) athletic excellence on the part of the athlete and professional excellence on the part of the coach and (b) personal growth on the part of the athlete and coach (see Jowett, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2002). These motives or objectives shape the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and its outcomes, which might include stability and harmony. For

example, consider a coach–athlete dyad that focuses primarily on achieving performance success. In this dyad, a harmonious coach–athlete partnership is based on whether the coach and athlete have reached a level of normative performance success (e.g., a gold medal in world championships). In contrast, another dyad may assess the outcomes of the athletic partnership based on whether it has met the coach’s and the athlete’s needs for personal growth and development, such as the needs for empathy, confidence, responsibility, and leadership development. This distinction is crucial in understanding how athletes and coaches define the quality of their relationship in terms of effectiveness or success.

Jowett (2005) has stated that coach–athlete relationships can be loosely described on two interrelated dimensions: (1) prizewinning relationships (with two subdimensions, successful and unsuccessful), and (2) helpful, caring relationships (with two subdimensions, effective and ineffective) (see figure 1.1). These characteristics are organized in a 2×2 taxonomy: (1) effective and successful relationships (E-S), (2) effective and unsuccessful relationships (E-U), (3) ineffective and successful relationships (I-S), and (4) ineffective and unsuccessful relationships (I-U). Examples for each category are discussed next.

Effective and Successful (E-S) and Effective and Unsuccessful (E-U) Relationships

A coach–athlete relationship that contains elements of success and effectiveness (E-S) is the ideal athletic relationship because it includes both performance success, as reflected in improving skill or achieving success, and personal growth, as reflected in experiencing a sense of maturity and satisfaction. An example of this type of relationship is Michael Phelps and Bob Bowman. Bowman began coaching Phelps in swimming when Phelps was 11 years old, and at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, he helped Phelps at age 19 to become

the first American to win eight medals (six of which happened to be gold). Bowman, 39, has reported in the media that their partnership is a close one, and his role as a coach has extended to being a friend, confidant, counselor, and exemplar (Ruane, 2004). This partnership can be described as exceptional because, according to Phelps, his coach knew him better than anyone aside from his mother, and it was his coach who has made him the swimmer he is. Bowman has made Phelps one of the most talked-about swimmers in a generation, carefully crafting the exquisite system that is Phelps’ body and mind and overseeing the athlete’s development from child to man.

An effective yet unsuccessful (E-U) coach–athlete relationship, on the other hand, will invariably have some positive outcomes for the athlete and the coach in terms of psychological health and well-being, but these outcomes do not extend to performance. These relationships are often found in youth sport programs where the underlying philosophy is (or should be) to be the best that you can be—that is, to partake in sport for the pleasure it provides. Here, the emphasis is on personal growth and development.

Ineffective and Unsuccessful (I-U) and Ineffective and Successful (I-S) Relationships

Ineffective and unsuccessful (I-U) relationships as well as ineffective yet successful (I-S) relationships are psychologically unfavorable because the costs of dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration, sadness, and loneliness outweigh the rewards even when the relationship is successful. The early stages of these athletic partnerships are often characterized by mutual positive regard, but this relationship quality is not enduring. Negative relational components such as conflict, tension, disagreement, and exploitation change its potentially positive character to a state of disregard, disrespect, and disintegration.

		Helpful/caring	
		Effective	Ineffective
Prizewinning	Successful	Effective and successful (E-S)	Ineffective and successful (I-S)
	Unsuccessful	Effective and unsuccessful (E-U)	Ineffective and unsuccessful (I-U)

Figure 1.1 The motivational nature of coach–athlete relationships: A 2×2 taxonomy.

Examples of successful yet ineffective relationships are not so difficult to uncover in the sport field. Consider the relationship between football (soccer) coach Alex Ferguson and one of his finest players, David Beckham. This successful but ineffective coach-athlete partnership went through a multiplicity of unpleasant events. Beckham reported in the media that he had grown out of the relationship originally established between him and his coach; he further reported that his coach failed to see him as a man who was strong enough to stand up and handle things (retrieved September 16, 2003, from www.channel4.com/news/2003/04/week_3/24_beck.html). Ultimately, in such situations of conflict there are two routes: either repair the relationship or break it up. The latter was the choice of this dyadic partnership, and they parted each other's company in spring of 2003.

