



Players' perceptions of their coaches' immediacy, assertiveness, and responsiveness

Kelly A. Rocca , Matthew M. Martin & Mary C. Toale

To cite this article: Kelly A. Rocca , Matthew M. Martin & Mary C. Toale (1998) Players' perceptions of their coaches' immediacy, assertiveness, and responsiveness, Communication Research Reports, 15:4, 445-450, DOI: [10.1080/08824099809362144](https://doi.org/10.1080/08824099809362144)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08824099809362144>



Published online: 06 Jun 2009.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 207



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 5 View citing articles [↗](#)

Players' Perceptions of Their Coaches' Immediacy, Assertiveness, and Responsiveness

Kelly A. Rocca
West Virginia University

Matthew M. Martin
West Virginia University

Mary C. Toale
West Virginia University

This study involved players' perceptions of their coaches' nonverbal immediacy, assertiveness, and responsiveness. Previously in the classroom setting, Thomas, Richmond, and McCroskey (1994) found that in the classroom setting nonverbal immediacy was positively, moderately correlated to both assertiveness and responsiveness. College students (N = 192) were asked to fill out a questionnaire based on a coach that they had in high school. Players who perceived their coaches as being nonverbally immediate, also perceived their coaches as being responsive, and to a lesser extent, assertive. Future research directions include considering the relationships between a coach's nonverbal immediacy with player motivation and satisfaction.

The area of coaching as a form of teaching and of instructional communication has been overlooked in the communication literature. Arguably, the concepts that are used to measure communication of teachers could be used to evaluate the communication of coaches. Coaches are often seen as teachers in the sense that they help to encourage and develop affective, cognitive, and behavioral learning of a sport. The perceived closeness a player feels to his or her coach (i.e., immediacy) is one communication variable that may play an integral role in the player-coach relationship. Specifically, this study involved players' perceptions of their coaches' immediacy, assertiveness, and responsiveness.

Kelly A. Rocca (M.A., West Virginia University, 1997) and **Mary C. Toale** (M.A., West Virginia University, 1998) are doctoral students, and **Matthew M. Martin** (Ph.D., Kent State University, 1992) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506.

The concept of immediacy dates back to Mehrabian in 1971. "People are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer" (Mehrabian, 1971, p.1). Immediacy relates to approach and avoidance behaviors and can be thought of as the perceived distance between people (Mehrabian, 1971; Andersen, 1978; 1979).

Immediacy has been researched primarily in the context of the college classroom. In the classroom, immediacy is positively related to cognitive learning (Gorham, 1988), affective learning (Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen, 1988; Kearney, Plax, & Wandt-Wesco, 1985; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986), motivation (Christophel, 1990), recall of information (Kelley & Gorham, 1988), and compliance (Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorensen, 1988; Richmond, 1990). All of these relationships could be meaningful in studying the player-coach relationship.

Seemingly, an immediate coach would create positive affect between him/herself and the players. An immediate coach could get her or his players to like him or herself as well as the sport. Sometimes athletes quit playing sports because they did not like the coach. Other times, athletes may increase their participation because they like their coach. Greater affect could lead to greater cognitive learning of the sport and all of its complexities, possibly leading to greater recall of information and greater performance by the players. This is crucial in a game situation where the player is under a great deal of stress and must try to remember what was learned from the coach during practice. The player must be paying attention to the coach during practice in order to remember what to do when faced with the pressure of a game situation. An immediate coach might also be more successful in motivating a player/team to succeed.

Two other communication variables that have been studied with immediacy are assertiveness and responsiveness. Assertiveness involves being able to speak up for oneself. Assertive communicators are often very dominant, independent, and competitive. Responsiveness involves being other-oriented. Responsive communicators are often very empathic, friendly, and helpful (Richmond & Martin, 1998). Lamke, Sollie, Durbin, and Fitzpatrick's (1994) study supported these descriptions by finding that assertiveness was associated with instrumental competence, while responsiveness was associated with expressive competence. Research has consistently shown that people differ in how they communicate with others based on their assertiveness and responsiveness (Anderson & Martin, 1996; Martin & Anderson, 1996a; Martin, Chesebro, & Mottet, 1997; Richmond & McCroskey, 1995).

In the classroom, Thomas, Richmond, and McCroskey (1994) investigated the relationship between assertiveness and responsiveness with immediacy. Thomas et al. found both assertiveness and responsiveness to be positively correlated with immediacy, $r = .48$ and $r = .46$, respectively. The relationship between assertiveness and responsiveness was not significant ($r = .01$). When teachers are more immediate with their students, they are also perceived as being more assertive and responsive.

This study attempted to replicate the findings of Thomas et al. (1994), and to extend their research by considering immediacy, assertiveness, and responsiveness in the player-coach relationship. Thus, two hypotheses and one research question were proposed:

- H1: There is a positive relationship between the coach's immediacy and the coach's assertiveness.

