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Review of Factors Influencing the Coach-Athlete Relationship in Malaysian Team Sport

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Abstract

Previous research has found that interaction processes between coach and athlete have always been the strongest factor for sports performance. Other researches have drawn conclusions to other factors in the coach-athlete relationship, such as culture and gender. Research has generally shown that effective communication required the development of trust and respect between coach and athlete (Yukelson, 1984). The review focuses on an analysis of past literature on communication styles, culture, and gender as potential key factors influencing the coach-athlete relationship. This review paper examined studies specific to the empirical studies on athletes and coaches from the Western and Asian perspectives. In particular, the review analysed empirical studies on communication, gender and culture as potential factors influencing the coach-athlete relationship. The review concluded that while various studies on the coach-athlete relationship had been done, a majority of the empirical studies were within Western perspectives. Such empirical study is particularly under-researched in Malaysia. Therefore, the paper concludes by suggesting that future research which explores the aspects of communication styles, culture, and gender within the Malaysian context is timely.

Keywords: coach-athlete relationship, communication styles, gender, culture

Introduction

A National track cyclist, Azizulhasni Awang once highlighted that one of the most valuable lessons from his coach, John Beasley, came through good communication (Jayabalan, 2015). Similarly, many Malaysian national athletes emphasised that good relationships with their coaches is one of the key elements for their success in sports. For example, national squash queen, Datuk Nicol Ann David saw her coach as a good friend and a great mentor (Jayabalan, 2015) Meanwhile, Datuk Lee Chong Wei, notable national badminton player, looked up to his coach, Misbun Sidek, as his pillar of strength. He also highlighted that it was the strict coaching principles and communication styles of his coach that made him a champion, and the world's top-ranked badminton player (Jayabalan, 2015).

Adding on, coaches and athletes such as Clyde Hart and Michael Johnson (Olympic gold medallist and world record holder in 400 m), Bob Bowman and Michael Phelps (Olympic gold medallist in 100 m/200 m butterfly), Chris Carmichael and Lance Armstrong (7-time Tour de France winner), and Béla Karolyi and Mary Lou Retton (Olympic gold medallist in gymnastics) are a few examples from Western countries that demonstrate the impacts that a good coach-athlete working relationship can have on the athletes' performance accomplishments. However, according to Drussel (2012), the lack

of effective communication skills makes it hard to resolve conflicts, and may affect the behaviour of both coach and athlete, and impair the ability to develop and maintain the relationship.

This is a review paper which aims to provide critique on the factors influencing the coach-athlete relationship from both Western and Asian perspectives; specifically on the communication styles, gender, and culture. This paper looks into past researches and theories to support and further explore the crucial gap in the literature. Finally, conclusion and suggestions for future research were presented.

A good performance, by its nature, highly depends on the coach and athlete building a good relationship. For this to happen, successful interpersonal communication is needed. This is when the message senders and the message receivers understand the message that is being transmitted. Also, it is often defined as the communication that takes place between people who are interdependent and binding the same knowledge with each other. For example, manager-subordinate relationships, teacher-student relationships, or parents-children relationships. The coach-athlete relationship seems to be interdependent with one another as well. Communication is a two-way process that involves encoding by the coach, and decoding by the athlete, and vice versa (Montgomery, 1988 & Walsh, 2008 cited in Abdul Latif, Hasan, Fauzee, 2009).

Factors Influencing the Coach-Athlete Relationship: Western and Asian Perspectives

Literature within the sports management and communication field has indicated various factors motivating the coach-athlete relationships. Past researchers have highlighted a need to explore the communication styles that coaches use on their athletes, and vice versa, in the relationship-building process. According to Jowett and Meek (2000); Poczwadowski, Barott and Henshen (2002), both relationship participants need to be included in the designs, so that conflicts that are inherently present in the interpersonal communication between the coach-athletes can be overcome in a harmonious ways. Besides that, the “uni-directional” bias can be overcome as well (Wylleman, 2000, p.559). Researchers from the Western countries focused much on 3+1C model by Jowett (2000) to enhance the coach-athlete relationship.

This model was developed and studied by a group of researchers led by Jowett herself. For example, Jowett & Chaundry, 2004; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; and Jowett, Olympiou, & Duda, 2006, as cited in Jowett, 2005. This model, which include closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation, proved to provide wide opportunities to help the dyads manage their interpersonal exchanges more effectively. For example, a key informant in Culver and Trudel (2000) mentioned that studies on the coach-athlete relationship helped him a lot and allowed him to see and improve on his weaknesses. However, this study is still under poor reception in Malaysia.

