

# Values, motivational orientation and team cohesion amongst youth soccer players

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International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching  
2022, Vol. 17(5) 1049–1058  
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DOI: 10.1177/17479541211055690  
journals.sagepub.com/home/spo



## Abstract

There is a close link between moral education and sports activities. A well-organized sport can be an excellent means of transferring positive values to children and adolescents, which can influence motivation and group processes. This study aimed to analyse (a) the relationships between social, personal and individualistic values, motivational orientation and team cohesion amongst young soccer players and (b) compare differences in these variables between players competing in different age categories. Our participant sample comprised 401 male soccer players of Spanish teams (mean age = 14.64 years) competing in official competitive leagues, of five age categories, Under-10 years to Under-19. All participants responded to three instruments: the Values Scale for Positive Adolescent Development, the Perception of Success Questionnaire and the Group Environment Questionnaire. Correlation and regression, and analysis of differences between categories were performed. The results confirm that personal values are mainly related to task orientation, and individualistic values to ego orientation. The values of responsibility, integrity and honesty were the best predictors of task orientation, and social recognition and hedonism predict ego orientation. Honesty and responsibility were the main predictors of both task and social cohesion. Younger players showed a higher level of social values, task orientation and social cohesion, while older players show higher individualistic values and ego orientation. Implications for research or practice are discussed.

## Keywords

Association football, goal orientation, moral development, positive youth development

## Introduction

There is a close link between moral education and sporting activities,<sup>1,2</sup> and sports when performed in a well-organized manner, can be an excellent means of transferring positive social and personal values to children and adolescents.<sup>3,4</sup> Values are enduring beliefs in which a specific mode of behaviour is personally or socially desirable,<sup>5</sup> and the values can also be considered judgments of desirability or of rejection that are attributed to the facts and objects of a sport situation, given that they are defining principles or criteria of what is good or bad.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, especially in youth sports, the values have a key relevance in the social and moral development of young people.

Childhood and adolescence are crucial stages in the acquisition of values, and organized youth sport offers athletes many opportunities for social interactions with significant others, which could be an instrument that leads to moral and social development, and promote norms and values.<sup>2,7</sup> In the process of socialization, young people gradually progress from external (parental) regulation to

autonomy or self-regulation in which they are increasingly responsible for their own value decisions and their own behaviour, through a process of internalization of moral values.<sup>8</sup> This process emphasizes the fundamental role of the family, school, media and general society as value transmitters. Sport also plays a key role in this regard, as it is one of the main activities in which many young people devote much of their time, acquiring an important role in their education and socialization.<sup>9</sup> Participation in sports has been associated with many values, and the promotion of values

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development through sport depends on how it is delivered and how it is experienced.<sup>10</sup> Although sport has always been regarded as an essential socializing and educational instrument, its formative character does not lie in its mere application; rather, it encourages athletes to develop morally through sport.<sup>11</sup>

In recent years, a relevant theory in developmental and sport psychology is the Positive Youth Development (PYD). The PYD is a strength-based approach to child and adolescent development based on the assumption that all youth have the potential for positive developmental change.<sup>12</sup> This theory searches for characteristics of individuals and their social environments that can be harnessed to build strengths and foster positive developmental change.<sup>13</sup> From the perspective of PYD, sports participation has been associated with both positive and negative outcomes.<sup>12,14</sup> Thus, the promotion of PYD through sport depends on the way it is delivered and experienced,<sup>12</sup> and the role coaches, parents and teammates play in creating a positive social context for development.

