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New England High School Coaches' Perceptions of the Role of Team Culture on Performance and Well-Being

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New England high school coaches' perceptions of the role of team culture on performance and well-being

A Dissertation

submitted by

STEPHEN BROWN

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as submitted for final approval by Stephen Brown under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Counseling and Psychology Division and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Degree at Lesley University.

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Abstract

High school sports are the most popular extracurricular activity in the United States. Coaches serve as gatekeepers to team culture and influence student athletes' experiences in those sports. Team cultures influence performance and well-being outcomes. Those outcomes are not inherently beneficial and have caused harm to some student-athletes. Guided by a constructivist approach paired with grounded theory analysis, this study investigates how high school coaches in New England perceive the role of team culture in promoting student-athlete well-being and performance. Thirteen head varsity athletic coaches from New England schools took part in interviews via Zoom to share their thoughts on building team culture, supporting their student-athletes, and improving their coaching practice. Findings pointed to a need for coaches to understand themselves, develop an understanding of the relationship between well-being and performance, and recognize how to build healthy team environments. A sense of themselves includes reflection on their sport origin story, understanding how the impact of their family contributed to them becoming a coach, and having a clear sense of their coaching philosophy. Well-being is supported by cultivating conditions of psychological safety: managing conflict, encouraging speaking up, and building trust, buy-in, and relationships with student-athletes. Healthy team cultures emerge from healthy leadership structures, multidirectional communication, clear expectations, and trusting relationships. Coaches would benefit from professional development and dialogue on self-awareness, relationship building, culture building, and social justice issues.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Problem

In March 2022, the Aspen Institute published a playbook titled Reimagining School Sports, intended to help guide school leaders in expanding and improving students' athletic experiences. That document identified coaches as a crucial factor in the student-athlete experience and emphasized the importance of coaches being able to support and care for athletes. Coaches are among the most important adults in the lives of students because of the time they spend with student-athletes and their ability "to shape students' ideas about health, education, ethics, personal responsibility, and initiative to succeed in society" (Aspen, 2022, p. 22).

According to Arne Duncan, the former U.S. Secretary of Education, sport is the best venue for schools to build social and emotional skills (Aspen, 2022). Coaches shape the sporting environment in which their athletes take part, allowing them to serve as primary agents for supporting and motivating athletes to enhance their sports performance and individual well-being (Bissette et al., 2020; Jowett, 2017; Sauvé et al., 2021). Within those sporting environments, it is essential to understand the relationships that influence student-athletes. Davis et al. (2021) suggest that athletes can succeed when their coach engages in coaching behaviors that create an environment where an athlete feels their needs are being satisfied.

Vella (2013) found that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and coach transformational leadership behaviors were the best predictors of young athletes' growth through positive developmental experiences. Those positive developmental experiences include personal and social skills, cognitive skills, goal setting, and initiative (Vella,

2013). Coach-athlete relationships rely on closeness, commitment, and complementarity, while transformational leadership behaviors include individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and role modeling (Vella, 2013).

Davis and Jowett (2010) argue that coaches can take on a more robust and wiser role by providing support, advice, guidance, and comfort and encouraging exploration and risk-taking behaviors. To do this effectively, coaches must help fulfill essential relational attachment functions, including closeness, safety, and security. Athletes thrive with a coach-athlete relationship marked by familiarity, trust, and support. Athletes who described their relationship with their coach as promoting uncertainty and fear of rejection did not thrive (Davis et al., 2021). Attending to athletes' well-being is a legal and ethical obligation associated with social responsibility and a duty of care to safeguard against the risk of harm (Campbell, 2022). Those working in sport should understand why well-being is valuable and how to cultivate it (Campbell, 2022). Coaches would benefit from professional development, administrative support and oversight, and feedback to promote these cultures of belonging.

The concept of psychological safety presents a viewpoint that considers performance and well-being. Vella et al. (2022) defined psychological safety in sport as the perception that one is protected from or unlikely to be at risk of psychological harm. Psychologically safe environments are free of negative behaviors, including toxic relationships, degrading treatment, emotional abuse, and malevolence (Blynova et al., 2020; Kaye et al., 2015; Vella et al., 2022). Frazier et al. (2017) found that leaders, including coaches, play a clear role in supporting team members' psychological safety, finding a correlation between positive relationships and feelings of psychological safety.

In professional settings, leader inclusiveness, support, trustworthiness, openness, and behavioral integrity strongly influence employee perceptions of psychological safety and drive speaking up, creativity, performance, and engagement (Newman et al., 2017). Psychological safety becomes essential when considering the power differential between coach and player.

In sport, a coach's hierarchical status derives from dependence and exchange between player and coach, with coaches acting as the power wielder and athletes as the influence target. The interaction occurs when athletes give power through compliant behavior to coaches for attention, playing time, or positive regard (Rylander, 2015). Leadership styles, including transformational, ethical, and shared leadership, are strongly related to speaking up and learning. Authoritarian leadership hindered psychological safety; individuals felt decisions were enforced rather than discussed (Remtulla et al., 2021). Authoritarian leadership creates a power differential magnified for high school athletes because of authority level, age, gender, knowledge, and racial gaps.

A recent national coaches survey of high school and youth coaches found that professional development in motivational techniques, mental toughness, performance anxiety, team dynamics, mental health, effective communication, leadership development, and suicide protocols all ranked in the top ten most desired training for coaches in New England (Butcher & Bates, 2023). Absent knowledge and confidence in these areas, coaches may look outward to societal norms (or inward to personal experiences (Hassanin & Light, 2013; Holmes et al., 2020). The playbook (2022) described how all states require mandatory concussion training for coaches, but only 12% require training in human development, developmental psychology, and organizational

management (Aspen, 2022). This research focuses on the perspectives of high school coaches, highlighting how they forge solid relationships and build caring cultures to promote well-being and performance.

Researcher Reflexivity

My interest in this topic derives from my experience as an athlete, coach, counselor, and parent. I have seen the positive impact of sports on supporting the growth and development of children and adolescents. However, I also recognize how variable that impact can be. Sport cultures glorify traditional ways of being and doing, even to the detriment of the whole person. Schools, coaches, and student-athletes must acknowledge the need to build inclusive environments that support well-being and performance so that all who participate can realize the benefits of sport.

Through my work with athletes in my private practice and as a wellness director at a grade 6-12 preparatory school, I have also seen a growing need to shift the focus from acute individual sport psychology interventions to more global systematic supports. Over the past decade, the athletes I work with have gotten younger, and their concerns have become more universal. Learning and sharing more about how coaches think and feel about well-being can positively impact the coaches and their athletes.

Olympian Roald Bradstock (2017) once wrote that sport and art represent the two universal languages of humanity. According to Bradstock, participating in sports allows individuals to express themselves physically, emotionally, and intellectually, leading to better connections and communication. In his memoir, "My Losing Season," author Pat Conroy (2002) shared that athletics provided the only outlet for a repressed and shy boy to express himself publicly. For many young athletes, sports are not just an

extracurricular activity but an integral part of their being. Their relationships, goals, failures, and successes find their rhythm through the games they play.

Conroy (2002) wrote that there was a time in his life when he saw himself and was seen by others as an athlete. This belief defined him and formed "the part he most respected" (Conroy, 2002, p.1). Their efforts, relationships, goals, failures, and successes find their rhythm through the games they play. Conroy (2002, p.1) wrote, "There was a time in his life when he walked through the world known to himself and others as an athlete." This belief, he wrote, formed the definition of who he was and "the part he most respected" (Conroy, 2002, p.1).

Conroy's description of being an athlete occupies the second paragraph of his memoir. This paragraph encapsulates better than I could write what sport meant to me and highlights why I have stayed connected with sports. Sport offers athletes physical exercise, camaraderie, voice, and purpose, but they also help introduce them to language and context for experiencing difficult emotions like fear, loss, and pain. It allows young athletes to share locker rooms and other spaces with those from different backgrounds and identities and creates authentic communities centered on pursuing a common goal (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001).