An article entitled ‘Relationship in sport’ by Jowett and Poczwadowski (2012), highlighted that the call for more research in the coach-athlete relationships is motivated by the need for a systematic and comprehensive guide for the policy makers, and also to serve as knowledge for coaches and athletes in the next decades. This is in line with Kenny’s (1995) statement, as cited in Jowett and Poczwadowski (2012), stating 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 endeavour”.

On the other hand, a study done by Bennie and Connor (2012) on perceptions of effective coaching and coach-athlete relationships within professional team sports in Australia suggested that developing a good relationship in sports was more of a personal choice of the coaches and athletes. Key informants from this study stressed that coaches do not need to be friends with the athletes in order to build a good coach-athlete relationship. Both coaches and athletes must be prepared to work for one another. However, the lack of respect in relationship restricts communication between the coaches and the athletes, eventually affecting the achievement of the team goals.

From an Asian perspective, an exploratory study done by Li, Dittmore and Park (2015) on relationships between Chinese and Western Olympians' coaches and athletes concluded that Chinese Olympians had better rapport with their coaches compared to the Western Olympians, which is in line with a previous study (Yang & Jowett, 2012). Chinese Olympians looked up to their coaches as parents, while Western Olympians treated their coaches as working partners. This result could be caused by the cultural differences in China and Western countries. The individualism-collectivism framework by Hofstede (1984) explained that human development and social relations can differ from country to country. China has a highly collectivist culture, where their consciousness are more towards 'we'. Triandis (1995) as cited in Li, Dittmore and Park (2015), stated that people from a collective culture are more interdependent on one another, whereby people from an individualistic culture like the Westerners view themselves as more independent, and are motivated by their goals, needs and own preferences. This, therefore, explains the reason why Chinese Olympians are closer to their coaches compared to Western Olympians. Finally, this study also found that Chinese male athletes were more sensitive when they were in different gender coach-athlete relationships compared to the same gender relationships.

Communication

A good coach-athlete relationship has shown to have a great effect on an athletes' satisfaction, performance, and quality of life (Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001; Kenow & Williams, 1999; Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon, & Templin, 2000; Wrisberg, 1996 cited in Frey, Czech, Kent, Johnson, 2008) and several factors may influence this relationship (Burke, Peterson, & Nix, 1995; Grisaffe, Blom, & Burke, in press, cited in Frey, Czech, Kent, Johnson, 2008). Literature within the sports management and communication field has indicated various factors motivating the coach-athlete relationships. Past Western researchers have highlighted a need to explore the communication styles that coaches use with their athletes in the relationship-building process. For instance, Becker (2009) found that athletes were more pleased on how their coaches interacted with them effectively through clear and positive communication styles. He also highlighted that it did not matter what coaches did, but how they did it. Erickson (2013) detailed the manner in which volleyball coaches interacted with their athletes, and how the tone they used on them impacted the athletes' performance significantly. These have also shown that how coaches communicate with their athletes directly influences their performances and behaviour.

Effective communication involves two or more parties exchanging both verbal and nonverbal cues to reach a point of shared understanding (Hargie & Dickson, 2004). Shannon and Weaver (1949) broadly defined communication as "all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another". This will increase the collection of skills that a coach or athlete should aim to have, and explains why good communication is linked to success.

A Malaysian study entitled 'Influence of Coaches' Behavior on Athletes' Motivation: Malaysian Sport Archery Experience' by Samah, Hanie, Olotokunbo, (2013) stated that communication remains one of the key factors to motivate the coach-athlete relationship. Though there was a Malaysian study done on behaviour on athletes' motivation, and much on leadership behaviour, there is still a lack of studies on factors that influence the coach-athlete relationship.

Communication in coach-athlete relationship

The coach-athlete relationship is an important factor affecting sports performance (Serpa, 1999). Past researchers have concluded that a satisfying and successful coach-athlete relationship depends on the mutual trust, respect, and support from each other (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Poczwadowski, Barott, & Peregoy, 2002). However, not all coach-athlete relationships are effective and positive. Much of the literature on coach-athlete relationships focus on motivational model (Deci & Ryan, 1980, 1985; Vallerand 1997, Fortier, Guay; Jones, 2002; Lopez-Walle, Balaguer, Castillo & Tristan, 2011).

There had also been some research related to maintenance strategies done. For example, Gould, Louer, Collin, and Chung (2007) studied ten American football coaches who received awards for their ability to outshine their athletes' personal developments. This study was conducted using in-depth interviews; these coaches emphasized the importance of communication in order to build the coach-athlete relationship. For example, having open lines of communication with athletes, holding players accountable for losses, and possessing clear expectations for success. They also avoid direct criticism towards their athletes to show that they cared, trusted, and respected the athletes as people. Stafford and Canary (1991) stated that these ways of communication are in line with the relationship maintenance strategies labelled as positivity, openness, and assurance. However, there were not much research done on how to maintain a good coach-athlete relationships in Malaysia.

