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The relationship between goal orientation, perceived motivational climate, and sportspersonship orientation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present research was to examine the relationship between goal orientation, perceived motivational climate, and sportspersonship. The participants were 366 male athletes (17.51 ± 2.47 years old) and completed TEOSQ, PMCQ, and MSOS questionnaires. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient suggested that task orientation and task involved motivational climate are positively associated with certain measures of sportspersonship (respect for the rules, respect for opponents, and respect for social conventions). However, the results of regression analysis showed that only perceived motivational climate is a predictor of respect for the rules, respect for opponents, and respect for social conventions. Based on the findings of the present research, it can be concluded that athletes are more likely to display moral behaviors and to observe sportspersonship in a task-oriented motivational climate.

Keywords: sportspersonship, goal orientation, perceived motivational climate

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INTRODUCTION

Athletic environment is a place in which moral behavior is as important as win and loss. Nonetheless, moral concepts have seldom been addressed by sport sociologists and psychologists due to their philosophical nature and the fact that they can hardly be the subject of experimental research. It is also believed that addressing moral concepts is the duty of parents, teachers, and education administrators rather than sport scientists [15]. Theoretically, there are different viewpoints regarding the role of sport in moral development. Ernest Hemingway states that "sport shows us how to win with honesty and sport shows us how to lose with dignity" [7], while Ogilvie and Tutko (1971) commented that if you want to build character, try anything but sport [13]. Some people consider the competitive nature of sport as an obstacle on the way of moral development, especially when winning at all costs is the dominant atmosphere. Others consider the competitive conditions in sport as one of its unique characteristics that contribute to cognitive development in moral concepts; conditions where athletes may have to choose between winning and fair play [16]. Different impressions of moral behavior in sport fields underline the fact that, unlike the common belief, there is no causal relationship between participation in sports and moral development; we cannot expect people to

achieve moral development by merely engaging in sport activities, but we can consider sport as a potential context where moral and immoral behaviors are displayed and reinforced [15, 16, & 20]. The competitive nature of sport raises doubts about the effect of sport on moral development; however, it is linked to certain concepts that need further examination. One of these concepts is achievement goal theory (AGT). Based on this theory, individuals in achievement settings may interpret their success with respect to two orientations, learning or task orientation and performance or ego orientation. Task-oriented individuals consider skill and performance as the criterion for success, while ego-oriented individuals focus primarily on winning or losing [11].However, there may be individuals who have different levels of both these characteristics. There are environmental factorsin AGT, known as motivational climate, that affect goals and achievement interpretations. Athletes may work in an environment where they are influenced by the opinions of significant others. The motivational climate can be characterized as task- (i.e. emphasizing learning processes, improvement, and effort) or ego-involved (i.e., emphasizing competition, winning, and social comparison) [1].AGT provides a good framework for sportspersonship by postulating that differences in athletes' interpretation of events and acceptable behaviors are a function of the dominant motivational climate. Shields and Bredemeier (1995) described sportspersonship as coordination of the play impulse with the competitive impulse in light of moral goals [15]. Vallerand et al. (1996) proposed a multidimensional conceptualization of sportspersonship: (a) full commitment to participation, (b) respect for social conventions, (c) respect for rules and officials, (d) respect for opponents, (e) a negative approach to participation (i.e., the importance of winning at all costs) [18]. Despite the little research carried out on the application of achievement goal theory in sportspersonship, the results are different in terms of the contribution of the driving factors, i.e. goal orientation and motivational climate. Therefore, the present research aims to expand the literature on sportspersonship and tries to prove the possibility of effective interventions for moral development in sporting environments. This article addresses the following questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between goal orientation (task orientation/ego orientation) and sportspersonship?
2. Is there a relationship between motivational climate (task involved/ego involved) and sportspersonship?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research is descriptive-correlational and examines the relationship of goal orientation and perceived motivational climate as the predictor variables and three sportspersonship components (respect for rules and officials, respect for opponents, and respect for social conventions) as criterion variables. The sample of the present research consists of 366 athletes (17.51 ± 2.47 years old) with at least one year experience of membership in a sports club and participation in at least 3 competitions. Of this number, 182 participants were team athletes (basketball, volleyball, and football) and 184 participants were individual athletes (wrestling, tae kwon do, and judo). Three questionnaires were used for data collection. The first one is Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ) which includes 13 questions ranked on a 5-point Likert scale (1 for totally disagree and 5 for totally agree). The questions assess whether an individual defines success in a sporting context as task orientated or ego orientated. Current reports have confirmed the validity and reliability of this questionnaire [2 & 10]. The second instrument of the research is Perceived Motivational Climate Questionnaire (PMCQ) which includes 21 questions that examine whether the motivational climate is task involved or ego involved. The questions are ranked on a 5-point Likert scale (1 for totally disagree and 5 for totally agree) and the validity and reliability of this questionnaire has also been confirmed [19]. The third instrument is Multidimensional Sportspersonship Orientation Scale (MSOS) which consists of 25 questions ranked on a 5-point Likert scale (1 for no correspondence and 5 for total correspondence) [17]. It examines five subscales, but for the purpose of the present research only three subscales were used: respect for rules and officials (5 questions), respect for opponents (5 questions), and respect for social conventions (5 questions). In preliminary examinations, the alpha coefficient obtained for these three questionnaires was higher than 0.75. The researchers personally visited the sport clubs in order to make necessary arrangements with the trainers and to explain the purpose of the research for the athletes. They asked for volunteers to complete the questionnaires and from the 400 questionnaires distributed, 366 were returned.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data in Table 1 shows that the participants of the present research have average ego orientation scores and task orientation scores. In terms of perceived motivational climate, the mean ego involved climate score and task involved climate scores are slightly higher than average. Moreover, the means of the criterion variables indicate that the highest scores belong to respect for rules and officials, respect for social conventions, and respect for opponents respectively.

