**Coaches’ behaviour, social support and athletes’ self-talk**

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**Introduction**

In sport psychology, self-talk research has primarily focused on the beneficial effects of self-talk on performance, specifying various forms, such as positive, negative, motivational, and instructional self-talk. Conroy and Metzler (2004) suggested that determining the origins of self-talk should become a priority in sport psychology research. In educational psychology, some interest regarding self-talk antecedents has been exhibited. Specifically, a considerable amount of research has focused on the relationship between significant others’ statements, children’s positive and negative self-talk and their impact on self-concepts and self-esteem (Burnett, 1999). In sport settings, these statements or feedback can be effectively applied to athletes through Hardy and Grace’s (1991) recommendations of informational support. Furthermore, Zourbanos and Theodorakis (2004) revealed a possible relationship between coaches’ behaviour and athletes’ self-talk. Accordingly, the present study tested these hypotheses by examining how social support and specifically informational support could mediate the relationship between athletes’ perceptions of coaches’ behaviour and athletes’ positive and negative self-talk

**Methods**

Participants included 208 athletes (75 females and 133 males), who ranged in age from 14 to 36 years ($M = 17.25, SD = 5.29$). They were recruited from various sports and had an average competitive experience of 6.19 years ($SD = 5.24$). The Test of Performance Strategies-2 (TOPS2), which measures psychological skills, the Coaches’ Behaviour Questionnaire (CBQ), which measures athletes’ perceptions about their coaches’ behaviour, and the Social Support Scale (SSQ), which measures social support, were used. First, the structure of the instruments was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Subsequently, the hypothesized structural relationships were tested through structural models with latent factors. The criterion for item-selection was the best possible conceptual representation of the constructs. Three structural models were examined to test the mediation hypothesis, namely as a non-mediated model, a partially, and a fully mediated model.

**Results**

The non-mediated model revealed that supportiveness predicted coaches’ informational support and athletes’ positive ST, whereas negative activation predicted athletes’ negative thinking. The indirect paths from supportiveness to positive self-talk and from negative activation to negative thinking were .18 and .32 respectively. The partially mediated model presented a good fit, however it was revealed that when the path from coaches’ informational support to athletes’ positive ST was added, the path from supportiveness to athletes’ positive self-talk dropped emphatically and became non-significant. Finally, the fully mediated model (Figure 1), where the non-significant paths were removed, presented a good fit (NNFI = .97, CFI = .98, IFI = .98, SRMR = .06, and RMSEA = .03). Therefore, the full-mediated model was deemed the best, thus supporting the mediation hypothesis. The model explained 43% of athletes’ positive self-talk variance and 10% of athletes’ negative self-talk variance.

**Discussion/Conclusion**

The major findings of the present study suggest that supportive coaching behaviour followed by supportive feedback directed towards the athletes could have beneficial effects upon athletes’ thinking, whereas coaches’ negative behaviour could generate negative thoughts in athletes’ minds.

**References**