The coach-athlete relationship is a relationship that stresses on interpersonal communication. Coe (1996) explained that great things can be achieved if both coach and athlete are in perfect harmony. Indeed, in track and field athletics, as in many sports, effective coach-athlete relationships have been associated with top-level sports performances. It is highlighted that the coach-athlete relationship is one of the main factors of a top class performance. A coach must also be able to motivate the athletes and give them confidence, and sometimes provide a 'sympathetic ear' when needed. Verbal interchange features as a key factor for achieving top performances. For example, a study done by Jowett (2003) stated that one of her respondents, who is a coach, said that both the coaches and athletes often discussed things together, and this type of dialogue was essential in their relationship. Next, in Phillippe and Seiler (2006)'s study, the male athletes' perceptions of the relationship quality with their coaches were explored. The results showed that the male elite swimmers stressed on the importance of verbal exchange developed by a mixture of professional and personal issues. Moreover, the male swimmers claimed that to help in the development of the athletes, the coach's capacity to provide equal communication skills like the ability to listen and help solve problems were equally necessary.

A relationship without interchange is not a relationship. If there is no interchange, a negative relationship between the coach and athlete will be easily formed. According to Ryan (1996), a coach's arrogance, ignorance, and ultimate betrayal of trust that is confidential in the coach-athlete relationships are negative coaching approaches. Kelley, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Lvinger, McClintock, Peplau, and Peterson (1983) defined that dyad relationships are ones that have interconnected behaviours, emotions, and thoughts. On the other hand, Jowett (2001) also defined that the coach athlete relationship as a situation where coaches' and athletes' thoughts, emotions and behaviours are interdependent. In order to examine this interpersonal relationship, Jowett and colleagues drew out the interpersonal construct of Closeness, Co-orientation and Complementarity (3C), and interviews were conducted, revealing that constructs are major components of the coach-athlete relationship.

a) Communication Styles

Communication is defined as 'the transmission and the exchange of information conveying meaning between two or more people' (Fuoss & Troppmann, 1981). Meanwhile, Spink (1991) as cited in Culver and Trudel (2000) stated that communication is known as a critical piece in the puzzle and even the most essential element in the art and science of coaching. In order to convey the message properly, coaches need to have good communication skills to create the effectiveness in communication, such as interaction with the athletes, managing the teams, giving tactical and technical instructions, and others. Bloom (1996) stated that "Learning when to communicate with players is an intangible art; a skill that separates the competent coach from the great one. It takes years to learn to distinguish the best communication style for each player" (p. 165). Therefore it is essential for both coach and athlete to have a good communication style to enhance a better relationship.

The old model of 'tear them down so you can build them up' no longer apply in today's sports world. However, combat sports still apply this method to achieve good performances. A study done by Longueville, Fournier and Dubois (1998) emphasized on the French judo coaches' and athletes'

perceptions regarding their effective interactions. The underlying factors for effectiveness of these interactions concluded that the dominant communication style by the judo coaches established a disciplined atmosphere among the athletes, and athletes who stayed in the system understood and accepted these restrictive rules. This is because, in general, judo athletes could not question their coaches' authority and their encouragement on rivalry, as this was a major component of judo in France. This is in line with Ames's (1992) citation in Longueville, Fournier and Dubois (1998), that judo coaches encourage rivalry among athletes, which partly led to warrior-like motivational atmospheres.

Athletes are prone to have friendly relationships with their coaches. This is clearly shown in Jowett's (2001) study; both coaches and athletes viewed each other as friends, highlighting the correspondent dimensions. Whereas how controlling one is always depends on the roles and tasks performed by the coach and athlete specifically. Athletes viewed their coaches as someone who were always ready to provide support, and who were enjoyable to work with. The enjoyment in learning and interacting atmospheres are important. Kavussanu and Robert (1996) defined enjoyment as one of the essential elements between the coach and athlete, especially for female athletes and the mentally weaker athletes. Similarly, in Orlick's (1986) study, it was concluded that while athletes worked incredibly hard to achieve their goals, they emphasized on an agreeable environment to work with, which included fun or enjoyment to maintain their interest, and the passion to pursue their sport. This approach is equally important to athletes of all levels, such as young amateurs (Boyd, Trudel, & Donohue, 1997), Olympic athletes (Werthner, 1998 cited in Culver & Trudel 2000), and professional athletes (Barbour, & Orlick, 1994). The gaps between these relationships are important to be studied.