However, when so much is at stake, the individual or the environment sometimes needs help to meet the demands or find support. Coaches can help bridge this gap and help athletes reap the benefits of participation. The word coach in sport emerged as slang from the word coach, meaning wagon. It was used to describe someone who "carries" someone through a process, like a teacher supporting a student through exams. Sport can offer so much to student-athletes, but the experience on their journey depends on more

than the road they take; it also relies on the wagon or the person most responsible for helping to carry them. The word carry means to support and move from one place to another. I heard from many coaches during this research about how they worked to move their student-athletes forward.

Research Purpose

Looking at student-athlete performance and well-being through the lens of the environment and relationships and not solely through an individual lens supports the greater need for a holistic approach to supporting the whole athlete. Holistic approaches help athletes develop in sport and personal lives (Larsen et al., 2013; Martindale & Mortimer, 2010). This approach means a coach sees the student-athlete for who they are as a person and not a replaceable commodity. It means they recognize their individual stories, strengths, and needs. However, much of the standard practices around sport training still focus on giving individual athletes the tools to succeed by broadening the range and context of the technical skills required. Unfortunately, standard practices of adding supportive interventions or further skill-building can also increase demands and expectations, which creates additional stress. Human performance does not develop in a vacuum, so the environment becomes essential. (Davids et al., 2017; Feddersen et al., 2021).

Neil et al. (2018) suggested that it would be beneficial for researchers to learn how support structures in team environments contribute to athlete well-being. Researchers should pursue ambitious qualitative approaches to offer more detailed and holistic accounts of the workings of a sport organization to impact well-being (Neil et al., 2018). Araujo and Davids (2009) suggested that sport performance researchers use eco-

behavioral science approaches to study the dynamics of behavioral settings in sport because sport is an inherently sociocultural phenomenon.

In 2021, the International Olympic Committee published a toolkit for elite athletes' mental health. It highlighted a quote from Abhinav Bindra, a former Olympic champion and an IOC Athlete's Commission member, who stated:

> Human well-being must be at the heart of elite athletic performance. Athletes should feel empowered and nurtured both physically and mentally… mental health and physical health are two halves of a whole, and care for both must be seen as a priority. (Erdener et al., 2021, p.2)

Performance outcomes and well-being have been mutually exclusive, with priority given to outcomes in most sporting contexts. A shift is taking place that has created the opportunity for a concept like psychological safety and mattering to bridge the gap. The proposed research will investigate how coaches move closer to and away from creating cultures of well-being.

Most coaches perform this work admirably, but some fail, and multiple local stories have highlighted this over the past couple of years. In November 2021, the Boston Globe published a story on the Danvers (M.A.) High School Boys Hockey team. The investigative report shined a light on how members of the all-white team hosted "Gay Tuesday" and "Hard-R Friday" (Manza-Young, 2021). "Gay Tuesday" allegedly called for players to strip naked in the locker room, and with the lights out, some team members would touch others inappropriately. If a player did not want to take his clothes off, teammates would hold him down and forcibly strip him (Manza-Young, 2021). On "Hard-R Fridays," the tradition was to allegedly shout the n-word on command, with the

hard-r sound at the end. If a player refused, he was held down and smacked in the face with a sex toy until he had a welt on his cheek (Manza-Young, 2021).

Before the Globe report, Danvers officials had previously revealed allegations of hazing and other inappropriate behavior, and police and an outside investigator investigated the incidents (Leighton, 2021). However, officials refused to release the reports and never disclosed the details of the alleged abuse. A reporter described a school committee meeting following the Globe article as emotional and explosive (Leighton, 2021). In Massachusetts, King Phillip, Haverhill, and Woburn provide other examples of how sporting environments can become toxic and abusive. Hazing incidents have recently emerged in Maine and Connecticut (Craig, 2021; Stockford et al., 2021). In Rhode Island, an East Greenwich assistant volleyball coach was fired for sexually harassing players. The school fired the head coach for not being receptive to concerns. In 2023, a girls' basketball coach in East Hampton, Connecticut, was suspended for pushing one of his players during a game (Robbins, 2023). If supporting student-athlete well-being exists on a spectrum, these examples would be abusive. The coaches in this research described strategies to help coaches move their programs in a healthy or constructive direction.

When programs are healthy, student-athletes receive many benefits, including lower risks of substance use/abuse and loneliness, higher college attendance rates, self-esteem, and physical health (U.S. Dept. Of Education, 2005; Zarrett & Veliz, 2021). It can also produce improved health outcomes, group cohesion, and work production later in life (Brinkley et al., 2016). Brunet et al. (2013) found that team sport participation showed more influence on lowering depression than moderate to vigorous exercise plans

for adolescents. Eime et al. (2013) found that sport participants had better mental health and overall well-being than non-sport participants. Students who consistently participated in school sports in high school reported lower depressive symptoms, lower perceived stress, and better mental health than those who never participated. Team sport also creates opportunities to practice mastery and social belonging, which have psychosocial benefits (Eime et al., 2013; Fredricks et al., 2002; Harrison et al., 2003).

Well-being and performance are not mutually exclusive. Well-being is not a privilege but necessary for optimal performance and human functioning. Creating environments where athletes feel safe and supported is essential for personal growth and team success. The challenge is to change the dominant cultural narratives that endorse hierarchical masculine norms to reflect more psychologically safe and democratic spaces. This challenge becomes relevant at the high school level due to the number of participants and their developmental age.

Research Question

Blynova et al. (2020) stated that forming social and psychologically safe learning environments in sport is vital due to humans' pressing need for social connection, attachment, and support. Learning how coaches think about the settings they co-create with student-athletes helps others understand how teams can support well-being and performance. The research question guiding this paper is: What are high school coaches in New England's perceptions of how team environments support student-athlete well-being and performance?

I chose to focus on coaches from New England because the United States has diverse regional and cultural affiliations. There have also been issues with supporting

well-being at this level in New England. The hope is that the understandings that emerge

can help these coaches.

Theoretical Framework

This review is guided by three theories - the Holistic Ecological Approach (HEA),

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). I selected

these theories to explore student-athlete well-being through holistic, relational, and

democratic perspectives. The HEA model's nesting structure highlights the different

levels of relationships that each student-athlete experiences, starting from the self and

moving outward to culture. Relationships with teammates, coaches, parents, and those

formed in the broader communities to which the student-athlete belongs exist in between.

RCT is a reference in this review because it emphasizes how people grow through

relationships, while SDT describes motivation and the importance of leveraging inner

resources for behavior and motivation. Relationships with teammates, coaches, parents,

and those formed in the broader communities to which the student-athlete belongs.

Summary of Research Design

Constructivist epistemological assumptions influenced this study. Constructivists

believe that when we socially construct knowledge, a person must actively engage in

meaning-making. The role of an educator or coach is not to dispense knowledge but

rather "provide opportunities and incentives to build it up" (Ultanir, 2012, p. 197). Those

assumptions led to choosing a methodological approach that leveraged qualitative

methods to gather narratives, capture stories, and explore perceptions that may not

otherwise surface. Coaches carry their assumptions and biases to the teams they coach.

Using a constructivist approach will help me interpret the information shaped by

individual coaches' personal experiences and backgrounds while understanding that

meaning generation is always social and derives from interaction with a human

community (Crotty, 1998). Specifically, I took a constructivist grounded theory approach

to explore the research findings.

This iterative process utilized simultaneous data collection, coding, and analysis. I

recruited high school coaches using snowball sampling and email recruitment. Two

different sampling methods informed participant recruitment: purposeful and theoretical.

Purposeful sampling selects participants based on the researchers' judgment about the

most informative potential participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Theoretical sampling

refined the categories after initial interviews and theoretical coding (Flick, 2018). I

selected the first two to three participants using purposeful sampling, following a semi-

structured interview protocol (Appendix A).

Grounded theory is not linear, so data collection and analysis are not separate

activities (Weed, 2009). Charmaz (2014) stated that our data collection methods flow

from the research question and where we go with it. Data analysis consisted of three

steps: initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. Initial coding produced

simple and active codes about what was happening in the data (Thornburg & Charmaz,

2014). In the focused coding process, codes were assessed "for their relevance and

became the conceptual categories in the continuing process of analysis" (Flick, 2018, p.