Another vivid example of this type of relationship is that between Renald Knysh and gymnast Olga Korbut. Their partnership started when Korbut was 11. Knysh has been described as a modest, quiet man and a boldly innovative coach. According to Knysh, relations with his athlete were not easy. Korbut had a stubborn streak, and Knysh had to keep convincing her that success only comes with a tremendous amount of hard work. Although Korbut had described her coach as a tough taskmaster who helped her achieve success, in 1999 she accused him of forcing her to have sex with him; Knysh denied the accusation (retrieved September 16, 2003, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/other_sports/1512051.stm [television broadcast]). Such anecdotes underline the fact that the coach-athlete relationship has a unique nurturing role and any actions that exploit either member undermine the trust that is implicit in the relationship.

The 2×2 taxonomy contains implicit interpersonal properties of the coach-athlete relationship, such as

- affective properties (e.g., trust vs. distrust, respect vs. disrespect, liking vs. disliking),
- cognitive properties (e.g., expecting the relationship to last over time as opposed to terminating shortly), and
- behavioral properties (e.g., dominant vs. submissive, friendly vs. hostile).

The content and quality of affective, cognitive, and behavioral interpersonal properties reflect on the overall quality of the coach-athlete relationship. An important aspect to consider is that although successful coach-athlete relationships may appear to be outstanding and admirable, closer inspection may reveal an adverse interpersonal profile. Athletic success should not be a measure of harmonious, stable, and satisfying relationships because unsuccessful coach-athlete



Should sport success be a measure of harmonious, stable, and satisfying coach-athlete relationships?

relationships may prove more valuable than successful relationships when the unsuccessful relationships are effective.

Importance of Studying Coach-Athlete Relationships

The significance of studying the interpersonal dynamics between coaches and their athletes lies to a great extent in its practical applications. The study of the coach-athlete relationship provides ample opportunity to help people manage their interpersonal exchanges more effectively. Problems that confront the sport community such as coach-athlete conflict, parental overinvolvement, lack of support, depression, loneliness, dropout from sport at a young age, aggression, and power struggles are fundamentally interpersonal. These are just a few of the issues that applied researchers could focus on in an attempt to provide valuable guidance. Kenny (1995) stated that "society has an interest in preventing destructive relationships, and we [social scientists] are the people who are best equipped to assist society in this endeavor" (p. 598). The call for more research in this area is motivated by the need for a systematic, comprehensive, and empirically grounded body of knowledge that also contains practical implications for coaches, athletes, parents, practitioners, and policy makers (e.g., sport administrators) in the next decade.

Researchers who focus on this relatively new field should not lose sight of the critical link between theory and research. Hunches based on background knowl-

edge, personal experience, or casual observations that link to theory about social behavior can lead to the formation of theory-bound hypotheses that, in turn, lead to either increasing or decreasing the confidence one can place in the selected theory. Theoretical or conceptual frameworks guide research and establish a dependable and well-organized knowledge base for understanding and analyzing coach–athlete relationships.

Whether one pursues basic research or applied research, theory is important. Basic research refers to studies that examine central mechanisms and processes of coach–athlete relationships. For example, sorting out competing explanations of the effect of closeness on relationship outcomes is an important theoretical issue, but its resolution would add little in the way of intervention benefits over and above the benefits of closeness itself. Although basic research is only minimally concerned with the applied potential of the findings, Reis (2002) has suggested that it does illuminate possibilities of effective application. Applied research, on the other hand, refers to studies that explicitly aim to bring about change in relationships, such as testing the effects of a particular intervention designed to enhance the quality of the coach–athlete relationship, delivering and refining an intervention known to be effective, or identifying the factors that give rise to certain relationship outcomes (e.g., stability and harmony). The value of both basic and applied research lies in the importance of the problem explored and, in turn, in the importance of the answers that exploration of the problem generates.

There is a rich history of interaction between theory and empirical research, though it has been acknowledged that applied research has weaker associations with theory (Bradbury, 2002). Theory and empirical research can fuel each other, complement each other, and even correct each other; thus, theory and empirical research coexist in some useful relation (Muehlhoff & Wood, 2002). To illustrate this with an example, if the aim of research is to improve the coach–athlete relationship by outlining the life cycle or trajectory of the relationship from junior to senior sport, it would be sensible to consult theories that focus on developmental concerns such as relationship evolution, change, or survival. Consulting these theories involves reaching out to domains other than sport sciences (e.g., sport psychology and sociology of sport) to close scientific neighbors such as social anthropology, sociology, communication, organizational psychology, and individual and cognitive psychology (see Poczwardowski, Barott, & Jowett, 2006).