In Malaysia, The Star Online (May, 2011) reported that national rhythmic gymnast, Elaine Koon had made shocking allegations about her coach, Elena Kholodova. Elaine Koon entered the team with hopes of bringing glory to the country, but ended up leaving with much frustration, bitterness and disappointments by the authoritarian leadership style of her coach. The report also stated that athletes were never treated with respect, and had often been called names or shouted at needlessly. Therefore, athletes prefer to withdraw from programs or remain in silence, bearing all the scolding and harsh instructions by their coaches. This has now become a norm in Malaysia, where the culture of remaining silent speaks louder. To what extent do these athletes bear with these crises? This is the question to ponder on. Kassing, Pearce, and Infante (1999) in a study entitled 'Aggressive communication in the coach-athlete relationship' suggested that athletes who receive aggressive communication from their coaches were less satisfied with their coaches, exhibited less sportsmanship, and were less successful in terms of win-loss percentages. Coaches may believe that aggressive communication is important to enhance performances, but not all athletes can be dealt with such aggression.

Studies on communication styles are important in light of the previous research demonstrating that coaches threaten punishment when faced with less desirable performances by athletes (Miles & Greenberg, 1993). The indication is that aggressive communication styles designed to correct unsatisfactory performances may also affect the coach-athlete relationship. Previous research has found that good communication between coach and athlete has often been one of the strongest factors for sports performance (Serpa, 1999). According to scholars, interpersonal relationship is fundamental in the process of coaching as its nature is likely to determine the athletes' satisfaction, self-esteem and performance accomplishments (Jowett and Meek, 2000a, Jowett and Meek, 2000b, Lyle, 1999 and Vealey, Armstrong, Comar and Greenleaf, 1998). In order to build an effective interpersonal relationship, interpersonal communication plays an essential role.

Adding on, communication is viewed as a vehicle to develop common grounds (knowing each other well) and includes verbal interchanges of technical and personal issues, decision making, and goal setting. A poor communicator as a result of not having good communication skills will result in bad performances. In demonstrating sport skills, coaches should focus on giving a clear image of the correct movement, and convey the information effectively to the athletes. This communication style is essential as to avoid communication errors. Misunderstanding between the coach and athlete may occur if conflicts in communication arise. Fights, training boycotts, and athletes quitting from the team

are few examples of coaches and athletes not having a good relationship due to poor communication styles.

On the other hand, communication style is a particular way of sharing information and feelings with another person based on the personality and experiences of the one sharing and the position of the one shared with. Self-value also affects the person's communication style when transmitting a message to other communicators. According to Lustig and Koester (1999), communication styles refer to the topics people prefer to discuss, their favourite forms of interaction; either sarcasm, argument or self-disclosure. Meanwhile, Samovar and Porter (2004), as cited in Aleksandra (2008) stated that communication style includes the depth of involvement in communication, where partners are tuned to the same level of factual, emotional, and content messages. The communicants rely on the same channels for conveying information. Basketball coaches in Western countries specifically used Norton's (1983) ways of communication styles to evaluate the coach-athlete relationship. However, there are not much research done on communication styles by using Norton's communication styles in Asian countries. Norton (1983) stated 9 conducts that reflects the styles of communication.

The first communication style is 'impression-leaving'. This communication style describes the way coaches or athletes use their words, so that they are easily remembered and communicate them softly and politely. With this, they will leave an impression on each other. The second communication style is 'calm', where the coach or athlete speaks patiently, even in stressful situations, and are not easily influenced by the environment. The third communication style is 'attentive'. This communication style explains that when the coach or athlete is interacting, the focus is not just mere talk, but they also actively observe each other and maintain eye contact.

The fourth communication style is called 'dramatic', where the coach or athlete often tells stories or jokes, always exaggerate, and often act out while communicating. For example, when they talk, they uses aggressive body movements to show the suspense of the story they are telling. In line with dramatic communication, current Malaysian karate coach, Andris Vasiljevs stated that there are moments when coaches have to be serious and intense; however, it is also appropriate to joke with the athletes, and talk to them about topics other than just sports. He found that the approach of showing concern towards the athletes helped develop a positive relationship with them, and brings out a more positive response from the athletes. He also highlighted that it is important for the coach to maintain a fine line and a professional relationship with his athletes, knowing that he is still their coach, and it is good to be their friend, but not buddy. He found this type of relationships to be very effective. The fifth communication style is 'domination'. This means that when the coach or athlete have a self-concept to control, they use a dominant style like excessive talking, anger, and the need to control the conversation.