71). Theoretical coding specified possible relationships between focused coding

categories (Charmaz, 2014).

After the initial coding, the comparison continued with data, codes, concepts, and

literature to ensure that the developing ideas were grounded. This process continued until

further iteration was no longer needed (Weed, 2009). Memo-writing, a self-awareness

practice, took place to encourage reflection and grounded decision-making (Levitt,

2021).

Integration of Multicultural, Diversity, and Social Justice Perspectives

This work was influenced by multicultural, diversity, and social justice concepts.

To do this effectively, I chose theoretical lenses that guide this paper, which all support

the investigation of how people understand themselves and others in their roles.

An essential part of psychological safety is valuing diversity, equity, and

inclusion. When people can be their whole selves in their environment, they can exhibit

their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, background, family status, and any other

part of their identity without judgment (Psychological Safety and DEI, 2023). Tying

psychological safety to diversity and inclusion efforts allows student-athletes to feel safe

being themselves since their diversity is welcomed (Psychological Safety and DEI,

2023).

Hartling (2003) shared that working from an RCT perspective helps demonstrate

alignment of relational, multicultural, and social justice understandings by recognizing

disconnections on interpersonal and sociopolitical levels. Awareness of oppressive

structures allows people to utilize opportunities to use growth-fostering relationships to

promote resilience. Jordan (2002) advocated building diverse ally networks that could

resist oppression, challenge stereotypes, and negate controlling images in different

community environments. The sport team environment is one of these environments.

Self-Determination Theory focuses on social-contextual factors that can help or hurt one's

ability to satisfy basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness

(Ryan & Deci, 2017). To meet their needs, people require nurturing conditions, including supportive teaching, inclusive structures, and positive learning environments (Ismailov & Chiu, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Accomplishing this requires understanding the influence of various levels within ecological models, such as those promoted in Hendricksen's Holistic Ecological Approach. It is essential to recognize that the playing field is only sometimes level. Ryom et al. (2020) used HEA to explore the team culture of a Belgian soccer team. They found the cultural sensitivity of their coaches, who recognized the strength of a blended French and Flemish culture, best supported the team. Ryom et al. (2020) noted that the advantage of this approach was that the club developed a wider variety of players and that those players brought distinctive character and contributions to the team.

Definition of Key Terms

This section clarifies how I define mental health, well-being, and other commonly referred to terms in my writing.

Athletic Identity. Brewer et al. (1993) defined athletic identity as the extent to which an individual identifies with the role of an athlete.

Athletic Talent Development Environment. A system of an athlete's interactions inside and outside sport on the micro-level and how these interactions are influenced by the macro level Henriksen et al. (2010, p. 29).

Coach-Athlete Relationship. Refers to all situations in which a coach and athlete's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors are interrelated (Jowett and Cockerill, 2003).

Formal Leader. Formal athlete leaders are those players who are officially appointed in their leadership role (e.g., the team captain) (Mertens et al., 2020, p. 281).

Informal Leader. Informal athlete leaders emerge as leaders through interactions with their teammates, even though their leadership status is not formally recognized (Mertens et al., 2020, p. 282).

Mattering. Prilleltensky (2020) described mattering as feeling valued and adding value to others.

Mental Health. The World Health Organization proposed that mental health is the "state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community" (WHO, 2004, pg. 12).

Psychological Safety. The sense that individuals are free to express themselves individually in the group without fear of negative consequences in a particular context (Edmundson, 1999).

Shared Leadership. Shared leadership is the distribution of leadership functions among multiple team members (Engel Small & Rentsch, 2010).

Social Identity. The identity manifested from a person's identification with a group or social category, such as a sport team (Edison et al., 2021).

Well-being. A positive and sustainable state that allows individuals, groups, and nations to thrive and flourish (Huppert et al., 2004).

Chapter Summary

Participation in high school sports offers many benefits for student-athletes, but the coaches create the environment in which student-athletes participate. I am interested in uncovering how high school coaches think about this responsibility, how they go about this, and how they support student-athlete needs. Particularly how they navigate building team cultures and how they view the relationship between performance and well-being.

The literature review in the next chapter describes the three theories that guide this research: Holistic Ecological Approach (HEA), Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT), in more depth and provide a rationale for the use of each. Chapter 2 also reviews research on sport culture, team leadership, team culture, individual well-being, and psychological safety. The outline for this chapter will mirror the nesting structure of the HEA. Chapter 3 provides a rationale for emphasizing a constructivist approach and selecting Grounded Theory. This chapter also includes a description of the data collection and data analysis process. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive review of the findings. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the findings and conclusion of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Close to 8 million high school students, 47% of eligible students, participated in high school sports in the United States in 2018 (NFHS, 2019). For adolescent student-athletes, sport provides a distinct learning environment for personal growth and socialization (Steinfeldt et al., 2016). Sport participation decreases one's risk of depression, hopelessness, social isolation, and suicidal ideation while improving well-being, mental health, physical health, and academic performance (Drane & Barber, 2016; Harrison & Narayan, 2009; Miller & Hoffman, 2009).

Despite the benefits mentioned above, sport participation increased performance anxiety, sleep deprivation, depression, rigorous training, and time commitment stressors (Stevens et al., 2013; Watson et al., 2021; Wolanin et al., 2015). When sport organizations create environments that incentivize and prioritize performance over well-being, it encourages athletes to embrace a culture that can undermine their well-being (Coakley, 2015; Hughes & Coakley, 2001; Kerr et al., 2020; Sauvé et al., 2021). High-profile examples of this are the abuse scandals within USA Gymnastics and the Chicago Blackhawks organization (Chiari, 2021).

The dichotomy of positive and negative developmental outcomes suggests the need for further understanding of how athletic experience contributes to variations in psychological well-being. Davis et al. (2021) showed that enhancing performance while optimizing athlete well-being is a pressing issue in contemporary sport. Organized sport involves an individual within a complex social network that intersects with health, social-emotional development, and societal expectations for entertainment (Jayanthi, 2015).

More knowledge will allow administrators, coaches, parents, and players to create better opportunities for student-athletes to thrive (Hansen et al., 2003; Theokas et al., 2005).

This literature review provides a case for exploring how coaches think about well-being, highlighting guiding theories and describing common themes from previous literature. Some aspects of well-being related to psychological safety, a topic explored in organizational psychology, have only started to garner the attention of researchers in sports (Leaders, 2021). There are few published articles on psychological safety and sport, with none on high school athletics.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria for the search process initially focused on high school student-athletes and coaches; however, due to the limited research with these sub-groups, the search extended to elite athletes, college student-athletes, and professional athletes. Athletes become eligible for elite status in literature at 16 years of age and older, which matches comparatively to high school student-athletes, even though the two groups differ in environment, skill level, and expectations. Studies focused on subjects from the United States were given higher priority versus those originating in Europe or Asia. However, studies using an American sample with the appropriate age group were prioritized over older and more elite athletes. Peer-reviewed articles were used as often as possible. However, special issue reports and personal narratives were also used for this review.

Theoretical Framework

Three theories guide this review: the Holistic Ecological Approach (HEA), Relational Cultural Theory (RCT), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). These theories support exploring student-athlete well-being through holistic, motivational, and relational

lenses. The nesting structure of the ecological model highlights the different levels of

relationships each student-athlete experiences. These levels start with the self and move

outward to culture, relationships with teammates, coaches, parents, and those formed in

the broader communities to which the student-athlete belongs. RCT is a reference in this

review because it emphasizes how people grow through relationships. SDT describes

motivation and the importance of leveraging inner resources for behavior and motivation.

This section will explore their origins, principles, and application to sport and how they

support and help ground this research.