- H2: There is a positive relationship between the coach's immediacy and the coach's responsiveness.
- RQ: What is the relationship between a coach's assertiveness and a coach's responsiveness?

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 192 undergraduate students in a large communication service class at a midwestern university. The sample consisted of 104 males, 84 females, and 24 students who did not reveal their sex. The mean age of the sample was 19.14 ($SD = 3.46$). Participation was voluntary and participants earned minimal extra credit. All participation took place during regular class time. Students were asked to fill out a questionnaire based on a coach that they had in high school. High school was chosen because of the increased chance of students who are now in college at a division one school to have played sports in high school, but not in college. Students who did not play any sports in high school were given a questionnaire to complete for a different study.

Instruments

A questionnaire was distributed with a modified 16-item version of the Nonverbal Immediacy Measure (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987), the Assertiveness-Responsiveness Measure (Richmond & McCroskey, 1990), and several demographic questions.

The Nonverbal Immediacy Measure (NIM) has been shown in numerous studies to be both valid and reliable. A revised 16-item version was used here which was adapted specifically for nonverbal coaching behaviors.¹ After the scale was modified, a focus group of graduate students familiar with the immediacy construct were given the scale items to assess for face validity. Modifications were made so that the scale would be consistent across all sports. The mean for the revised Nonverbal Immediacy Measure was 44.53 out of a possible 64 ($SD = 7.05$). Obtained reliability for the 16-item scale in this study was .72.

The Assertiveness-Responsiveness Measure was developed by Richmond and McCroskey (1990). This scale measures both the assertiveness and responsiveness of a target person as seen by the individual completing the scale. In this study, the coach was the specified source. The maximum score for both assertiveness and responsiveness is 50 and the minimum score for both is ten. The mean for assertiveness was 40.49 ($SD = 6.31$) and 33.50 ($SD = 8.63$) for responsiveness. Reliabilities were .83 for assertiveness, and .94 for responsiveness.

RESULTS

Both hypotheses were tested using one-tailed Pearson correlations. The research question was investigated using a two-tailed Pearson correlation.

Hypothesis One predicted that there was a positive relationship between immediacy and assertiveness. This hypothesis was supported ($r = .13, p < .05$). While statistically significant, the magnitude of the relationship between immediacy and assertiveness was small.

Hypothesis Two predicted that there was a positive relationship between immediacy and responsiveness. This hypothesis was also supported ($r = .58, p < .0001$). Thus, coaches

who are perceived as being immediate are also seen as being responsive.

The research question involved the relationship between assertiveness and responsiveness. The correlation between these two variables was not significant ($r = .03$, $p < .05$).

Following the analyses conducted by Thomas et al. (1994), post hoc analyses were conducted to look at the relationships between assertiveness and responsiveness with the individual nonverbal immediacy items. These results are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Relationship between the Individual Immediacy items With Assertiveness and Responsiveness

Immediacy Items	Assertiveness	Responsiveness
1	.35**	-.02
2	-.10	.57**
3	.17*	.06
4	.16*	.11
5	-.08	.11
6	.23**	.20**
7	.27**	.31**
8	-.09	.50**
9	-.12	.29**
10	.07	.00
11	.37**	.13
12	-.04	.39**
13	-.15	.54**
14	.02	.14*
15	.21**	.39**
16	-.09	.26**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Assertiveness was positively related to gesturing, touching, moving around, having eye contact, and using vocal variety. Responsiveness was positively related to smiling, having eye contact, using vocal variety, being relaxed, touching, and being personally close.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to look at the relationships between coaches' immediacy behaviors, assertiveness, and responsiveness. Coaches who are immediate are also seen as high in responsiveness, and to a limited extent, more assertive. This was somewhat unexpected since in Thomas et al.'s (1994) study, immediacy was moderately related to both assertiveness and responsiveness. Possibly, immediacy as measured for the coach-specific context lends itself more toward the dimension of responsiveness than assertiveness.

Thomas et al. (1994) did not report the mean scores for assertiveness and responsiveness of teachers, but in a sample of over 600 of the general population, Martin and Anderson (1996b) reported a higher mean score for responsiveness in comparison to assertiveness. In this current study, players rated their coaches significantly more assertive than responsive

$t(188) = 9.11, p < .001$. The functions of coaching might require people to accentuate their assertiveness in order to be effective. Since this study did not measure relational or behavioral outcomes, we cannot conclude to what extent coaches being assertive, responsive, and/or immediate is considered appropriate and effective by their players.