Sport psychology has traditionally examined coach–athlete interpersonal dynamics mainly from a leadership approach (e.g., Chelladurai, 1990; Smoll & Smith, 1989; see also chapters 5 and 6). However,

more recently relationship models and other related approaches have been presented (see Conroy & Coatsworth, 2004, for a representational model of others and self; see Mageau & Vallerand, 2003, for a motivational model of coach–athlete relationships). These attempts place the *relationship* as the focal point of investigation into the interpersonal dynamics of the coach and the athlete. The discussion that follows aims to critically and succinctly outline recent conceptualizations that have explicitly targeted coach–athlete relationships and to propose an integrated model for research on coach–athlete relationships.

Recent Conceptualizations of the Coach–Athlete Relationship

In less than half a decade, sport psychology has enjoyed the development of at least four models in an attempt to delineate the social phenomenon of the coach–athlete relationship by drawing specific assumptions and clarifying what is and is not known about it. The relationship models that will be discussed argue the importance of focusing on the components (i.e., content) of the relationship between the coach and the athlete and on incorporating both the coach and the athlete in any investigation that studies relationship quality and processes. The conceptualizations favor data analyses, interpretations, speculations, and conclusions that consider simultaneously both the coach’s and the athlete’s perceptions, yielding a more complete picture of the complex dynamics involved. Furthermore, these conceptual models employ diverse methodologies that suit the nature of the problem under study (see Poczwardowski et al., 2006). The conceptual models that will be outlined next include (a) Wylleman (2000); (b) Jowett and colleagues (e.g., Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004); (c) LaVoi (2004); and (d) Poczwardowski and colleagues (Poczwardowski, 1997; Poczwardowski, Henschen, & Barott, 2002; Poczwardowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002).

Wylleman’s Conceptual Model

Wylleman’s (2000) conceptualization purports that the coach–athlete relationship can be defined based on the *behaviors* coaches and athletes manifest on the sport field. These interpersonal behaviors can be categorized along three dimensions: an acceptance–rejection dimension that describes a positive or negative attitude toward the relationship; a dominance–submission dimension that reflects a strong or weak position in the relationship; and a social–emotional dimension

that refers to taking a social or a personal role in the relationship.

While heavily influenced from Kiesler's (1983) seminal work on interpersonal behaviors, according to Wylleman the conceptualization allows one to "operationalize the *complementarity* between individuals within a dyadic relationship" (p. 562). In this sense, athletes' complementary behaviors would attract responses from coaches that are reciprocal for behaviors that reflect the dominance–submission dimension, when, for example, an athlete's submission attracts the coach's dominance and a coach's submission attracts the athlete's dominance. Behaviors may also be correspondent; for example, correspondent behaviors reflecting the acceptance–rejection dimension include an athlete's acceptance attracting acceptance and an athlete's rejection attracting rejection.

The model is intuitively appealing because athletes' and coaches' reciprocation and correspondence of behaviors is likely to occur in the field of play. However, the model does not explain when, how, and why these behaviors are likely to occur. The salience, valence, and implications of interpersonal behaviors perceived and expressed by the coach and the athlete are also unknown. These and other questions await further exploration on conceptual, operational, empirical, and methodological grounds.

Jowett's Conceptual Model

A group of researchers led by Jowett (e.g., Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Clark-Carter, in press; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Olympiou, Jowett, & Duda, 2006) developed and studied an integrated model of the coach–athlete relationship that is influenced by principles from social exchange theory. The integrated model includes established interpersonal psychological constructs, namely, closeness (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989), commitment (Rosenblatt, 1977), complementarity (Kiesler, 1997), and co-orientation (Newcomb, 1953). (In social psychology, these constructs have traditionally been studied independently from one another.) The premise of the 3+1Cs conceptual model (Jowett, 2005; Jowett et al., 2005) is that coaches' and athletes' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are causally and mutually interdependent. According to the 3+1Cs,

- *closeness* refers to the affective meanings that the athlete and coach ascribe to their relationship (e.g., trust, liking, respect),
- *commitment* is defined as the athlete's and coach's intention to maintain the athletic relationship and therefore maximize its outcomes,
- *complementarity* represents the athlete's and coach's corresponding behaviors of affiliation (e.g., athlete's friendly and responsive attitude is likely to elicit coach's friendly and responsive attitude), and reciprocal behaviors of dominance and submission (e.g., coach instructs and athlete executes), and
- *co-orientation* includes the athlete's and coach's interpersonal perceptions and reflects the degree to which they have established a common ground in their relationship.