In sports, a basic and fundamental construct is motivation. Although empirical research linking values and motivation is limited, many theorists have proposed that this link should exist.<sup>15</sup> Values are closely related to personal motivation, since they can serve as criteria for stimulating behaviour and are fundamentally motivational in their function, and each value implies an underlying content and different motivational objective.<sup>16</sup> Although researchers have tended to treat values as discrete, they rest on a motivational continuum,<sup>17</sup> and values fulfil a set of functions that specifically includes motivating behaviour.<sup>18</sup> In sports, many theories have explained motivation, but this study aims to analyse the relationship between values and achievement goals. Values are antecedents of achievement orientations,<sup>19,20</sup> being interrelated with goals and act as a general action guide for individuals.<sup>21</sup> The Achievement Goals Theory<sup>22</sup> states that the way in which people define competition and success (goal orientation) influences motivated behaviours.<sup>23</sup> This theory presents two orientations, task and ego, conceived as stable personality dispositions. Both values and goal orientations are cognitive schemas that serve as organizing constructs since each basic value or goal orientation establishes a logical pattern of cognitive, affective and behavioural consequences that differ from other values or goal orientations.<sup>24</sup> However, values cover a spectrum of motivation broader than achievement goals that focus on achievement situations and, therefore, form a subset of human values.

Task orientation is consistently associated with good sportsmanship.<sup>25</sup> Ego-oriented athletes exhibit a greater risk of compromising their own health, engaging in tricks and foul play and displaying other characteristics related to undesirable performance in which the ability to demonstrate superior competence is questionable.<sup>21</sup> It has also been confirmed that a motivational climate generated by

ego-oriented trainers is related to deceiving and cheating,<sup>26</sup> and that a climate in which this orientation is not predominant is associated with prosocial behaviours and positive cognitive and emotional responses in sports of varied cultures and at different competitive levels.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the relationship of values with goal orientations is an important area to study in youth sport.

In this area, cohesion is a relevant concept because of its relationship with values and with the motivational orientation of the player. Team cohesion represents a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency of a group to unite and remain united in a search for instrumental objectives and/or to satisfy the affective needs of its members.<sup>28</sup> Confirmed as a multidimensional construct, conceptual model of group cohesion distinguishes between task cohesion and social cohesion.<sup>29</sup> The first refers to the degree to which group members work together and remain united to achieve common goals, while social cohesion implies the degree of interpersonal affiliation or attraction amongst team members, or the extent to which team members interact with each other and enjoy each other's company.<sup>29,30</sup> From the foregoing discussion, the adequate cohesion implies a series of values amongst group members, including cooperation, empathy, responsibility and fellowship. Although there is little research in this area, cohesion has been directly related to team norms, group performance and shared knowledge.<sup>31</sup> In their study, Lee and Cockman<sup>32</sup> even identify cohesion as a category of values, described as a team sport value that implies doing something for the good of others and for the sake of team performance, and the satisfaction obtained by participating in a group activity. Because of the aforementioned limited research linking cohesion and values, the present study aimed to explore their relationship.

Therefore, the objectives of this study were (a) to analyse the relationships between social, personal and individualistic values, motivational orientation and team cohesion amongst young soccer players and (b) to analyse differences in these variables according to the athletes' category of the competition. In addition, different hypotheses are proposed, specifically, that the positive values of children and adolescents can be related to task orientation and group cohesion, whereas ego orientation may be mostly associated with individualistic values. Also that values, orientations and cohesion vary with age and competition level.

## Methods

### Participants

The participant sample for this study consisted of 401 male soccer players in Spain, aged from 9 to 19, with a mean age of 14.64 years ( $SD = 2.298$ ); participants had a mean of 5.16 years ( $SD = 2.908$ ) of experience in their sport, with

an average of 3.32 days (SD = 1.004) and 5.85 h (SD = 1.519) of training per week. Players belonged to several clubs, and participated in official competitive leagues at regional and national levels. For the purpose of this study, players were grouped according to their age or category of competition, based on the official categories established by the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF): 94 soccer players (23.4%) belonged to the Under-10 (9–10 years) category, 94 (23.4%) to Under-12 (11–12 years), 88 (21.9%) to Under-14 (13–14 years), 80 (20.0%) to Under-16 (15–16 years) and 45 (11.2%) to Under-19 category (17–19 years).