Holistic Ecological Approach

This section explores Henriksen et al.'s (2010a, 2010b) Holistic Ecological

Approach (HEA). The Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) model and

Environment Success Factors Model (ESFM) form the basis of HEA described by

Henricksen et al. (2010a, 2010b). I will also discuss the three background theories that

inspired the development of the HEA: ecological psychology, systems theory, and

cultural psychology (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) is an evolving theoretical

model for understanding the environment's role in human development throughout one's

life (Brofenbrenner, 2005). An ecological approach adapted from Bronfenbrenner's work

helps represent multilayered and interconnecting systems that influence student-athlete

experience and well-being (Brady, 2022). Systems theory suggests that the athlete's talent

development environment is a complex system with components, structures, functions,

and development (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017, p. 272). Henriksen and Stambulova

(2017) wrote that cultural psychology highlighted the importance of understanding

culture as a collective programming of the mind and viewing it as a multi-level

phenomenon. Coaches need to be aware of this because student-athletes negotiate

stressors from various locations within a complex environmental system, and they decide

and respond to internal, relational, group, organizational, and societal stimuli.

Athletic Talent Development Environment

Henriksen et al. (2010) conceptualized a Holistic Ecological Approach (HEA) to

better describe talent development in sport by focusing on the team environment and not

the individual. The Athletic Talent Development Environment provides a framework for

describing a particular athletic environment and clarifying the roles and functions of the

different components and relations within the environment (Martin et al., 2018).

Like Ecological Systems Theory, ATDE depicts the environment in a series of

nested structures. The athlete is at the center of the model, and other components of the

ATDE structure are divided into two levels (micro and macro) and two domains (athletic

and non-athletic) (Henriksen et al., 2011). Micro-level refers to the athlete's environment,

such as the team environment (surrounding the athlete), school, social groups, and family

(Henricksen, 2011). Macro-level refers to social settings, which affect but do not contain

the athletes, governing bodies, media, educational system, and reference groups, as well

as to the values and customs of the cultures (such as national and sport-specific cultures)

to which the athletes belong (Henricksen, 2011). The athletic domain covers the part of

the athletes' environment related to sport, whereas the non-athletic domain represents

other areas of influence in the athletes' lives. The outermost layer of the model presents

the past, present, and future of the ATDE, emphasizing that the environment is dynamic,

and the athletes and their contexts are changing and influencing each other Henriksen et al. (2010a, 2010b).

Henricksen (2010) described eight characteristics of successful Athletic Talent Development Environments: 1) training groups with supportive environments, 2) proximal role models, 3) support for performance goals in the larger environment, 4) support to develop psychosocial skills, 5) training that allows for diversification, 6) focus on long-term development, 7) coherent solid team/organizational culture, 8) integrations of efforts (Crawley, 2021; Larsen et al., 2013).

Henricksen (2010a) described supportive training as having opportunities for inclusion in a training community, supportive relationships, and friendships within the group, despite performance level and good communication. He described proximal role models of more experienced athletes who work with younger, less experienced athletes to increase knowledge sharing and influence behavior. One achieves the support of larger performance goals when others in the athlete's circle recognize the need for an athlete to focus on their sport. A person advances and develops psychosocial skills when opportunities are present to build skills and competencies outside the sporting domain. It also considers athletes as whole human beings (Henricksen, 2010a). Henricksen (2010a) described training for diversification as opportunities to sample different sports during the early phases of the career, integrating other sports into the daily routines, and appreciating unique sports profiles and fundamental sport skills. The focus of long-term development places a greater emphasis on future performance than on succeeding in the present. Coherent organizational culture derives from a shared sense of meaning, values, and goals. This integration refers to the coordination and communication between sport,

school, family, and other components that impact an athlete's daily life (Henricksen, 2010a).

This framework helps to locate the student-athlete within the complex system in which they exist—each of the eight characteristics links to the importance of relationships with self or others. The characteristics also hint at the significance of player-coach relationships and team culture, topics that will become clearer in the next section on Environmental Success Factors. Sections in the empirical review will mirror the tiers described by the ATDE.

Environment Success Factors

The ESF working model attempts to describe what makes for a successful ATDE. The model focuses on three outcomes that help gauge the environment's success. It predicts that the ATDE's success results from the interplay between preconditions, process, individual and team development, and achievements, with organizational culture integrating these elements (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017, p. 272). Preconditions include human (e.g., coaching and management resources), material (e.g., training and accommodation facilities), and financial factors, which all support but do not guarantee success (Henriksen et al., 2010b). Process refers to everyday activities, including training, camps, competitions, and social events. Individual development and achievements refer to the athletes' acquisition of psychosocial competencies and athletic skills.

In contrast, team achievements refer to the team's athletic success. In this model, individual and team achievements reflect the training process and team culture development. The section on team culture will explain how ESF describes culture more. Our connections with others influence the process and team culture aspects of success.

Relational-Cultural Theory

This section summarizes Relational-Cultural Theory by highlighting its feminist origins, basic principles, and application to sport. Central to the theory is the idea that we grow through relationships. All people, including athletes, have an innate need to build relationships that can shape developmental experiences and perspectives for better or worse (Burns et al., 2020).

Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) promotes the idea that one's well-being is a product of the degree to which one participates in growth-fostering relationships (Jordan, 2008). The relational aspect of the theory examines how people experience connection through the complexity of human relationships, while the cultural component emphasizes the influence of larger cultural forces and power differentials on those relationships and their ensuing effect on the person's well-being (McCauley, 2013). Power differentials influence a coach both upstream and downstream. They hold power over their players but are also subject to the oversight of school administration. Miller and Stiver (1997) identified that the less powerful individual in the relationship could not represent their feelings due to not feeling comfortable in the environment or receiving an indifferent response from an authority figure. The individual will isolate parts of themselves from the relationship. Regarding sport beyond individual student-athletes, RCT views culture as an active agent in relational processes that shape interactions among athletes and coaches (Walker, 2005).

Principles of RCT

The theory asserts that humans are social beings socially constituted by relationships. Humans grow towards and through connection. When people find

themselves in growth-fostering relationships, they are more likely to thrive and flourish.

Miller (1986) proposed that growth-fostering relationships encompass five essential

qualities: 1) a sense of zest, 2) an increased sense of self-worth, 3) clarity, 4)

productivity, and 5) a desire for more connection. A sense of zest is the energy that

emerges from being seen. Self-worth increases through the reciprocal process of care.

Clarity derives from mutual authenticity in the interactions between two people.

Productivity increases because one can accomplish more in and out of the relationship. A

desire for more connection is born from the growth-fostering relationship. Relationships

that meet these criteria allow for an increased capacity for respect, impact on the other,

and openness to being changed by the other (McCauley, 2013). Proponents of RCT

suggest individuals approach optimal development while participating in relationships

characterized by authenticity, relational connection, mutuality, and engagement (Jordan,

2004).

Birell and Freyd (2003) note that RCT suggests that theories of psychological

development that emphasize individualizing problems do not account for the harmful

effect of power dynamics. Individualizing problems is a theme of positive psychology

that emphasizes the individual instead of looking at the group functioning or

environmental influence. This perspective creates space for a healthier alternative to

individualistic, western approaches to personal growth, which assume that autonomy and

independence from others inspire a sense of competence and esteem (Lentz, 2016). RCT

challenges those individualistic lenses by arguing that oppressive patterns within an

environment impact interpersonal relationships. A shift to relational thinking allows

investigation into how individual psychological issues are products of more prominent

socially destructive influences. RCT serves as an alternate theory to more masculine-based views of psychological growth because it emphasizes connection and independence collectively (Jordan et al., 1999).

Jordan et al. (2004) suggested that adherence to traditional Western culture creates communities that struggle to grow and foster relationships. The inability to develop these relationships can lead to isolation, confusion, and the absence of matter. Individuals who foster relationships experience esteem, achievement, and satisfaction growth. Western sport cultures, which place a higher premium on competition, winning, and the individual, can make fostering healthy relationships challenging (Tao & Chaunyou, 2016).

The founders of Relational Cultural Theory developed it as a foundation for understanding women's experiences, but its four components can apply to individuals regardless of gender or cultural demographics (Lentz, 2012). Dooley and Fedele (2004) found that the theory's four components helped understand masculine relationships. Those four dimensions are a) mutual engagement, defined as mutual involvement, commitment, and sensitivity to the relationship; b) authenticity, defined as freedom to be oneself in the relationship; c) empowerment or zest, defined as the capacity for action and the sense of one's strength that emerges from the relationship; and d) ability to deal with conflict, defined as the ability to express, receive, and process diversity in a relationship (Liang et al., 2002).