The sixth communication style is 'open', where the coach or athlete easily talk about anything at all, including themselves, without holding back or showing much emotion. They are also very honest in their interaction. A study done by Connolly and Rotella (1991) found that some athletes have been socialized to fake honesty in communication with their coaches to "agree with the coach in order to stay in the team and be on the coach's good side". This concern with looking good to the coaches surfaced in the incident 'when silent means neglect'. Yambor (1998) cited in Culver and Trudel's (2000) study that senior athletes may learn to be more confident, but considering their standing in the fast growing sociocultural system, whereby the other athletes need their coaches help to start communication and be open-minded. Coaches can achieve this by creating an environment that encourages their athletes to initiate communication.

The seventh communication style is 'contentious'; explained that when they interact, they always end up arguing, disagreeing, demanding for proof, and do not easily give up on tight conversations. In these situations, the coach or athlete will debate with opposite opinions and may find it hard to resolve the matter. The eighth communication style is 'animation', where the coach or athlete use facial expressions. As a communicator, facial expressions are often used when communicating, and it shows what is interpreted verbally. Facial expressions generate more trust compared to the spoken word. Besides that, a lot of hand movements are used when interacting.

Facial expressions of athletes often provide feedback to the coach, and vice versa. For example, the feeling of disinterest and boredom indicated by athletes' glazed eyes expression. Disbelief can be seen through the athletes' full-raised eyebrow, and half-raised eyebrows indicate confusion. Meanwhile, the body posture of the athletes point out their attitude and mood towards their coach. Coaches and athletes should be sensitive to the signals transmitted by one another as their facial expressions speaks louder than words. In line with this, a qualitative research done by Jowett and Meek (2000) stated that all the athletes and coaches reported that 'communication goes beyond actual conversation...eye and body can say everything.'

The last communication style is 'genial' (friendly and cheerful). Sincere encouragement and support towards others indirectly makes the person feel appreciated and accepted. Genial behaviours gives a lot of encouragement and support to others (Ishak, 2000). Similarly, a case study on the coaches' verbal aggression done by Mazer, Barnes, Grevious, and Boger (2013) stated that coaches who exhibit an affirming style through observant and friendly communication behaviours may lead athletes to greater motivation in sport.

Communication between coach and athlete in team sports may vary from individual sports. This is due to the team structure, where each athlete in the team may carry different characteristics, and coaches play an important role in making sure all the athletes are adaptable to the coach's communication style. Even though athletes may feel reluctant in certain aspects, the coaches and athletes have to work together to achieve the same goal in team sports. Team sport is the presence of many individuals combining and forming an efficient and effective team (Cotterill, 2011).

Speaking to coaches and athletes that are involved in team sports can influence upon team performance. Findings by few researchers indicate that a good leadership behavior displayed by coaches can affect an athlete's performance and outcome (Chelladurai, 1984; Riemer & Toon, 2001). Meanwhile, Baric (2007) cited in Chelladurai (1984) stated that sports type; be it individual sports or team sports, competition levels, athletes' age, and coaches and athletes gender are among factors that affect the coach-athlete relationship. In team sports, coaches are not only responsible for athletes' successful careers, but also the relationship with the athlete to achieve common goals. In team sports, every successful athlete have common characteristics. At the same time, every athlete in team sports have individual personalities that demands individual approach from their coaches; communication skills that differs, and specific interventions in the sports preparation process. (Tušak, Mouse, & Vičić, 2003). The following section reviews literature surrounding one of the key factors that may influence the coach-athlete relationship.

b) Gender

Gender is said to be another factor that influences the coach-athlete relationship. Numerous studies have been done to study the athletes' preferences of either the same-gender or opposite-gender coach. The gender factor included the level of knowledge of the coaches, and the ability for both coach and athlete to motivate each other, (Medwechuk & Crossman, 1994; Parkhouse & Williams, 1986), the level of the athletes' comfort in disclosure, (Medwechuk & Crossman, 1994; Sabock & Kleinfelter, 1987), and the capability of the coach in being a role model for the athlete (Lirgg, Dibrezzo, & Smith, 1994).

Unger and Crawford (1992) stated that female coach-female athlete relationships tend to involve more emotions in the interactions, whereby male coach-male athlete relationships tend to have more sharing of information to enhance the athletes' performances. The opposite gender coach-athlete relationship's dynamics leads to questions of compatibility due to different male and female motivators. Moreover, gender may be a mediating factor for relationship productivity between coaches and athletes (Lirgg, Dibrezzo, & Smith, 1994; Medwechuk & Crossman, 1994).