## Measures

**Values Scale for Positive Adolescent Development (EVDPA).**<sup>33</sup> The EVDPA is a self-report scale that evaluates the importance boys and girls give to a series of values deemed important to their development.<sup>33</sup> The scale consists of 24 items requiring respondents' ratings of importance on a 7-point Likert type scale (1 = not important and 7 = most important). Respondents render scores corresponding to eight first-order factors that can be grouped into three main second-order factors. According to the authors,<sup>33,34</sup> the Social Values factor implies an empathic and prosocial attitude, and an interest to collaborate in activities to help other people, being integrated by the subscales Pro-sociality, Justice and Equality and Social Commitment. The Personal Values factor represents the importance given to personal security and strength to act in a manner consistent with one's own principles, and also includes subscales such as Honesty, Responsibility and Integrity. The Individualistic Values factor involves the pursuit of popularity and social recognition, hedonism and pursuit of pleasure and personal satisfaction. The subscales Hedonism and Social Recognition make up the factor. In this study, there is good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for all factors: Social Values ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ), Personal values ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ), Individualistic Values ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ), Pro-sociality ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ), Justice and Equality ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ), Social Commitment ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ), Honesty ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ), Responsibility ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ), Integrity ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), Hedonism ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) and Social Recognition ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ).

**Perception of Success Questionnaire (POSQ).**<sup>35</sup> To measure goal orientations, we used the Spanish version<sup>36</sup> of the POSQ. It consists of 12 items, 6 of which correspond to the Task Orientation factor ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) and 6 to the Ego Orientation factor ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ). Respondents rate items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree, 5 = totally agree).

**Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ).**<sup>29</sup> For the evaluation of group cohesion, we used the Spanish adaptation<sup>37</sup> of GEQ. It consists of 18 items on a 5-point Likert response scale (1 = totally disagree and 5 = totally agree). Nine of the items correspond to the Task Cohesion Factor ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ), or

the degree of cohesion between team members in undertaking team activities, and the remaining nine items correspond to the Social Cohesion factor ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ), or the level of friendship and shared similarities within the group.

## Procedures

First, approval was received from the institution's ethics committee (UCAM) to conduct the study. Then, we contacted the managers of the soccer clubs to explain the study's objectives request permission to collect data. Player participation was voluntary, and following our presentation of the study to both parents and participants (emphasizing the confidentiality of the data collected), parents of all younger participants (under the age of 18 years) and all older participants each gave their written consent. Before starting, information was provided on the objectives of the study, instructions and guidelines for completing the questionnaires. Participants responded to questionnaires anonymously and collectively in their usual training facilities, minutes before starting team training sessions. The researchers were present during the questionnaire administrations to supervise the correct completion of the data and answer any questions that arose. For underage athletes, authorization was requested from their parents and they signed informed consent forms.

## Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using the statistical program SPSS v.22.0 (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA). We calculated Pearson's correlation coefficients to observe patterns of common variation amongst the variables. We conducted regression analysis, specifically the method of successive steps (stepwise), to determine the contribution of the independent variables (values) in the explanation of the dependent variables (motivational orientation and cohesion). In each analysis, the eight first-order factors (e.g. Pro-sociality, Social Commitment, Justice and Equality, Responsibility, Integrity, Honesty, Hedonism and Social Recognition) were introduced. We conducted one-way ANOVA and Bonferroni *post hoc* analysis to test the differences between scores. To know the size or the magnitude of the group differences, we calculated the size of the effect, squared ETA ( $\eta^2$ ). We set the level of statistical significance for these statistics at  $p < 0.05$ .

## Results

### Correlation analysis

We performed a correlation analysis to check the relationships between the scales and subscales of values, goal orientations and team cohesion (Table 1). In terms of the size of the associations, the most significant correlations were between