RCT explores the impact of disconnection by recognizing that disconnection is an inevitable part of being in a relationship (Jordan et al., 2004). Disconnection does not equate to a loss. The connection can grow in response to disconnection if the injured

(significantly less powerful) person can represent their feelings and the other person can respond empathetically; experiences of disconnection can lead to a strengthened relationship and an increased sense of relational competence (Jordan, 2008). This mattering section covers the connection concept in more detail.

Relational competency is the ability to effect change and feel effective in connections (Jordan, 1999). However, when the less powerful or vulnerable person cannot represent themselves or their feelings in a relationship, they will begin to hide portions of their identity to keep the relationship. RCT names this the central relational paradox (Miller & Stiver, 1997) (Jordan, 1999). Jordan and Dooley (2001) suggest that promoting mutuality within relationships is at the core of establishing a context of respect and trust. Individuals can view themselves as impacting others around them. When modeled, mutuality highlights how vulnerability can promote a sense of empathy. Mutuality is an essential concept for coaches to recognize and will be explored further in the coach-athlete relationship section.

Jordan et al. (2004) described relational empowerment as the ability to trust themselves to be different from others while maintaining growth and fostering relationships. Empowerment is both an influential factor and a product of relationship development. It is "generally facilitated by encouraging others to engage in activities that promote comfort while managing disconnection safely" (Lentz, 2012, p. 416). Frazier et al. (2017) found that interpersonal relationships and group dynamics were the central drivers of psychological safety. Relational networks promote psychological safety and contribute to learning performance and innovation (Newman et al., 2017). The strength of relationships in an organization is directly related to the team's ability to learn

through failure (Carmeli, 2007). Blustein (2011, p.2) selected RCT to study organizations because it helped "delete artificial hyphen that has existed in the study of relationships and working, to bind these essential domains of life in psychological discourse, much as they are in the lived experiences of people." RCT in a sporting environment would offer an opportunity to delete the hyphens between the study of relationships and coaching.

RCT and Sport

There needs to be more research applying RCT to the sports. One study by Kilty (2006) used a relational perspective to understand developing coaches. She found relational skills encourage cooperation, collaboration, trust, and mutual learning. However, the dominant culture prevalent in many sports organizations limits the acceptance and practice of those skills (Maitland, 2012). LaVoi (2007) used RCT to examine athletes' perceptions of closeness and conflict. Trust, communication, and mutuality emerged as the most cited dimensions. She also advocated for empowerment and authenticity in coach-athlete relationship education. LaVoi (2007) was interested in learning more about how performance goals impacted the relational dynamic between the athlete and coach regarding power and hierarchy.

Maitland (2012) called for sports organizations to break down traditional cultural norms in sports that foster disconnection. Jordan et al. (2004) identified that the psychology of connection poses a challenge to the system of competition in sport. LaVoi (2007) noted the need for in-depth research investigating the relationship between coaches and student-athletes. This investigation could strengthen team communities (Maitland, 2012). Social connections are critical to health, well-being, and elite sport performance (Burns et al., 2019). Supportive relationships with teammates and coaches

help athletes with the pressures of sport (Burns et al., 2019). Quality relationships can induce positive physical changes that improve adaptation to stress and enhance performance (Coan et al., 2006). Coan et al. (2006) found that access to social resources altered physiological and neuronal responses to threat or stress.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory is a motivational theory that can predict the well-being of athletes and other organizational members like coaches (Neil et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Neil et al. (2017) hypothesized that SDT contributes to performance and well-being outcomes. They argued that performance and well-being are not isolated ideas. Integrating performance and well-being through SDT could allow for more effective support and management within sport organizations.

SDT proposes three basic psychological human needs: autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Satisfying these three needs allows individuals to experience growth, integrity, and well-being. (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This growth is shown by increased self-determined motivation, concentration, persistence, positive affect, and well-being (Cuevas et al., 2017; Ntoumanis, 2005; Standage et al., 2005). Autonomy is the perceived level of control a person has over their behavior. Competence refers to the level of mastery a person feels when performing a task. Relatedness signifies a person's acceptance and connection with others while engaged in the activity (Cuevas et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001). In contrast, psychological needs thwarting describes the negative state in which the actions of others hinder autonomy, competency, and relatedness (Batholemew et al. 2011).

Deci & Ryan (1991) argue that individuals only sometimes integrate external values and experiences. Deci & Ryan (2000) conceptualized a self-determination continuum. The continuum moves from motivation to extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation. Individuals categorized as having amotivation are non-autonomous and have difficulties with meeting their needs. Four categories comprise self-regulation: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. It describes performing an activity to achieve some separate outcome. External regulation is marked by the effort to meet an external award while feeling alienated and controlled. Individuals displaying introjected regulation take in an external regulation but do not fully accept it as their own. At this level, the individual is motivated to avoid guilt and anxiety or to build ego and pride (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Identified regulation occurs when a person values a goal or regulation. These individuals find the action meaningful. Integrated regulation occurs when external motivation fully assimilates into the self (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivation occurs when an individual is self-motivated, self-determined, and driven by interest, enjoyment, and satisfaction inherent in the behavior or activity.

Rynne et al. (2017) noted that researchers had used SDT to explore athlete motivation, team motivational climate, and within the coach-athlete relationship. A core principle of SDT is social actors, such as coaches, ' role in shaping the motivational environment. SDT proposes two prevalent interpersonal styles: need supportive and controlling style (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The degree to which individuals in positions of authority (coaches) adopt a communication style that is supportive or controlling impacts the degree of psychological needs satisfaction of those they interact with (student-

athletes) (Matosie et al., 2016). When student-athletes believe their coach is helping to

meet their needs, they experience higher levels of motivation, well-being, and behavior

management. Rynne et al. (2017, p. 289) found that "supportive autonomous

environments contribute positively to performance, enhanced self-worth, increased effort,

persistence, adherence, and self-determined motivation. Controlling coaching

environments are linked to extrinsic motivation or amotivation and negatively influence

well-being, performance, and mental health."

Section Summary

These three theories support each other by offering a shared context regarding the

sport environment. For instance, a component of Relational Cultural Theory recognizes

that disconnections and opportunities for growth occur not only on the individual or

familial level but also at the sociocultural level (Jordan & Hartling, 2005). Societal

practices of categorizing, stereotyping, and stratifying individuals significantly impact

people's sense of connection and disconnection (Walker, 1999, 2001; Walker & Miller,

2001). Social connectedness is associated with being on an athletic team (Armstrong &

Oomen-Early, 2009). Davis et al. (2021) suggested that secure close attachment in sport

is fundamental to athletic thriving, and they also found that humans can thrive through

secure relationships during adversity. The Holistic Ecological Approach offers an

opportunity to locate the individual within their complex sport system and a framework

for how components of those symptoms relate to each other. Self-Determination Theory

provides a theory for how a student-athlete will engage. Ryan and Deci (2001, p. 68)

wrote that human beings can be proactive and engaged or alternately passive and

alienated mainly as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and

function. Relatedness, for instance, is a basic human need in SDT. The level to which

student-athletes' needs are met impacts their well-being and motivation to act.

HEA helps describe the interaction between multiple social, physical, and cultural

dimensions. RCT helps mark the importance of relationships at each level that allows one

to grow. Behavior is influenced by environmental and relational factors and individual

factors, including disposition, knowledge, attitude, and previous behavior (Zhang &

Solomon, 2012). HEA's multi-level approach allows for simultaneous consideration of

individual and relational factors that influence well-being and performance.

Sport Culture

This section explores how researchers understand sport culture while highlighting

the influence of gender and finance. Sport and culture are so entangled that it is hard to

distinguish which influences the other and to what extent.