Future researchers could look at the relationship between a coach's nonverbal immediacy with players' motivation and satisfaction. In the classroom, teachers who are immediate have students who report being more motivated and satisfied. Would these relationships also exist in the player-coach relationship? In looking at different coaching styles and different communication behaviors, one could also investigate athletes who have quit the sport because of their coach to see the communication of that coach and if that has any effect on athletes quitting a sport.

One possible limitation of this study is that high school athletes vary in their intensity and successfulness in the sport. Also, many of them are not competing now and may either be looking back with fond memories or may have used this study as a self-serving means of revenge. They may have somewhat distorted memories or selective memories in this regard. Future researchers need to investigate athletes who are currently playing. This study also focused solely from the player's perspective. Another area of interest for future researchers is the coaches themselves. Coaches could report on their thoughts and behaviors involving about their communication patterns. Since many people do participate in sports at one time or another, further research on the communication that occurs in the coach-player relationship could be useful and practical.

NOTE

¹ Below are the 16 items of the Nonverbal Immediacy Measure used in this study. Items that were reversed coded are signified with a (R) at the end of the item. 1. Gestures while talking to the team. 2. Smiles at the team while talking. 3. Touches players during practice/games. 4. Moves around the playing area when coaching. 5. Stands a far distance away while coaching. (R) 6. Uses a monotone/dull voice when talking to the team. (R) 7. Looks at the players on the team when talking/coaching. 8. Smiles at individual players on the team during practice/games. 9. Has a very tense body position when talking to the team. (R) 10. Sits on the sideline while coaching during practice. (R) 11. Uses a variety of vocal expressions when talking to the players. 12. Has a very relaxed body position while coaching. 13. Smiles during practice/games. 14. Keeps a great distance between him/herself and the players while coaching. (R) 15. Gives players a pat on the back for a job well done. 16. Pushes/shoves players violently when they do something wrong. (R)

REFERENCES

- Andersen, J.F. (1978). *The relationship between teacher immediacy and teaching effectiveness*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.
- Andersen, J.F. (1979). Teacher immediacy as a predictor of teaching effectiveness. *Communication Yearbook*, 3, 543-559
- Anderson, C. M., & Martin, M. M. (1996). Communication motives of assertive and responsive communicators. *Communication Research Reports*, 12, 186-191.

Christophel, D.M. (1990). The relationships among teacher immediacy behaviors, student motivation, and learning. *Communication Education, 39*, 323-340.

Gorham, J. (1988). The relationship between verbal teacher immediacy behaviors and student learning. *Communication Education, 37*, 40-53.

Kearney, P., Plax, T.G., Smith, V.R., & Sorensen, G. (1988). Effects of teacher immediacy and strategy type on college student resistance to on-task demands. *Communication Education, 37*, 54-67.

Kearney, P., Plax, T.G., & Wendt-Wasco, N.J. (1985). Teacher immediacy for affective learning in divergent college classes. *Communication Quarterly, 33*, 61-74.

Lamke, L. K., Sollie, D. L., Durbin, R. G., & Fitzpatrick, J. A. (1994). Masculinity, femininity and relational satisfaction: The mediating role of interpersonal competence. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 11*, 535-554.

Kelley, D.H., & Gorham, J. (1988). Effects of immediacy on recall of information. *Communication Education, 37*, 198-207.

Martin, M.M., & Anderson, C.M. (1996a). Argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 11*, 547-554.

Martin, M. M., & Anderson, C. M. (1996b). Communication traits: A cross-generational investigation. *Communication Research Reports, 13*, 58-67.

Martin, M. M., Chesebro, J. L., & Mottet, T. P. (1997). Students' perceptions of instructors' socio-communicative style and the influence on instructor credibility and situational motivation. *Communication Research Reports, 14*, 431-440.

Mehrabian, A. (1971). *Silent messages*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Richmond, V.P. (1990). Communication in the classroom: Power and motivation. *Communication Education, 39*, 181-195.

Richmond, V. P., & Martin, M. M. (1998). Sociocommunicative style and sociocommunicative orientation. In J. C. McCroskey, J. A. Daly, M. M. Martin, & M. J. Beatty (Eds.) *Communication and personality: Trait perspectives* (pp. 133-146). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Richmond, V.P., & McCroskey, J.C. (1990). Reliability and separation of factors on the assertiveness-responsiveness measure. *Psychological Reports, 67*, 449-450.

Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (1995). *Communication: Apprehension, avoidance and effectiveness* (3rd ed.) Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch-Scarlsbrick.

Richmond, V.P., Gorham, J., & McCroskey, J.C. (1987). The relationship between selected immediacy behaviors and cognitive learning. *Communication Yearbook, 10*, 574-590.

Thomas, C.E., Richmond, V.P., & McCroskey, J.C. (1994). The association between immediacy and socio-communicative style. *Communication Research Reports, 11*, 107-115.