**Table 1.** Correlations analysis.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	1														
2	0.65**	1													
3	0.42**	0.37**	1												
4	0.85**	0.59**	0.35	1											
5	0.85**	0.52**	0.44	0.57**	1										
6	0.82**	0.52**	0.26**	0.56**	0.540**	1									
7	0.47**	0.81**	0.25**	0.45**	0.388**	0.362**	1								
8	0.51**	0.80**	0.40**	0.45**	0.463**	0.374**	0.424**	1							
9	0.58**	0.81**	0.24**	0.53**	0.412**	0.532**	0.512**	0.481**	1						
10	0.46**	0.43**	0.76**	0.41**	0.432**	0.322**	0.265**	0.444**	0.343**	1					
11	0.29**	0.25**	0.91**	0.23**	0.336**	0.165**	0.184**	0.282**	0.121*	0.430**	1				
12	0.27**	0.41**	0.24**	0.25**	0.211**	0.226**	0.342**	0.331**	0.316**	0.201**	0.208**	1			
13	0.23**	0.16**	0.54**	0.20**	0.262**	0.111*	0.078	0.260**	0.023	0.328**	0.540**	0.269**	1		
14	0.13**	0.23**	-0.03	0.10*	0.120*	0.109*	0.258**	0.052	0.261**	0.019	-0.057	0.333**	-0.186**	1	
15	0.09	0.25**	-0.01	0.12*	0.043	0.058	0.243**	0.117*	0.261**	0.051	-0.049	0.303**	-0.144**	0.571**	1

Note: \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01.

1 = Social Values; 2 = Personal Values; 3 = Individualistic Values; 4 = Pro-sociality; 5 = Social Commitment; 6 = Justice and Equality; 7 = Responsibility; 8 = Integrity; 9 = Honesty; 10 = Hedonism; 11 = Social Recognition; 12 = Task Orientation; 13 = Ego Orientation; 14 = Task Cohesion; 15 = Social Cohesion.

Personal Values and Task Orientation ( $r=0.419$ ), between Individualistic Values and Ego Orientation ( $r=0.537$ ) and between Ego Orientation Social Recognition ( $r=0.540$ ). The size of the associations is large amongst the subscales with the factor to which they belong. In addition, Social Values showed statistically significant correlations ( $p<0.01$ ) with both Task ( $r=0.271$ ) and Ego Orientation ( $r=0.239$ ). There were also significant correlations ( $p<0.01$ ) between Personal Values and Ego Orientation ( $r=0.168$ ), Task Cohesion ( $r=0.237$ ) and Social Cohesion ( $r=0.257$ ). Individualistic Values were also significantly correlated ( $p<0.01$ ) with both motivational orientations, Task Orientation ( $r=0.240$ ). From the other subscale values, the most important correlations were between Task Orientation with Responsibility ( $r=0.342$ ), Integrity ( $r=0.331$ ) and Honesty ( $r=0.316$ ) and between Ego Orientation with Hedonism ( $r=0.328$ ). The main correlations of Cohesion were between Task Cohesion with Responsibility ( $r=0.258$ ) and Honesty ( $r=0.261$ ) and between Social Cohesion also with Responsibility ( $r=0.247$ ) and Honesty ( $r=0.261$ ).

### Regression analysis

According to results of regression analysis (Table 2), Responsibility accounting for 12% of variance in predicting Task Orientation ( $R^2=0.12$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.12$ ;  $F(1, 399)=52.706$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In the second model, Integrity ( $\beta=0.227$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) entered accounting for additional 4% of variance, and in model 3, Social Recognition ( $\beta=0.108$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) contributes for an additional 2% of variance. In the last model, Integrity, Social Recognition and Honesty contributes for an additional 7% of variance ( $R^2=0.19$ ,  $\Delta R^2=0.07$ ). Regarding Ego Orientation as a dependent variable, Social Recognition accounting for 29% of variance ( $R^2=0.29$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.29$ ;  $F(1, 399)=164.530$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In model 2 entered Social Recognition ( $\beta=0.507$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and Honesty ( $\beta=-0.116$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In model 3, Social Recognition ( $\beta=0.506$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), Honesty ( $\beta=-0.141$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and Hedonism ( $\beta=0.110$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) entered accounting for additional 6% of variance ( $R^2=0.32$ ,  $\Delta R^2=0.03$ ).