In Western countries, a strong gender bias favouring male coaches was found in both the male and female basketball teams. Athletes concluded that male coaches are more knowledgeable, more skilful,

more likely to achieve more success, more desirable to play for, and have a greater ability to motivate. (Parkhouse & William, 1986). As a former athlete in National Sport Council myself, I noticed that most athletes always desire to bond with their coaches, and we do not want any favouritism to be shown towards any specific athletes. We also believe that with good support from the coach, we achieve better.

Osborne (2002) stated that although male and female athletes share many attributes like the willingness to sacrifice time and energy, and the desire to win, they still need to be coached differently. For example, female athletes thrive on self-satisfaction and are able to perform certain drills, and can deliver the best with encouragement from the coach.

According to Parratt (1994) as cited in Emily (2013), gender is a social construction that changes over time. Gender is a performed behaviour that is parallel to how society expects men and women to act, and this can change over time. Taylor & Wilson, 2005; Riemer & Toon, (2001) stated that gender is one of the factors that can influence the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. They also added that it is better to have an advisory type of relationship, whereas in case they are of the same gender, more emphasis is on social support behaviour. Studies on the gender role factors and styles or approach between female coach-female athletes and male coach-male athletes that might bring closeness in the coach-athlete relationship is yet to be explored in Malaysia.

An exploratory of female athletes' experiences and perceptions of male and female coaches done by Melinda, Daniel, Rebecca, & Johnson (2008), concluded that there were four themes that emerged from the interview. Firstly, discipline and structure; the key informants felt that the female coaches were unorganized, non-authoritative, and did not have similar discipline compared to experiences with the male coaches. Secondly, personal relationship; most athletes felt that female coaches had a greater ability to relate to them. Athletes experience a lot of positive encouragement from female coaches, and agreed that they could discuss 'almost anything' about personal problems. To uphold this statement, Jowett, 2007a, 2007b; Poczwadowski, Barott and Henshen (2002) emphasized the role of affective ties, such as reciprocal feelings of trust, respect, appreciation, valuing, and caring, as defining characteristics of the coach-athlete relationships. This shows that the intensity of the bonds between coaches and athletes can also build the psychological well-being, besides achieving overall performance.

Thirdly, passivity and aggressiveness; athletes prefer male coaches over female coaches in this area. According to the athletes, male coaches seemed to be more aggressive and demanding. Osbourne (2002) stated that female athletes preferred this style to enhance their relationship due to cultural expectations of men in authoritative positions, male dominance in sports, or possibly the lack of female coaches as role models. Female athletes also want to be trained hard and challenged. However this does not apply if male coaches use extreme methods on athletes like constant yelling; female athletes may be less receptive that style (Osbourne, 2002). Finally, coaches' preference; athletes assumed that male coaches know more about the basics and fundamentals, and everything that is required for a successful team.

In the coach-athlete relationship, coaches are always perceived as the person whose control is absolute, and the role of the athlete is submissive without questioning the instructions of the coach (Burke, Carron & Eys, 2006). The dominant-submissive pressures placed on coaches and athletes to act in a certain ways, and may cause them to feel uncomfortable to interact, or react differently to each other, depending on the specific expectations of their gender and role within the coach-athlete relationship. The stereotype mentality about males and females, and about coaches and athletes may therefore lead to different levels of desire in coaches and athletes to understand each other.

According to Burke (2001), male coaches have two expectations of their role acting on them; namely, coach (controlling and directing), and gender (assertive and leading; Rudman & Glick, 2008). Yoder and Schleider (1996) highlighted that the coach and athlete dyad made up of a male athlete and female coach may have conflicting expectations due to different role expectations. On the contrary, female

athletes with male coaches may find that their role expectations are strongly reinforced. This study shows that gender is a very important factor to enhance coach-athlete relationships.

Looking back at the history of the gender factors in the coach-athletes relationships, Parkhouse & William (1986)'s study has not shown a clear consensus as to whether female athletes prefer a male or female coach. Some literature claimed that athletes may be more comfortable with male coaches (Frankl & Babbitt, 1998; Whitaker & Molstad, 1985). This can be due to the long service of the male coaches in the sports arena, compared to female coaches who are relatively new in coaching, and also the general lack of female coaches' altogether (Osbourne, 2002). Automatically, athletes' level of trust will be more favourable towards male coaches. Since the majority of coaches have always been male, this could help to explain the female athletes' preferences towards male coaches.

However, conducting studies on gender in Asian countries will be interesting as the perception of the athletes will vary as Asian countries comprises of many different ethnicities. William & Parkhouse (1988) stated that other personal attributes such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and the athletes' level of skills, abilities, and age (Burke, Peterson & Nix, 1995; Whitaker & Molstad, 1985) may influence the coach-athletes relationship.