Great Sport Myth

Coakley (2015, p. 403) described the Great Sport Myth as the pervasiveness and

unshakable belief in the "purity and goodness of sport that can be transmitted to those

who participate in or consume it." The idea holds that once shared sport can lead to

individual and community development. More than other civil institutions, sport appeals

to the zeitgeist in ways that make people susceptible and subject to political manipulation

and control. Coakley (2015, p.403) argues that this inherent goodness goes unchallenged,

allowing people in positions of power to "camouflage personal interests related to

projects through which sport is presented as a tool for problem-solving and individual or

collective development." Coakley (2015) compared the faith people have in the great

sports myth to religious zealots, citing that faith overwhelms facts.

Wrisberg (1996) described sport as having a hypnotic power that discouraged penetrative inquiry into its effect on the participants' lives (Brady, 2022). When performance discourse dominates, a person's well-being becomes secondary to the culture and aims of sport (Brady and Maynard, 2010.) Sauvé et al. (2021) highlighted that conforming to traditional norms of being an elite athlete can be harmful and emotional. These elite athletes did not realize that how they were pushing themselves was not expected or could have a detrimental impact on their well-being.

Like the tension between performance and well-being is the tension between life skill development and broader social issues. The great sport myth opens the window that all participants will access and learn these skills through the inherent nature of games. However, broader social problems such as social justice or identity-related topics that offer the potential for individual and community growth are too often bypassed as distractions and something separate from sports (Kochanek & Erickson 2019). Due to the popularity of high school sports and their recognizable benefits, it would be beneficial to learn how they can empower and lead to adaptive outcomes (Kochenek and Erickson, 2019).

Masculinity in Sport

The current sport model is rooted in competitive athletics in the 19th century. Part of the reason sport became popular was its ability to strengthen athletes and protect them from vice and unethical behavior (Gorn, 1986; Steinfeldt et al., 2016). Woven into the fabric of sport were toughness, independence, competition, and domination that would help boys succeed and avoid a feminine perception (Anderson, 2009; Radar, 1999; Wellard, 2002; Steinfeldt et al., 2016). With sport landscapes being socially constructed

as masculine training centers often highlight strength and muscularity (Luciano, 2007).

Schrack-Walters et al. (2009) found that males gravitate to the sport because they enter a

world created by males.

Sport participation grew in correlation with the idea that sport was also an arena

for the socialization of masculine values. Steinfeldt et al. (2016) noted that sharing

masculine ideals is not inherently wrong, but it planted the seeds for current issues in the

sport landscape. Male athletes have privileges based on their participation in sports that

exclude others from access and participation. These privileges can create a cycle that

encourages negative masculine behaviors that maintain male dominance (Messner, 1992;

Sabo & Panepinto, 1990; Steinfeldt et al., 2016; Whitson, 1990). Men who espouse more

traditional Western masculine norms express higher psychological, relational, and

behavioral concerns (Raemaker & Petrie, 2019). Similarly, athletic identity is also

predictive of Gender Role Conflict. The more an athlete identifies with an athlete role,

the more conflict he will experience as he attempts to fulfill the masculine gender role he

perceives he is supposed to fill.

Men's gender role conflict is a psychological state where restrictive definitions of

masculinity limit men's well-being and human potential (O'Neil, 2015). One consequence

of sport is the socialization of males through the transmission of masculine norms from

generation to generation. Clement-Guillotin & Fontayne (2011) stated that young males

learn to be men through sports participation. Historically, elite athletes tend to

overconform cultural norms (Sauvé et al., 2021). Excessive conformity has negatively

influenced well-being (Hughes & Coakley, 1991). Steinfeldt et al. (2011) found that sport

reinforces traditional masculine norms like denial of pain and using the body as a tool for violence.

Through sport environments, boys and men may internalize masculine ideologies that can negatively impact their health and well-being (Connell & Messerchmidt, 2005; Raemaker & Petrie, 2019). Organized sport is a domain where competition establishes a physical and social hierarchy through competition playing time, selection, and scholarships. Raemaeker and Petrie (2019) suggest that a sporting environment may matter less to help-seeking behavior than an individual athlete's adherence to traditionally masculine norms. For this reason, coaches need to challenge counterproductive norms that limit help-seeking and growth.

Females in Sport

As noted in the above section, sport has a historical foundation to teach males hegemonic masculinity. Dworkin & Messner (2002) argued that sport creates a battleground where real and symbolic boundaries have been drawn to limit access for racial minorities, women, the LGBTQ community, and disadvantaged members of society. In 1972, Title IX prohibited sex-based discrimination in federally funded schools and education programs (Paine, 2022). One of the ramifications was that the legislation challenged the notion that sports belonged to men only (Paine, 2022). Before its passage, the number of girls participating in sports was only eight percent of the number of boys. The year after, the number of girls playing high school sports increased from below 300,000 to over 800,000. The number of girls participating in high school sports is now 75% of the total number of boys participating. According to a Pew Research Survey, 46% of women familiar with Title IX state that it has not gone far enough to increase

opportunities for girls and women in sports in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2022). In 2019, 95% of sports coverage on television was geared to men's sports. Schell and Rodriquez (2000) argue that controlling women's status in sports may be the most damaging and powerful aspect of male hegemonic dominion. Over 70% of women believe women's and men's college sports should receive equal funding, while only 50% of men feel the same (Pew Research Center, 2022).

Cultural narratives around gender continue to create inequalities in youth sport for females (Wright, 2016). For instance, a 2011 International Sports Press survey found that males wrote 90% of sports articles and that the subjects of all sports stories were 85% male. In 2019, 95% of sports coverage on television was geared to men's sports (Cooky et al., 2021). Women are less promoted than men in the media and are labeled clumsy when making mistakes (Schillēe et al., 2020). The allocation of funds is also a concern, with a 2016 report stating that in 2016, Division I women's sports received only half as much financial support as men. Isard and Melton (2022) found that mainstream online sports media gave more attention to white WNBA players than Black WNBA players. Black athletes not deemed feminine enough received the least amount of media attention, while white athletes in this category were still able to gain attention. Schillēe et al. (2020) reported that Generation Z students had a high level of knowledge and were critical of gender inequalities in sport.

A personal-relational identity gap can influence participation in sport. This gap refers to the difference between a person's beliefs about themselves and how others view that person. An example is that I am a girl and an outstanding athlete, and girls are not good at sports. Separation in these gaps can affect a girl's decision to participate in sport

(Zanin et al., 2021). Since identity is fluid and requires constant negotiation, female athletes transitioning to high school are likely to experience a shift in their identification through implicit or explicit messaging (Zanin et al., 2020). The impact of this personal, relational gap coincides with the average age of sport drop-out for girls between 11-14 (Cooky, 2009; Staurowsky et al., 2015). This negotiation extends to adulthood, as Ericksen (2021) found that female professional athletes can have an unstable relationship with sports due to fear of job loss, poor financial benefits, a lack of female role models, and the belief that sports are for youth.

Identification with identity groups may increase or decrease over time due to positive or negative interactions that support or hide identities. Zarrett et al. (2020) stated that positive interactions with her teammates or coach will help the athlete to see herself as an athlete. Gosai et al. (2022) wrote that coaches consciously or unconsciously conform to a gender lens when coaching. Examples of this gender lens include longer practices for females and more reinforcing behaviors expressed towards them than their male counterparts. Gosai et al. (2022) suggested that this could limit female athletes' physical, social-emotional, and psychological development.

Despite these challenges, young girls' sport participation has increased markedly in the Western world (Strandbu et al., 2019). In 2022-23, 198,936 girls played high school sports in New England (NFHS, 2023). Cooky (2009) referenced Dowling (2000), who wrote that because sport is one of the few social institutions in our society where the ostensibly natural differences between men and women are reproduced, girls' participation can potentially be empowering because it challenges the very foundations upon which gender inequality is based. Cooky (2009) argued that the everyday

interactions of girls within their environmental structures simultaneously constrain and encourage agency. The benefits of sport participation for female high school student-athletes are an increased likelihood of developing teamwork and leadership skills, engagement in less harmful behavior, and increased self-esteem. Most recently, the U.S. Soccer Federation announced that the Women's National Soccer team would be paid the same as the Men's National Team (Hernandez, 2022). This decision came after a lengthy dispute between the Women's team and the Federation, culminating in an agreement to provide $22 million in back pay.