The content and significance of closeness, co-orientation, and complementarity in the coach–athlete relationship have been extensively explored in qualitative research designs (see Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Meek, 2000). More recently, all four constructs have attracted quantitative research designs (see Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Clark-Carter, in press; Olympiou et al., 2006). (See chapter 2 for details about the conceptualization and accompanied research.)

LaVoi's Conceptual Model

LaVoi (2004) attempts to depict in sport settings the manner to which the deep human need to belong and to feel close in relationships with others can result in personal gains. Her approach is based on psychological interpretations of relational-cultural theory (see Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Evidence from developmental, educational, and social psychology that have used relational-cultural theory as an interpretive framework suggests that interpersonal relationships are formative in acquiring fundamental skills, qualities, and benefits such as language, motor behaviors, self-esteem, and healthy lifestyles. In sharp contrast, deprivations in interpersonal contacts lead to emotional problems and other maladjustments.

The relational-cultural view in sport psychology offers a paradigm shift from traditional theories that view human development as a means for achieving individuation, separation, and independence (LaVoi, 2004). According to the relational-cultural approach, psychological development is facilitated by interdependence, connection, and participation in growth-fostering relationships. When applied to coach–athlete relationships, this approach would focus on athletes achieving potentially higher levels of satisfaction and growth when optimally close or interdependent with their coach and their teammates. According to LaVoi, closeness and interdependence in the context of sport can be studied in terms of four qualities:

- Authenticity (a person's genuine self-expression in the relationship that is respectful of the partner)

- Engagement (commitment and responsiveness)
- Empowerment (being strengthened, encouraged, and inspired to be an active partner in the relationship)
- Ability to deal with difference and conflict (embracing and building on diversity to enhance the relationship)

LaVoi has further suggested a contextual approach that accounts for sociocultural norms and rules and has underlined the importance of studying both relationship members, thus both the coach and athlete are viewed as critical research considerations.

Poczwadowski's Conceptual Model

Poczwadowski and colleagues (Poczwadowski, 1997; Poczwadowski, Henschen, & Barott, 2002; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002) proposed a qualitative-interpretive framework to investigate the process and the context of coach–athlete dyads. Poczwadowski's (1997) qualitative investigation of coach–athlete dyads in a gymnastics team centered on interpersonal dynamics in the context of both the athlete and coach as members of a dyadic relationship and as members of a team. Thus, coaches' and athletes' personality traits, interpersonal needs, acts, and activities, as well as interpretation of interpersonal behaviors and meaning attached to the relationship as a whole, were thoroughly examined. Interpersonal variables that emerged from this fieldwork included relationship role, interpersonal interaction, relationship in terms of rewarding outcomes, negotiation, shared meaning, and types of relationships (see Poczwadowski, Barott, & Henschen, 2000, Poczwadowski, Henschen, & Barott, 2002; Poczwadowski, Henschen, & Barott, 1998, 2001).

The results of this study conceptualized the coach–athlete relationship as a recurring pattern of mutual care between the athlete and coach. Relationship-oriented activities and interactions were categorized as instructional or technical, including sport task and goals, and social-psychological or affective, including human needs and emotions. As a result, both sport- and non-sport-related issues within the dyad were postulated to be a subject of an ongoing, interrelated exchange in which behavioral (i.e., actions, interactions) and cognitive-affective (i.e., meaning and care) aspects were incorporated.

Other findings included a strong influence of the context on dyadic relationships. In particular, group dynamics such as formal and informal roles that the

coaches and athletes played on the team influenced the dynamics of dyadic coach–athlete relationships. Additionally, the richness of the interview and observational data collected allowed the identification of three phases in the coach–athlete relationship: the (a) prerelationship (or recruiting) phase; (b) the relationship phase consisting of the initial, transition, productive, concluding, and after-eligibility stages; and (c) the postrelationship phase, which may be of two kinds, sentimental or extinct. Importantly, the study provided empirical evidence for the intuitive notion that coaches are influenced in the relationship as well as athletes, growing professionally and maturing personally.

Integrated Research Model

The sport-specific relationship models previously outlined have been offered as rudimentary frameworks to systematically study the interpersonal relationship that coaches and athletes develop in the course of their partnership. The conceptual models presented have derived deductively from well-established psychological theories, including interpersonal theory by Kiesler (1983, 1997), interdependence theory by Kelley and Thibaut (1978), and relational-cultural theory by Jordan and colleagues (1991).