Honesty accounting 7% of variance in predicting Task Cohesion ( $R^2=0.07$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.07$ ;  $F(1, 399)=29.111$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Together Honesty ( $\beta=0.174$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with Responsibility ( $\beta=0.168$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), they explain 10% of variance ( $R^2=0.10$ ,  $\Delta R^2=0.03$ ). The main predictor of Social Cohesion is Honesty ( $R^2=0.07$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.069$ ;  $F(1, 399)=29.073$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In model 2 entered Honesty ( $\beta=0.185$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and Responsibility ( $\beta=0.148$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In the last model, Honesty ( $\beta=0.247$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), Responsibility ( $\beta=0.165$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and Justice and Equality ( $\beta=-0.133$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) entered accounting for additional 3% of variance ( $R^2=0.11$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.10$ ).

### Analysis of variance for age groups

Table 3 shows the means of the sum of scores and standard deviations of all the scales and subscales studied in the five age categories of soccer athletes. As shown, the youngest players (U-10 and U-12 categories) recorded the highest means on the majority of scales and subscales, relative to other age groups.

Through analysis of variance, there were statistically significant differences between the values of Pro-sociality, Social Commitment, Justice and Equality, Honesty, Hedonism, Social Values, Individualistic Values and to Ego Orientation, Task Cohesion and Social Cohesion. For these scales, there was a moderate effect size for Pro-sociality ( $\eta^2=0.061$ ), Social Values ( $\eta^2=0.052$ ), Task Cohesion ( $\eta^2=0.059$ ) and Social Cohesion ( $\eta^2=0.079$ ), while the rest showed a small effect size. In these scales, the *post hoc* comparisons showed significant differences between the following variables: Pro-sociality, amongst athletes of the U-10 category and those of U-14 ( $I-J=1.625$ ;  $p=0.002$ ), U-16 ( $I-J=1.597$ ;  $p=0.005$ ) and U-19 ( $I-J=2.266$ ;  $p=0.001$ ); in Social Values factor, amongst athletes of the U-10 category and those of and U-14 ( $I-J=3.647$ ;  $p=0.018$ ), U-16 ( $I-J=3.918$ ;  $p=0.013$ ) and U-19 ( $I-J=5.281$ ;  $p=0.006$ ); Task Cohesion between U-10 and U-16 ( $I-J=2.172$ ;  $p=0.036$ ) and U-19 ( $I-J=1.952$ ;  $p=0.049$ ), besides between U-12 and U-16 ( $I-J=3.501$ ;  $p=0.001$ ) and U-19 ( $I-J=3.105$ ;  $p=0.003$ ); Social Cohesion between U-10 and U-12 ( $I-J=-2394$ ;  $p=0.005$ ), between U-12 and U-16 ( $I-J=3.407$ ;  $p=0.001$ ) and U-19 ( $I-J=3.391$ ;  $p=0.002$ ) and amongst U-14 with U-16 ( $I-J=2.632$ ;  $p=0.004$ ) and U-19 ( $I-J=2.615$ ;  $p=0.044$ ).

### Discussion

Taking into account the importance of sport on the moral development of the young athlete, the aim of this study was to analyse the relationships between social, personal and individualistic values, motivational orientation and team cohesion in young soccer players, and compare the differences in these many variables amongst young athletes competing in different age categories. Regarding the relationships between values, motivational orientation and cohesion, our results indicated that task (vs. ego) orientation is mainly related to personal values (responsibility, integrity and honesty), while ego orientation is related to individualistic values (social recognition and hedonism). It was also found that cohesion, both task and social, is less related to values, with personal values being the most important.

Responsibility and integrity were the main predictors of task orientation. Different reviews<sup>18,36</sup> have confirmed that task orientation (vs. ego orientation) is related to better moral functioning, sportsmanship and moral identification with the belief that the purpose of sport is the development