Sports-Industrial Complex

The sports-industrial complex describes how sports intertwine with American capitalistic pursuits at the expense of players' health and well-being (Powers, 2019). The entire sporting complex "breeds elements of self-justifying necessity" to allow sport to overcome mental and physical health concerns (Kampmark, 2018, p. 26). Critics of the sport industrial complex argue it thrives on the performance efficiency ethos at the expense of a human development model (Maguire, 2004).

Four characteristics accepted by athletes hold together this quest for performance: willingness to make sacrifices, striving for enhanced performance, acceptance of risk and pain, and a tacit acceptance that there is no limit to human performance (Coakley, 2003; Maguire, 2004). Maguire (2004) stated that these beliefs are learned early on and become normalized in athletes. When this happens, individual athletes can be treated like machines. Maguire (2004) argued that athletes must be recognized as their whole selves. Crum (1999) stated that the push for performance produces an efficient body that creates the loss of other body cultures besides sport. Body culture describes how society thinks

about physical movement in all its forms. The hegemonic model of Western modern body

culture is sport competition and achievement (Eichberg & Kosiewicz, 2016). When this

belief is centered, the sportive body treats the individual athlete as a thing or instrument

that produces data (Eichberg, 1995). The Olympic motto 'Faster, Higher, Stronger' is an

example (Maguire, 2004, p. 301). This push toward performance has driven sports

science to emphasize achievement and conscientization. Maguire (2004, p.304) argued

that a shift could be made by focusing on human development, allowing sport scientists

to move away from the "tentacles of achievement."

The sports-industrial complex has impacted the professional and college sports

landscape and is now pushing into youth sport. In 2021, despite a drop in youth sports

participation, the market for youth sports was valued at $19 billion (Bjork & Hoynes,

2021). Double what it was in the previous decade. One research group projects the

market value to reach $77 Billion by 2026 (Bjork & Hoynes, 2021). This change is partly

due to the NCAA offering more than $3.5 billion in scholarships annually (NCAA,

2021). Due to the increasing cost of participation, rates diverge across socioeconomic

lines, with participation rates as high as 41% for children whose parents earn more than

$100K annually and only 19% for those who make less than $25K annually (Aspen

Institute, 2021). This changing landscape has changed the expectations, relationships, and

goals for athletes, coaches, and parents, impacting player identity and team culture.

Parents often see high school sports as a potential return on investment. They

fulfill many roles in their children's athletic careers, including managing their children's

studies-sports-leisure balance, mediating between participants, fulfilling logistical duties,

providing financial support, and making sacrifices that impact their families (Harwood et

al., 2015). Author Michael Lewis described the sports-industrial complex as a machine created in response to parents' natural desire for their child to succeed, coupled with the child's natural response to playing a sport (Souza, 2021).

Section Summary

Sport culture influences how many coaches understand and act regarding their roles. It does so in ways that are seen and unseen. Some of the most common streams of influence derive from the idea that sport is a salve that only promotes good for participants. Culture can also influence how we understand the role of gender through the opportunities available and how coaches coach players depending on gender. Lastly, the sport industrial complex has strengthened its grip on sport to the point that it goes unchallenged. Coaches would benefit from learning more about these concepts and identifying how sport culture supports and hinders their coaching.

Team Leadership

Sport culture influences how many coaches understand and act regarding their roles. It does so in ways that are seen and unseen. Some of the most common streams of influence derive from the idea that sport is a salve that only promotes good for participants. Culture can also influence how we understand the role of gender through the opportunities available and how coaches coach players depending on gender. Lastly, the sport industrial complex has strengthened its grip on sport to the point that it goes unchallenged. Coaches would benefit from learning more about these concepts and identifying how sport culture supports and hinders their coaching.

During her 2019 TED Talk "Why Winning Doesn't Always Equal Success," former UCLA Women's Gymnastics coach Valerie Kondos Field described her

challenges in developing a team culture. She shared how she attempted to mimic the

"tough-talking, tough-minded, relentless, unsympathetic, bullish, unempathetic and often

downright mean" coaches she knew had won (TED, 2019). This style lasted years until

her team asked for a team meeting. In that meeting, her players shared that they wanted to

be supported, developed, and motivated by their coach instead of belittled, torn down,

and bullied (TED, 2019). The meeting provided Kondos Field with the opportunity to

change her leadership style.

This section explores key concepts and understandings in team leadership that

support performance and well-being. Leadership is essential for creating psychologically

safe environments and serves a necessary function on high school sport teams. There are

three types of sport team leaders: coaches, formal leaders, and informal leaders, and each

plays an essential role in helping the team come together.

Coach Leadership

Research studies show that coach-athlete relationship quality can improve

performance and well-being outcomes (Gosai et al., 2021). Influential leaders have a

vision for the way things ought to be. The best leaders understand the emerging themes in

each situation and shift the team toward where they need to be focused. The best leaders

are curious about their emotions toward themselves and others in performances.

An athlete's perception of the coach determines a coach's power base. Coaches

impacted team sense on the individual health pathway at a rate three times larger than

captains and informal leaders. Athletes feel more supported by coaches who relate to

them empathetically, such as sharing a meal or asking about their day. Highly successful

elite athletes consider human connection and the ability to be present and relaxed with

someone important in their success (Burns et al., 2018). When a person feels vulnerable in a relationship, they may shed their authentic self to fit into the relationship better, causing them to be less authentic (Miller, 1988).

One result of having an omnipotent coach is the absence of an embedded culture that survives after the inevitable turnover of athletes and provides clear cultural standards (AIS, 2020). There is also a concern about coaches' openness to ideas about well-being, which their experience as coaches may influence. One review suggests that senior staff sometimes need help understanding why cultural values are essential (AIS, 2020). Coaching research shifted from a coach-centered approach to an athlete-centered to a combined coach-athlete-centered approach. In a coach-centered approach, the coach leads and commands all aspects of the relationship. In an athlete-centered approach, the athlete has more role in directing their learning (Gosai, 2021). The coach-athlete-centered approach highlights the joint contributions coaches and athletes make. Jowett & Arthur (2019) stated that this coach-athlete-centered approach requires investigation into "what coaches do?" and "how coaches and athletes work together?".

The coach-athlete relationship has been defined (e.g., Jowett, 2007a, 2007c; Jowett et al., 2005) as the situation in which coaches' and athletes' feelings (closeness), thoughts (commitment), and behaviors (complementarity) are interconnected (co-orientation). This model was described by Jowett (2007) as the 3Cs + 1. Closeness describes the affective ties of the relationship members and represents such interpersonal feelings as trust, respect, and liking (Olympiou et al., 2008). Commitment reflects the cognitive element of the relationship and defines coaches' and athletes' desire to continue the relationship in the future. Complementarity captures the degree to which coaches' and

athletes' affiliations through what each relationship member does about the other during practice. Co-orientation supports the bidirectionality of the player-coach relationship (Olympiou et al. 2008). Athlete's relationships with coaches influence their affective, cognitive, and social experiences (Cranmore & Buckner, 2016).

Fransen & Mertens (2020) conducted a study with national-level players with an average age of 23.75 years to learn how players perceived coaches' leadership based on their shared power. The researchers examined 64 teams from 16 sports, including 776 players and 64 head coaches. The participants took general leadership, individual, and team-level network measurements. Network centrality was used to assess how leadership was shared throughout the team (Fransen & Mertens, 2020). This allowed the researchers to study traditional hierarchical power structures and horizontal ones. The study found that adopting a shared leadership approach increases the coach's leadership quality from the perspective of their players. Players on teams with more opportunities for shared leadership perceive their coaches to be better leaders. Coaches who empower their players signal that they are trusted and capable of leading. Players may, in turn, reciprocate trust with the coach.