A close inspection of the coach–athlete conceptual models and their main assumptions reveals several similarities. For example, LaVoi's (2004) application of relational-cultural theory to the coach–athlete relationship views closeness and connection as a major relationship quality for personal growth and development. In a similar vein, Jowett et al.'s (e.g., Jowett 2005; Jowett et al., 2005) model includes closeness, while Poczwadowski et al.'s (e.g., Poczwadowski, Henschen, & Barott, 2002) model includes care as one of the main components of coach–athlete relationships. Thus, despite the subtle conceptual differences between these models, both agree that a degree of interdependence (call it closeness, connectedness, or care) is important in the coach–athlete relationship. Furthermore, the conceptualizations put forward by Wylleman (2000), Poczwadowski et al., and Jowett et al. emphasize interpersonal behaviors of both reciprocity (e.g., a coach's friendly attitude attracts the athlete's friendly attitude) and correspondence (e.g., a coach's directive style attracts the athlete's accommodating style). Finally, another similarity can be located in the significance Poczwadowski et al.'s and Jowett et al.'s models place on coaches' and athletes' interpretations of relationship quality through *meanings* (or subjective experience) and through *interpersonal perceptions*.

The study of the coach–athlete relationship requires a clear and unambiguous definition, as proposed earlier

in the chapter. We believe that if researchers employ a relationship definition, the study of coach–athlete relationships within sport psychology will benefit from more focused research and a consistent body of knowledge that could be readily accessed by practitioners. Thus, the intent here is to propose an integrated research model that illustrates coach–athlete relationships as part of various social phenomena (e.g., communication, conflict, team cohesion, personality) and to map a pathway for research within the relational context of coach–athlete relationships.

The integrated research model can be seen as layers of a cake (see figure 1.2). The first (top) layer includes antecedent variables such as athletes' and coaches' individual difference variables (e.g., age, gender, experience,

personality), wider social-cultural context (e.g., culturally defined norms, roles, rules, customs, expectations, values), and relationship characteristics (e.g., relationship type, duration).

These three classes of causal conditions are important because they determine the quality of the relationship. It is speculated that these variables are responsible for regularities in the interaction patterns of the coach–athlete relationship and the relationship's quality in general. The capacity to accurately and completely account for the causal antecedents of the coach–athlete relationship is a basic yet important task toward developing a coach–athlete relationship theory.

The second layer of the model delineates the quality (nature or content, features or components) of the