**Table 2.** Regression analysis.

Predictors	F change	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
<b>DV: Task Orientation</b>						
Model 1	52.706***					
Constant		20.539	0.961		21.374	0.000
Responsibility		0.384	0.053	0.342	7.260	0.000
Model 2	19.941***					
Constant		18.239	1.071		17.033	0.000
Responsibility		0.276	0.057	0.245	4.835	0.000
Integrity		0.252	0.056	0.227	4.466	0.000
Model 3	5.097*					
Constant		18.003	1.070		16.818	0.000
Responsibility		0.267	0.057	0.237	4.681	0.000
Integrity		0.222	0.058	0.200	3.850	0.000
Social Recognition		0.068	0.030	0.108	2.258	0.025
Model 4	5.361*					
Constant		16.630	1.219		13.646	0.000
Responsibility		0.211	0.062	0.188	3.427	0.001
Integrity		0.174	0.061	0.156	2.850	0.005
Social Recognition		0.072	0.030	0.113	2.384	0.018
Honesty		0.169	0.073	0.131	2.315	0.021
<b>DV: Ego Orientation</b>						
Model 1	164.530***					
Constant		12.299	0.757		16.241	0.000
Social Recognition		0.681	0.053	0.540	12.827	0.000
Model 2	7.137**					
Constant		8.522	1.601		5.322	0.000
Social Recognition		0.640	0.055	0.507	11.645	0.000
Honesty		-0.258	.096	-0.116	2.671	0.008
Model 3	6.650**					
Constant		12.183	2.131		5.716	0.000
Social Recognition		0.638	0.055	0.506	11.680	0.000
Honesty		-0.363	0.123	-0.141	-2.946	0.003
Hedonism		0.224	0.103	0.110	2.184	0.030
<b>DV: Task Cohesion</b>						
Model 1	29.111***					
Constant		24.510	1.867		13.127	0.000
Honesty		0.538	0.100	0.261	5.395	0.000
Model 2	9.139**					
Constant		22.401	1.976		11.339	0.000
Honesty		0.360	0.115	0.174	3.132	0.002
Responsibility		0.302	0.100	0.168	3.023	0.003
<b>DV: Social Cohesion</b>						
Model 1	29.073***					
Constant		25.304	1.753		14.439	0.000
Honesty		0.504	0.094	0.261	5.392	0.000
Model 2	7.060**					
Constant		23.560	1.859		12.673	0.000
Honesty		0.357	0.108	0.185	3.305	0.001
Responsibility		0.250	0.094	0.148	2.657	0.008
Model 3	5.518*					
Constant		24.567	1.898		12.945	0.000
Honesty		0.479	0.119	0.247	4.013	0.000
Responsibility		0.277	0.094	0.165	2.940	0.003
Justice and Equality		-0.214	0.091	-0.133	-2.349	0.019

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

DV: dependent variable.

**Table 3.** Means differences between categories.

	Under-10 (n = 94)	Under-12 (n = 94)	Under-14 (n = 88)	Under-16 (n = 80)	Under-19 (n = 45)	F
Pro-sociality	18.16 ± 2.371	17.07 ± 3.418	16.53 ± 3.262	16.56 ± 3.393	15.53 ± 3.800	6.223**
Social Commitment	16.72 ± 3.468	16.07 ± 3.351	15.26 ± 3.719	15.19 ± 3.937	14.96 ± 3.483	3.355**
Justice and Equality	17.80 ± 2.730	18.23 ± 2.838	17.24 ± 3.353	17.01 ± 3.067	16.91 ± 3.417	2.678*
Responsibility	17.90 ± 3.206	18.02 ± 2.969	17.89 ± 2.938	18.00 ± 2.747	17.60 ± 2.597	0.179
Integrity	16.90 ± 3.176	16.72 ± 2.698	16.61 ± 3.007	16.88 ± 2.896	16.91 ± 3.132	0.159
Honesty	19.07 ± 2.131	18.81 ± 2.301	18.45 ± 2.746	18.21 ± 2.967	17.82 ± 2.434	2.579*
Hedonism	16.69 ± 2.670	17.55 ± 2.946	17.86 ± 2.827	17.04 ± 3.767	16.52 ± 3.390	2.661*
Social Recognition	14.19 ± 5.565	13.70 ± 5.240	12.10 ± 5.008	12.98 ± 4.829	13.31 ± 5.008	2.103
Social Values	52.68 ± 6.262	51.38 ± 7.988	49.03 ± 9.114	48.76 ± 9.113	47.40 ± 8.998	4.955**
Personal Values	53.88 ± 6.785	53.55 ± 6.104	52.95 ± 7.409	53.09 ± 7.267	52.33 ± 6.068	0.507
Individualistic Values	28.63 ± 7.083	31.26 ± 6.894	32.05 ± 7.589	30.01 ± 7.342	30.00 ± 5.973	3.073*
Task Orientation	27.48 ± 3.252	27.78 ± 2.995	27.20 ± 3.159	27.66 ± 3.257	26.58 ± 4.159	1.224
Ego Orientation	20.10 ± 6.572	20.98 ± 6.666	22.87 ± 6.685	20.79 ± 6.562	21.36 ± 5.373	2.597*
Task Cohesion	34.73 ± 5.352	36.06 ± 4.877	34.59 ± 5.091	32.56 ± 4.595	32.93 ± 6.166	5.204**
Social Cohesion	34.06 ± 4.914	36.46 ± 4.476	35.68 ± 5.260	33.05 ± 4.179	33.07 ± 4.915	8.295**