Meanwhile, according to Molstad and Whitaker (1987), the female basketball players ranked their female coaches higher than male coaches in terms of superiority in coaching qualities like relating well to other athletes, and understanding the athletes' feelings. Therefore, female coaches rated significantly higher than male coaches in demonstrating these qualities. In the same study, it showed that female coaches were more likely to establish friendship with athletes. In Malaysia, cultural effects have always been different compared to Western countries. Therefore, studies to find out how gender factors will influence the coach-athlete relationships in Malaysia are important. The following section reviews a key factor that requires further investigation within the focus of the coach-athlete relationship in a Malaysian context.

C) Culture (Ethnicity)

The concepts of race and ethnicity are often interchangeable, but they differ in meaning altogether. Whereby, the concept of race has often been used to classify people according to psychical characteristics. According to Nixon & Frey (1998, 227), ethnicity refers to 'categories of people who share a common cultural identity and heritage'. In particular, they are determined by cultural characteristics such as traditions, values, norms, and ideas that constitute a particular way of life (Coakley, 2001).

In the Western perspective, Solomon, Wietgardt, Yusuf, Kosmitzki, William, Stevens and Wayda (1996) as cited in Jowett and Frost (2007) highlighted that coaches have different expectations of athletes from various backgrounds, and treated athletes of particular ethnic groups differently. For example, African-American athletes receive more instructions, while European-American athletes receive more praise (Solomon, Wietgardt, Yusuf, Kosmitzki, William, Stevens & Wayda, 1996, as cited in Jowett & Frost, 2007).

Another study by Jowett & Frost (2007) highlighted that communication is viewed as an important element for developing a level of understanding. In her studies, a majority of athletes expressed that it could have been easier to talk to an African-American manager for certain things or personal issues, compared to a Western manager. This is because African-American managers were perceived to be more understanding and sensitive to their problems, due to their similar cultural backgrounds. From these studies, it can be concluded that race and ethnicity consists of expectations which can influence the coach-athlete relationship.

Jones, Potrac and Armour (2000) stated that issues relating to the needs and requirements of different cultures were largely ignored. The role of culture is believed to be crucial for coaches to develop an understanding of the athletes' ethnic heritage, and the sensitivity towards it, if the coaches are to provide the athletes a positive sporting experience (Schempp and Oliver, 2000). To have a good

coach-athlete relationship, both coach and athlete should understand, respect, and be sensitive towards each other's ethnicity. Within the social psychology literature, research has shown that interracial friendships are underlined by 'multicultural sensitivity' which includes the ability to respect and understand people of diverse cultural backgrounds, and the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively (Hunter & Elias, 2000, as cited in Jowett & Frost, 2007).

Many scholars have used the 3+1 Cs model by Jowett (2005) in cultural context such as Antonini & Seiler, 2006; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005. It has yet to be adopted in Malaysia as a framework in research that considers ethnicity as a factor in the coach-athlete relationship. In the 3+1 Cs model comprises of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation.

In 2007, a research done by Jowett and Frost on black players' perception and impact of ethnicity in the coach-athlete relationship concluded that in terms of closeness, respecting each other's culture is the main property in the coach-athletes relationship. Next, commitment appeared unaffected by athletes' or coaches' race as each athlete experienced strong commitment to their respective coaches. With regards to complementarity, none of the athletes talked about ethnicity issues related to co-operation or reciprocation during training, and instructions given by the coach were received by the athletes. Lastly, co-orientation; shared knowledge and understanding were important components of the athletes' relationship with their coaches. Athletes and coaches had a common belief about hard work, performance, as well as accepting each other's ethnicity and professional backgrounds. The examples above clearly shows that there is a huge gap in studying culture as a factor influencing the coach-athlete relationship.

Most Asian countries are culturally homogenous because of their population which is mainly formed by one race, and characterized by people of the same cultural aspects. They also speak the same language, and have the same norms and traditions. Japan and Korea are the prime example for this statement, unlike Malaysia which has rich multiracial cultures. Lai, Chong, Sia, and Ooi (2010) stated that Malaysia is a relatively small nation, with approximately 26 million people, formed by different ethnicities, living together even before the British Empire in 1957.

Similarly, for sports in Malaysia, many team sports have a combination of multiracial athletes. This is because of the eruption of the May 13th racial riot incident in 1969, and the government felt that all ethnicities needed to be integrated so that a harmonious society can be created. The National Sports Council took up the task to integrate all ethnicities to participate in various sports. Since athletes and coaches are from different cultures and ethnicities, this may indirectly influence the coach-athlete relationship. To avoid uncertainty in the racial aspect in the coach-athlete relationship, it is essential for the coach and athlete to come to a certain level of understanding.