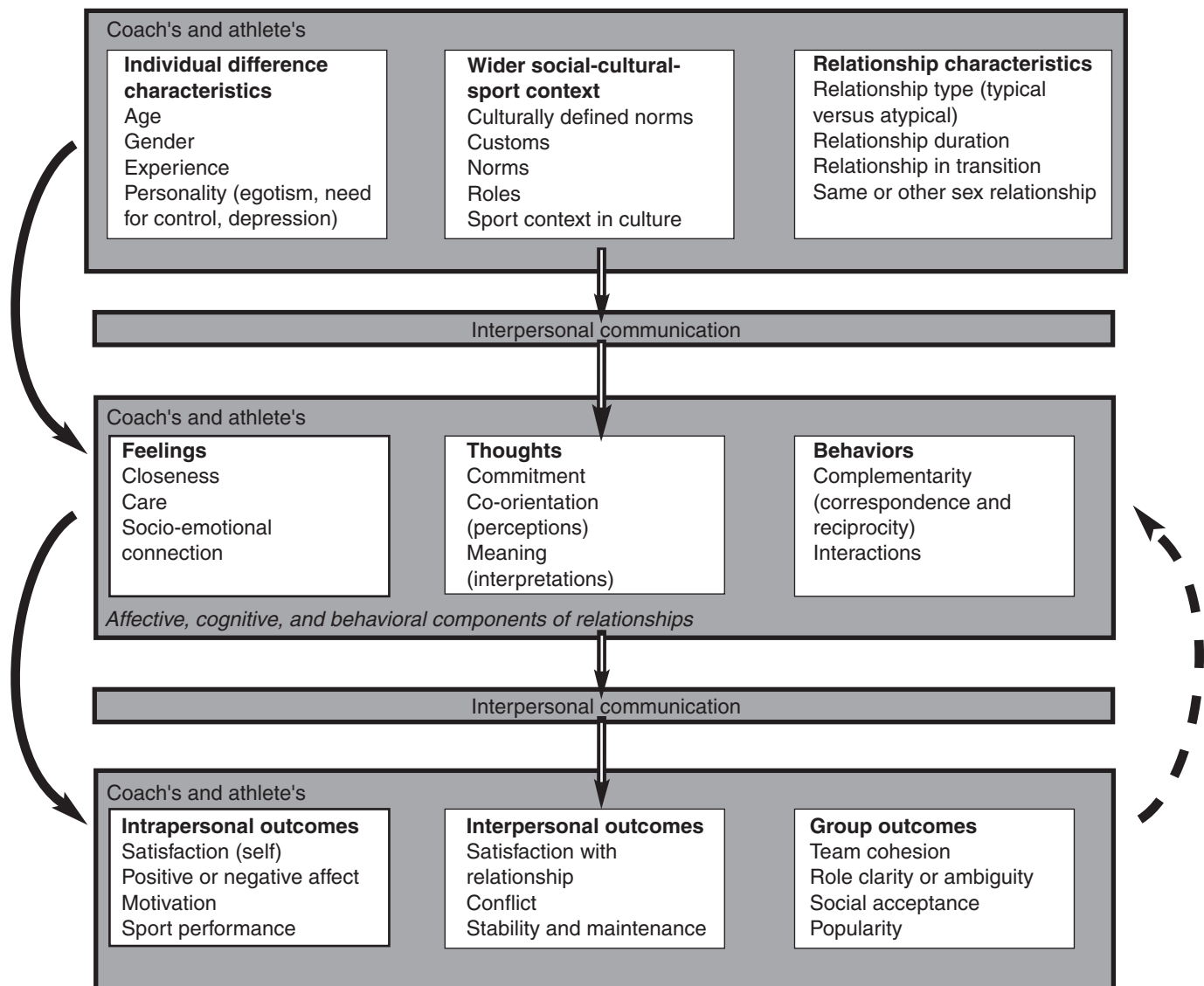


Figure 1.2 An integrated research model of coach–athlete relationships.

coach–athlete relationship. The main components of relationship quality include closeness (care or social-emotional features), commitment (intention to maintain and maximize the effectiveness of the relationship), co-orientation (interpersonal perception and subjective meaning), and complementarity (behavioral interactions that are reciprocal and corresponding).

As can be seen in figure 1.2, the second layer of the model is sandwiched between interpersonal communication. In effect, communication (verbal and nonverbal, intended and unintended, honest and dishonest) is a relational or interpersonal dimension that affects and is affected by the quality of the coach–athlete relationship. As Montgomery and Baxter (1998) have explained, communication can be viewed as the bridge between relationship members. In other words, communication is the process by which the distance between coaches and athletes broadens (coach and athlete become distant), narrows (they become close), and even merges (they become one). In effect, the quality and quantity of communication bring together or tear apart relationship members. Communication becomes the building block toward developing harmonious and stable coach–athlete relationships; in turn, the relationship affects the quality and quantity of communication (see chapter 3). For that reason, communication holds an important place in the model.

The third layer of the relationship model proposes a number of consequent or outcome variables. Three classes of such variables are identified: intrapersonal variables, interpersonal variables, and group-outcome variables. Intrapersonal variables include personal satisfaction (e.g., an athlete's or coach's satisfaction with performance, training, or instruction), sport performance accomplishments (e.g., athletes' personal best, the team's win–loss record), and coach and athlete motivation and burnout. Other intrapersonal outcomes can include an athlete's or a coach's health (e.g., mood, eating disorders). Interpersonal variables include satisfaction with the relationship and interpersonal conflict. Group outcomes involve such variables as athletes' and coaches' perceptions of team cohesion, role clarity, and perceptions of social acceptance or popularity.

The main layers of the model are interrelated. The model postulates that antecedent variables such as coaches' and athletes' gender, age, and experience affect the quality of the relationship, for example, in terms of the level of closeness or commitment experienced. It is also postulated that the central layer of the model, which represents the quality of the coach–athlete relationship, affects consequent variables. Therefore, a coach and an athlete who have formed a relationship based on respect and trust are more likely to experience positive feelings such as satisfaction and happiness as opposed to despair and distress. Finally, the model

postulates that the second and third layers are reciprocally related; as such, the quality of the relationship affects and is affected by intrapersonal, interpersonal, and group outcomes.

The proposed integrated research model has the scope to provide an impetus for research that would help us fully understand the predictive and explanatory functions of this crucial relationship in sport. It should help us unearth the processes that regulate interpersonal components such as athletes' and coaches' feelings, thoughts, and behaviors; the role of communication as an antecedent and consequence of relationship quality; and the effects of the fundamental interpersonal components and processes on various outcomes. This endeavor may also shed light on how, when, and what makes coaches and athletes emphasize performance or psychological well-being through their relationship.