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

of mastery and that the common effort of all team members leads to success. Task orientation is also related to prosocial attitudes and behaviours,<sup>20,39–41</sup> cooperation between teammates,<sup>42</sup> and they are associated with responsibility,<sup>43,44</sup> as the results found in the present study.

By contrast, individualistic values have been significantly related to ego orientation. Its main predictor is social recognition, or importance given to being socially recognized and admired, and also hedonism (transcendence given to the achievement of one's own pleasure above other goals) and honesty (appraisal of sincerity and the communication of truth) in a negative way. In various studies,<sup>38</sup> this type of orientation has been related to aggression, unsportsmanlike or antisocial behaviour in sports, beliefs that deception can lead to success and that the goal of sport is to gain social status. These antisocial attitudes associate negatively with sportsmanship, moral functioning and high-level moral reasoning.<sup>21</sup> Ego orientation and performance climate are positive predictors of antisocial behaviour in footballers aged 12–17 and youth team sport players.<sup>45</sup> Also, as in this study, ego orientation has been linked to the value of hedonism and a lack of interest in improving the general well-being of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact.<sup>21</sup> However, we must consider Shields and Bredemeier<sup>46</sup> who suggested that in the field of sport, moral exchanges occur very differently from those occurring in other aspects of daily life where responsibilities are different. Reasoning within a game may lead participants to adopt greater egocentrism and greater emphasis on victory.

In regards to cohesion, athletes with higher scores on personal values showed greater cohesion, being honesty and responsibility the main predictors of both types, task and social cohesion. Cohesion is considered to be a

determinant construct in the dynamics of sports teams, given its generalized effect on fundamental interpersonal variables in group processes, such as collective efficacy,<sup>47</sup> and personal variables such as effort and motivation.<sup>48</sup> Cohesion may also be determined in part by cooperation.<sup>49</sup> Cohesion is of great importance in the field of values, since it is related to the athlete's social behaviour towards teammates, in the forms of either collaboration or rivalry. High cohesion towards the task has been positively related to emotional regulation and diminishing social exclusion towards teammates.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, cohesion is related to higher levels of self-determination and the orientation and the climate required by the task,<sup>51</sup> and attraction to the group and greater integration to the task.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the role of team dynamics and peer influence are important, as it has been shown that team members have a stronger influence on moral behaviour compared to coaches or a broad moral club climate,<sup>9</sup> and prosocial teammate behaviour positively predicted both task and social cohesion.<sup>30,53</sup>

Personal values involve a high level of personal security and strength to act in a coherent way and follow the same principles.<sup>33</sup> The results of this study emphasize that the athletes with higher levels in these values (with greater responsibility, integrity and honesty, and who follow their own convictions and moral principles), perceive greater cohesion. Therefore integrate better with the group, are more cooperative with their peers to achieve the goals of the team and, at the same time, pursue fellowship with their peers.<sup>33,34</sup>

Considering the age of the young players, we found that the youngest groups of soccer players (i.e. those Under-10 and Under-12) had more positive values than did soccer players of older age categories. These two youngest player groups scored higher than older age groups on

questionnaire scales measuring pro-sociality, social commitment and social values. In addition, these youngest groups had lower scores on scales measuring individualistic values than did the older groups. These results indicate that the younger athletes presented a more empathetic attitude and a greater inclination to collaborate with and help others, and to be fairer and more egalitarian than the older athletes; younger players also showed less interest in popularity and social recognition, and less interest in the pursuit of pleasure and personal satisfaction than older athletes in this study.<sup>33,34</sup> In addition, U-10 athletes also showed lower scores on ego orientation, and together with the U-12 and U-14 athletes, they showed greater team cohesion.