The population of Malaysia comprises of three main races which are actively involved in sports, mainly the Malay race. Religious commitments like praying five times a day, or fasting during the month of Ramadhan are important issues to look into. An appreciation of how their religious commitments may constrain sporting involvements could help to dismiss the stereotypical belief regarding lack of interest. Haleem (2005) highlighted that a Western-Muslim athlete had a dysfunctional relationship with his coach as the coach ignored the athlete's Muslim faith and the practices he was obliged to undertake. Being emotionally tired, chronically injured, and athletically unfulfilled, the athlete retired at the age of 24. He believed that if his coach had taken the time to know him more personally, along with his faith, and had understood his religious beliefs, his potential as an athlete would have been better realized.

Awareness and sensitivity on the role of culture between coach and athlete who come from different cultural backgrounds may prove advantageous in developing the coach-athlete relationship that are both successful and effective (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). It is very essential, as sports in the multicultural and multiracial Malaysia continues to grow.

Hofstede (1991) defined that the uncertainty avoidance dimension refers to the extent that the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations, and the degree of ambiguity and change that can be tolerated. In order to have a low level of uncertainty avoidance, one needs to respect and accept another person's view or culture to build a good relationship. Milton (1993) explained that intercultural understanding is an individual process and defines it as an acceptance of cultural differences. Sensitivity in culture is no stranger in a multiracial country, and to develop intercultural sensitivity means to develop the capability to recognize and to accept the differences between the cultures. This points out the importance of studies on how culture influences the coach-athlete relationship.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

All the factors mentioned above by past researchers, both from the Western and Asian perspective, outlined simple understandings to systematically study the interpersonal relationship between the coach and the athlete. In summary, communication is an interpersonal dimension that affects, and is affected by the quality of coach-athlete relationships. Montgomery and Bexter (1998) as cited in Jowett and Poczwardowski (2012), highlighted that communication can be viewed as a bridge between relationship members. For example, communication is the process where distance between the coach and the athlete broadens (become distant), narrows (become close), and merges (become one). Communication is considered the building block towards developing balanced coach-athlete relationships (Yambor, 1995 as cited in Culver & Trudel, 2000). Next, gender may influence the bond between the coach and athlete. Preference of male or female coaches may influence the athlete's performance. This is due to the general view of male coaches' 'masculine' style of interaction, while female coaches were often viewed as better psychologists. However, this can vary from one's culture, and can change over time (Parratt, 1994). Finally, culture may also influence the coach-athlete relationship as different cultures bring different norms. Harmonious coach-athlete relationships can be built if one can adapt and respect the various cultures.

Clearly, there is a considerable scope for further studies on communication styles, gender factors, and culture's role as factors that might influence the coach-athlete relationship in team sports in Malaysia. This study will become imperative because most academic research in this area focuses in other parts of the world. In Malaysia, only few studies tackled communication that can enhance the coach-athlete relationship. For an example, Latif, Hassan and Fauzee (2009) explored the effectiveness of communication of coaches from the athletes' perspective. They concluded that through an effective communication style, both coach and athlete can build good interpersonal relationship. Tubbs and Moss (2000) highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships in producing good performances in the sports field, in terms of coach-athlete relationships.

Effective coach-athlete relationships are underlined by good communication styles, dependability, trustworthiness, and many others. More importantly, these features are under-researched particularly in triangulating three key concepts of interpersonal relationship among athletes.

Future study about the selection of both key informants which are coaches and athletes are important. In Philippe and Seiler's study (2006), the researchers were only restricted to study one half of a coach-athlete dyad, which was the athlete. They suggested future research to examine both coaches and athletes to reveal the mutual perception of their relationships. Also, Jowett and Chaundy (2004) highlighted that 'a coach cannot do it alone'. It means that focusing on one particular person in this coach-athlete relationship may not accurately reflect what goes on between coaches and athletes.

In order to advance the interpersonal relationships in coach-athlete relationships in Malaysia, researchers can focus on other factors that might influence the coach-athlete relationship. This would be the age of the athlete, the competitive level of the athlete, and in atypical relationships like parent-child or husband-wife.

On the other hand, many studies have been done to measure quantitatively the quality of the coach-athlete relationship by using the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) construct. For future study, the researchers can mainly focus on factors influencing the coach-athlete relationships by using a qualitative approach that is sensitive to the relational context to provide holistic data. This approach is important, as the researcher will be able to explore the grey areas in research.

All the gaps above proved that there were lack of studies on interpersonal relationships specifically between coaches and athletes, and the importance of conducting this studies. However, Norton (1983) does not claim that the styles he proposes are final, but indicates that all the styles are conceptualizations which provide a fruitful direction to conduct future research.

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