Future Research

In order to advance the study of interpersonal relationships in sport and more specifically coach–athlete relationships, attention to several issues in future research is required. Four issues are presented that are critical to advancing our knowledge of coach–athlete relationships: the needs for better samples, including more ethnically and culturally diverse populations; more descriptive research and more interdisciplinary research; causal analyses; and stronger inferences.

Better Samples

Sport psychology research generally employs undergraduate student samples due to convenience and limited resources. However, relationship research that employs undergraduate samples may derive principles that are misspecified. This could be true for coach–athlete relationship research unless we ensure that the phenomenon is elicited in the context (i.e., university sport) in which it is measured. Thus, caution is required, especially because many undergraduate students who participate in university sport or collegiate teams in Europe do not necessarily have formal training and instruction from qualified coaches. For example, athletic teams in Greek universities do not guarantee coaching sessions under the instruction of qualified coaches. The student-athletes themselves are often responsible for a team's organization, training, and competition. Frequency of interactions (how often training and competition take place) and longevity of the athletic relationship (how long the coach and the athlete have known and worked with one another) are also interrelated issues that can affect the representativeness of a sample. These are points that need to be specified in

research studies in an attempt to minimize uncertainty about an undergraduate sample's representativeness in relationship research.

Another concern that is worthy of our attention is the relationship experiences of coaches and athletes that come from ethnic minorities and diverse cultures. Ethnic backgrounds of coaches and athletes and the sociocultural nature of the sport context, such as traditionally Western versus Eastern sports, may be thought of as potential moderators (variables that interact with the variables under study so as to modify their impact on the relationship quality). Yet ethnic backgrounds and sociocultural context may be influential in more fully accounting for coach-athlete relationships. Thus, basic and applied research that is designed to cut across cultural, subcultural, contextual, and content complexity is much needed.

More Description

Both basic and applied research involve description. Basic researchers incorporate descriptions in the design of a study in an attempt to pinpoint what to look for, where and when to find it, and how it compares to related concepts and phenomena. Basic researchers use quantitative descriptions (e.g., surveys) and qualitative descriptions (e.g., based on interviews, observations) in identifying problems for basic research. Applied researchers, on the other hand, include rich descriptions from relatively few subjects and many variables. Case studies and the use of interviews for data collection are valuable means for understanding relationships and the meanings that formulate these relationships. In the last decade, research on coach-athlete relationships has employed a qualitative approach to better understand the complex nature of the coach-athlete relational context (see e.g., Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Poczwadowski, Henschen, & Barott, 2002). As a result, much of what has been proposed in relationship models is extracted from participants in interviews and observations.

The emerging field of interpersonal relationships in sport can be further developed if a premature foreclosing of the initial stage of exploration and discovery is avoided (Poczwadowski et al., 2006). As has been argued in this chapter, the coach-athlete relationship is a socially construed phenomenon that we need to understand much better in order to implement scientifically derived knowledge into intervention-based programs and everyday coaching practice. Phenomenological designs, interpretive designs, and other qualitative designs that are sensitive to the relational context should be implemented to provide rich descrip-

tions. Overall, it is expected that the implementation of descriptive (qualitative or quantitative) research will help to ground and inform theoretical work and development.

Causal Analyses

Cause-and-effect relationships are the building blocks of science. Smith (2000) stated that research should be designed to maximize internal validity or "the ability to draw sound conclusions about what actually causes any observed differences in a dependent measure" (p. 17). Greater attention to causation would help advance developmental models of coach-athlete relationship phenomena. Future experimental designs should build on the work conducted on coach leadership (e.g., Barnett, Smoll, & Smith, 1992; Conroy & Coatsworth, 2004). Additionally, the temporal patterning of relationships needs to be incorporated into research, particularly because relationships develop and dissolve and go through various transitional phases (e.g., success and failure, preparative and competitive seasons, injury and recovery periods). To our knowledge, no single study has employed a longitudinal design in order to examine the temporal dimension of coach-athlete relationships. In-depth, longitudinal studies based on multiple methods have the potential to draw our attention to predictive and causal factors that operate within and upon relationships.

Stronger Inferences

Stronger inferences can be achieved by attempting to replicate findings. Replication is integral to science and provides concrete evidence of reliability and validity. Social-psychological phenomena that do not replicate lack credence and often fade from the literature. In addition, to strengthen the inferences that can be drawn from research on coach-athlete relationships, researchers need to eliminate explanations of findings that *contradict* each other and increase explanations that *complement* and support each other. Designing research that aims, for example, to test competing models of coach-athlete relationships against one another should be encouraged because such research can add breadth to theory, research, and potential findings as well as applications.