These findings are consistent with previous studies noting that,<sup>54</sup> as athletes advance in age, they tend to legitimize certain unsportsmanlike attitudes and behaviours, if they perceive that they can achieve victory and demonstrate superiority against their rivals by doing so. In higher levels of competition, the same patterns towards more unsportsmanlike attitudes and towards higher levels of ego orientation have also been observed.<sup>54</sup>

### *Practical application, limitations and conclusions*

Based on all these data, we must emphasize the inescapable need to give values the transcendence they deserve within the sporting context, especially at the ages in which practitioners are in their learning process both in sports and at a personal level. Particularly in soccer, there is a growing concern about an increase in antisocial behaviour, and as shown by the present results, an increase in ego orientation and individualistic attitudes as athletes mature.

The role of the coach is fundamental in the promotion and maintenance of a learning environment.<sup>55</sup> Coaches and physical education teachers have a public responsibility. Their work consists of transmitting knowledge, but also a way of life that constitutes the basis for the children they are educating to learn to function properly in society, as well as to contribute to its improvement.<sup>3</sup> Current findings suggest that clubs and sports institutions have work to do if they are to ensure the promotion of positive value systems that promote task orientation, team cohesion and collaborative social and personal values. It is necessary to provide young people with well-designed sports and physical activity contexts and to support them through appropriate policies that help them to thrive, lead healthy and satisfying lives and meaningfully participate in their communities as adults.<sup>11</sup> Sports clubs and institutions could base their activities on a philosophy in which educational sport, adapted to the characteristics of young athletes, is predominant. For this purpose, they can implement values education programmes guided by development and sports science experts. For their part, coaches could create a learning environment to promote values, through strategies such

as establishing group identity, teaching values through competitive situations and moral dilemmas, and the development of a training environment in which a task- and mastery-oriented motivational climate prevails and promotes the self-determination of the young athlete.<sup>56</sup>

Regarding the limitations of the study, we must consider the design nature, since being a cross-sectional study it is only possible to check the levels of the variables analysed at a specific moment, but not to check their possible evolution throughout a competition season, nor its progress over time. We must also take into account the evaluation instrument of the values. The questionnaire has adequate properties and has been tested in multiple populations of children and adolescents. However, it is a general test and it is not a specific test in the sports field, and for this reason, it would be convenient to continue deepening its analysis in sports. Another limitation is the time/process of data collection, because the young players completed the questionnaires minutes before their training sessions, with limited time and possibly the next session could have influenced the athletes' focus. We must also consider the external transferability/validity of the results with respect to other contexts, as the present study analysed youth soccer. For this reason, the present study may provide opportunities for future research, that takes these limitations into account and perform studies that analyse other sports and samples and contribute to expanding the literature in this field.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the association between values, motivational orientation and group cohesion, and the current findings extend the previous literature. Personal values are mainly related to task orientation, and individualistic values to ego orientation. The values of responsibility, integrity and honesty are the best predictors of task orientation, and social recognition and hedonism predict ego orientation. Honesty and responsibility are the main predictors of both task and social cohesion. Younger players show a higher level of social values, task orientation and social cohesion, while older players show higher individualistic values and ego orientation. These findings have important practical applications for coaches, physical education teachers and sports institutions. Programmes could be implemented that promote positive values and make sport a healthy environment that contributes to the moral development of young people. In addition, effective interventions are needed that promote task- and mastery-oriented motivational climates in training and promote cohesion.

### **Acknowledgements**


We are grateful for the dedication of Dr Felix Guillén throughout the process. This manuscript is a tribute to his memory.

### **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.



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