Table 1 – Mean and standard deviation of the criterion variables (measures of sportspersonship) and predictor variables (goal orientation/motivational climate)

Criterion Variables	X ± SD	Predictor Variables	X ± SD
Respect for rules and officials	3.9 ± 0.6	Ego orientation	3.4 ± 0.8
Respect for opponents	4.0 ±	Task orientation	3.8 ± 0.7
Respect for social conventions	3.1 ± 0.7	Task involved climate	3.4 ± 0.5
		Ego involved climate	3.0 ± 0.6

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient suggests that task orientation and task involved motivational climate are positively associated with the measures of sportspersonship (respect for rules and officials, respect for opponents, and respect for social conventions). However, no significant relationship was observed between ego orientation and the measures of sportspersonship. Moreover, ego involved motivational climate was significantly associated only with respect for social conventions (Table 2).

Table 2 – The relationships between the criterion and predictor variables based on Pearson correlation coefficient

Predictor / Criterion	Ego Orientation	Task Orientation	Ego Involved Climate	Task Involved Climate
Respect for rules and officials	0.03	0.1	0.1	0.3
Respect for opponents	0.01	0.1	0.04	0.3
Respect for social conventions	0.09	0.1	0.01	0.2

The results of simultaneous multiple regression analysis showed that 9 percent of the variance of respect for rules and officials can be predicted by task orientation and task involved climate. However, the beta coefficients were only significant for task involved climate. Moreover, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that 6 percent of the variance of respect for opponents can be predicted by task orientation and task involved climate. However, the beta coefficients were only significant for task involved climate. Finally, it was shown that 8 percent of the variance of respect for social conventions can be predicted by task orientation, task involved climate, and ego involved climate. However, the beta coefficients were only significant for task oriented climate (Table 3).

Table 3 – A summary of the results of simultaneous multiple regression

Criterion variables	Predictor variables	B	SEB	β
Respect for rules and officials	Task orientation	0.02	0.05	0.02
	Task involved climate	0.33	0.07	0.29*
	$R^2 = 0.09, F(2_t, 363) = 18.5, p \leq 0.000$			
Respect for opponents	Task orientation	0.03	0.06	0.03
	Task involved climate	0.028	0.07	0.22*
	$R^2 = 0.09, F(2_t, 363) = 10.69, p \leq 0.000$			
Respect for social conventions	Task orientation	0.05	0.05	0.06
	Task involved climate	0.029	0.07	0.026*
	Ego involved climate	0.02	0.07	0.02
	$R^2 = 0.09, F(2_t, 363) = 12, p \leq 0.000$			

Notes: $* p \leq 0.01$

CONCLUSION

The results of the present research support the applicability of achievement goal theory (AGT) in the area of sportspersonship orientation. Nicholls (1989), one of the theorists of AGT, underlines the effect of goal orientation on actions, achievement interpretation, and the range of acceptable behaviors, and argues that those who interpret success as improvement relative to their past performance rather than better performance relative to others are more likely to respect moral principles [11]. The results of the present research revealed that task orientation and task involved motivational climate are positively associated with the measures of sportspersonship. This finding is consistent with the results of Dunn and Dunn (1999), Ommundson et al. (2004), and Gano-Overway et al. (2005). However, in the present research no significant relationship was observed between ego orientation, ego oriented climate, and measures of sportspersonship. This finding is inconsistent with the results of Dunn and Dunn (1999),Lemyre et al. (2002), and Duda et al. (1991). In these studies, a negative correlation is observed between high levels of ego orientation and the measures of sportspersonship. The reason for such an inconsistency can be the different levels of goal orientation and perceived motivational climate (high ego orientation against low task orientation) in the studied samples. Therefore, further studies can account for these conditions and find a more accurate response to this issue. One of the noteworthy results of the present research is the high predictive power of task involved climate. Based on the beta coefficients in multiple regression analysis, one unit of change in task involved climate is followed by 0.29 percent change in respect for rules and officials, 0.22 percent change in respect for opponents, and 0.26 percent change in respect for social conventions (Table 3). This finding highlights the

importance of environmental factors in sportspersonship orientation [1] and the necessity to create a task involved motivational climate for developing sportspersonship in athletes. A task involved climate is characterized by an understanding that effort leads to success [11 & 16]. Creating a task involved climate is the result of encouraging people to interpret success as progress rather than normative comparisons. In such an environment, effort is highly valued and the effect of unpredicted factors and the quality of opponents is emphasized [1]. Based on social learning theory, Shields and Bredemeier (1995) proposed guidelines for moral development in sport that included determining the measures of sportspersonship, reinforcing the behaviors that correspond to these measures, modeling proper behaviors in athletic environments, and laying the ground for discussion about moral dilemmas in such environments [15]. This can only be done in a task involved motivational climate. Thus, awareness of the characteristics of a task involved climate and the attempt to create it in athletic environments are necessary for developing sportspersonship. Despite the findings of the present research, there are limitations that must be taken into account in interpretation and generalization of the results. First, this study was carried out among male athletes and thus the results cannot be generalized to female athletes. Second, the studied sample consisted of non-professional athletes and the results cannot be applied to professional athletes. In the present research, no significant relationship was observed between ego orientation, ego involved climate, and measures of sportspersonship. The reason could be the lack of dispersion of the data related to the variables across the sample of the research. Hence, each of these limitations can be the subject of further studies.

The findings of the research support the ability of achievement goal theory in explaining sportspersonship and highlight the important role of environmental factors in moral orientation and actions. It was shown that the suitable environment for display of sportspersonship and moral development in sport has the characteristics of a task involved motivational climate.

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