Finally, the employment of multiple methods in a single approach will help us reduce method-bound results. Method-bound results (related to common method variance) are misspecified; that is, the results reflect instrumentation-related processes rather than the assumed theoretical processes that one sets out to

study. Usually such results are overstated associations accompanied by inaccurate interpretations. Consequently, methodological diversity (e.g., combining qualitative and quantitative methods) will go a long way in developing a methodologically sound field of coach–athlete relationships.

Practical Implications

Coaching revolves around the coach–athlete relationship. Thus, coaches need to be able to develop effective relationships with their athletes. Effective relationships are generally characterized by thoughtful and respectful communication about issues related to sport and life more generally. Effective coach–athlete relationships are underlined by stability, appropriateness, trustworthiness, and dependability. Relationships that are characterized by such constructive features make both the coach and the athlete feel like winners. A coach who involves the athlete in the coaching process by negotiating performance goals, discussing attendance at sporting events, communicating expectations related to training and practice, and showing interest in the athlete’s academic aspirations or family concerns ultimately may enhance psychological well-being and physical performance.

It is therefore important that coaches and athletes communicate with each other in such a way that meets their commitments, duties, and responsibilities. Coaches and athletes who possess strong interpersonal or communication skills can achieve their interpersonal goals (e.g., to cooperate) and other sought-after goals (e.g., performance goals) in an efficient and appropriate manner. Such skills include communicating nonverbally, rewarding, reinforcing, questioning and reflecting, explaining, listening, leading others, influencing, and self-disclosing. Thus, coach education and university courses in sport sciences should include sufficient information about interpersonal skills in coaching.

As mentioned at the onset of the chapter, one of the most vital reasons for researching coach–athlete relationships is to help the coach and the athlete manage their interpersonal encounters satisfactorily. Research thus far has attempted to provide information about the content of the relationship and its processes. This information is invaluable because it helps make coaches and athletes aware of what their relationship is like and how they can influence their relationship for the best. There is a dearth of research relative to the ways in which relationships between the coach and the athlete can be repaired or improved when conflict is experienced.

The knowledge generated from researching relationship conflict and repair would equip applied sport psychologists to help coach–athlete dyads make unsteady relationships work more satisfactorily by transforming them to steady and harmonious relationships.

Summary

This chapter has addressed critical issues in the conceptualization of and research on coach–athlete relationships. The coach–athlete relationship can be defined as a situation in which a coach’s and an athlete’s cognitions, feelings, and behaviors are mutually and causally interrelated and change over time. The basic motives for initiating and maintaining relationships can be categorized in a 2×2 taxonomy. A brief outline of conceptual models of coach–athlete relationship led to a proposed integrated research model, which aims to provide an impetus for research that will help develop a strong science of coach–athlete relationships. This model should help researchers understand the processes that regulate interpersonal components, the role of communication in relationship quality, and the influence of interpersonal components and processes on various outcomes. With such a model, the generated scientific knowledge is better organized and makes more apparent what is known and what is not known.

To achieve a dependable body of knowledge and understanding pertaining to the coach–athlete relationship, research must be carefully designed. The critical linkage between theory and research was discussed, and it is imperative that researchers use better samples; provide more thorough description throughout the study process; give greater attention to causation; and make stronger inferences by attempting to replicate findings, eliminate explanations of findings that contradict each other, and increase explanations that complement each other.

The practical implications of studying the coach–athlete relationship are many and include finding methods of establishing positive relationships and repairing unhealthy relationships so that both personal and performance goals can be met. In addition, as Berscheid and Reis (1998) observed, “Knowledge about interpersonal relationships is essential to the further development of social psychology” (p. 196). Indeed, any social psychology in sport settings that emphasizes the individual athlete or coach is naturally tested and stretched by the study of dyadic relationships (e.g., coach–athlete relationships). We hope that this chapter provides a springboard for such testing and expansion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the importance of studying coach–athlete relationships in sport?
2. Debate the role of effective and successful coach–athlete relationships at different levels of sport performance (e.g., top-level versus grass roots).
3. How do theory and research (basic and applied) contribute to understanding the relationships that coaches and athletes form?
4. Discuss the components of the integrated research model. According to the model, in what ways does relationship quality influence outcome variables through its affective, cognitive, and behavioral components, and how is it influenced by antecedent variables?
5. Which links in the integrated research model (figure 1.2) do you find most compelling, and how have you witnessed these links in sport situations?
6. What problems and concerns need to be taken into account when designing research on coach–athlete relationships?