Coaches are influenced by their experiences and those who hold power over them; for a high school coach, that includes their athletic director. High school athletic directors strongly influence the high school sport culture, impacting the sporting experience and potential development of student-athletes (Kochanek & Erickson, 2019). One area in which athletic directors are necessary is the development of a coach's critical praxis. Critical praxis refers to the awareness and action of how one attends to social issues and challenges them (hooks, 1994). Coaches who demonstrate a clearer critical praxis are

more likely to have higher levels of awareness and challenge "normative sport dynamics" (Kochanek & Erickson, 2019, p. 3). Downward support from leadership would encourage coaches to promote team environments as transformative spaces.

Coaching Philosophy

A coach's philosophy is a critical tool for expressing coaching leadership. Gomes et al. (2018) stated that coaching philosophy refers to values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, principles, and priorities influencing coaches' practice and effectiveness. The benefits to coaches of having a clear coaching philosophy include improved decision-making and limiting reactive decisions while promoting consistent decisions (Ferner et al., 2023). Jowett and Carpenter (2015) stated that relationships with positive intent and purpose are most potent, influential, and impactful within the sport. Partington and Cushion (2019) noted that when coaches clearly understand how their philosophy shapes and informs their practice, they can better identify behaviors and procedures that meet their athletes' needs. In keeping with the ecological basis of this research, it is essential to remember that there are limitations to viewing coaches' philosophies through the lens of coach agency. This view does not consider the impacts of past experiences, tradition, culture, and power on subjectivity (Partington, 2020).

A clear philosophy is critical to coaching success because it helps establish priorities and guide behaviors, allowing coaches to be more consistent in their actions (Carles & Douglas, 2011; Gould et al., 2017; Hardman & Jones, 2013). Not surprisingly, what coaches emphasize in their philosophy influences their coaching actions and interactions (Martens, 1996).

Coach philosophy also impacts how coaches choose to motivate their players, which is essential because sport commitment decreases the age of young athletes (Usan-Supervia et al., 2016). The motivating style selected by coaches significantly influences athletes' motivation and sport commitment. (Abos et al., 2021) Abos et al. (2021) suggest that coaches reduce the frequency and intensity of controlling behaviors (controlling the use of rewards, negative conditional regard, intimidation, and excessive personal control) and shift toward need-supportive behaviors (autonomy and competency support).

Coach philosophies also gave insight into their views on performance and well-being. All but one coach stated that they go hand in hand, and all ranked well-being over performance in importance. A clear coaching philosophy also contributes to the team culture by influencing the creation of positive sports environments for student-athletes (Ferner et al., 2023).

Formal & Informal Leaders

A student-athlete who supports team members in achieving a common goal is considered a team leader, whether formal or informal. Edmondson & Lei (2014) argued that employees share a responsibility for collaborating and learning, and it could be assumed that student-athletes would also share some of this responsibility. Effect sizes on the impact of informal leaders were ten times as large as the effect sizes of team captains and coaches, which contrasts with the traditional hierarchical structures of most sport teams. Teams should adopt systems that enable informal leaders to have a shared voice to maximize their impact on team functioning (Fransen et al., 2020).

Fransen et al. (2014) identified four leadership roles athletes can occupy. The first is the task leader, who offers tactical advice. The second is a motivational leader encouraging

teammates to play to their full potential. Third is a social leader who helps to develop a

positive team culture outside the playing field. Lastly, the external leader handles

communication and relationships with those outside the team (Fransen et al., 2014). It is

difficult in a hierarchal model for coaches or formal leaders alone to satisfy each of these

areas for the whole team.

Many sport teams still operate under a hierarchal structure that overemphasizes

formal leaders. Most team captains receive their status for the wrong reasons, according

to Fransen (2015). Teammates often rate informal leaders as better leaders than captains

in all four leadership roles, which Fransen et al. (2014) suggested was due to an

overrating of captains' leadership abilities and the fact that leadership is more naturally

spread throughout teams. Franson et al. (in press) suggested that programs implement a

shared leadership structure in which informal athlete leaders receive opportunities to

share their voice to maximize their influence on team functioning.

Shared Leadership

Fransen et al. (2020) suggested adopting a structure of shared leadership in which

leadership is spread among team members. Shared leadership is effective for performance

outcomes in both organizational and sport domains (D'Innocenzo et al., 2016; Nicolaides

et al., 2014; Mertens et al., 2021). Nurturing a shared sense of we and us within team

leaders fosters a psychologically safe environment, which in turn paves the way for

optimal team functioning and healthier teams. Cotterill and Fransen (2016) found that

shared leadership may promote team well-being and performance.

Shared leadership has three distinct characteristics: source of leadership, unit of

analysis, and distribution of influence (Mathews & Passmore, 2021). The source of

leadership refers to a horizontal rather than vertical approach. The unit of analysis

considers shared leadership as the team's pooled influence rather than residing solely in

the formal leader (Mathews & Passmore, 2021, p. 69). Shared leadership spreads the

distribution of leadership across all team members rather than being focused on one

individual.

Mertens et al. (2021) conducted a network analysis on the leadership structure of

20 semi-professional soccer teams at the beginning and middle of a season. They found

that sports team leadership structures could be more stable and evolve towards more

shared leadership structures due to the emergence of informal leaders over time.

Adopting shared leadership principles increases team functioning and performance. The

researchers suggested that coaches employ a shared leadership structure by encouraging

players to take on leadership roles (Mertens et al., 2021).

When shared leadership is present, team members are more confident in their

team's abilities and have a stronger connection with others because multiple people are

fulfilling leadership roles (Fransen et al., 2017). Even shared leadership within a single

part of the team improves task and social cohesion. Fransen et al. (2017, p. 250) stated

that by facilitating a shared sense of "us," coaches can establish an optimal environment

for team functioning in good times and when facing obstacles.

Section Summary

Quality leadership creates an environment where all previously discussed themes

come together. For Konos Field, it became about learning to connect with others and

grow. Gymnast Margzetta Frazier surprisingly chose UCLA after a recruiting trip

because Konos saw her as more than an athlete. Frazier stated that Konos "asked me right

away what I wanted to do after gymnastics. No one had ever asked me that before"

(Maine, 2019). Frazier admitted that no one had ever shown interest in her outside of

sport, nor did she know she was supposed to have any. Konos invited Frazier to have a

healthier relationship with her athletic identity during her final year of coaching. Former

Olympian and then UCLA junior Kyla Ross said Konos "really helped me come out of

my shell and taught me to always speak my mind and speak the truth" (Maine, 2019),

indicating that Ross experienced psychological safety.

Sport culture can emphasize rigidity and repetition. On her first day of practice

with the team, Kondo's coaching style rejected this, as former Olympian Madison Kocian

noted. Kocian, who was used to elite training methods, was surprised there was no

predetermined workout for when she approached the beam. When she approached

Kondos, the reply was, "What do you want to do?" (Maine, 2019) This autonomy-

supportive environment offered an opportunity for trust. "I have found that once a

student-athlete trusts that I really care for them primarily as a human, then as an athlete,

that's when the magic happens. That's when you can ask them to do the hardest

conditioning challenge, and they'll put more intention, more intensity into it because

you've developed this bond" (Maine, 2019). Kondo presided over seven NCAA National

Championship Teams. The following section will explore influences outside the

individual and the team environment by looking at key components of sport culture.

Team Culture

This section explores current theories of team culture and culture's impact on

well-being. There is a growing need to study culture in sport psychology because

traditional, individual-focused methods have proven limited in their capacity to help

applied practitioners understand and influence team and organizational performance

issues (Nesti, 2004). As the literature in this area has grown, the emphasis has been on

developing high-performance ends rather than understanding what culture might be.

Culture is layered and complex because every member has a role in its development.

Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2019) recommend that sport psychology scholars not

oversimplify culture and cultivate a deeper appreciation of its foundations and the variety

of perspectives that best understand and communicate its meanings. Organizational

culture is central to the ESF model and consists of three levels: cultural artifacts,

espoused values, and basic assumptions (Schein, 1992). Cultural artifacts include stories

and myths told in the environment, customs and traditions, and physical cultural

manifestations such as clothing, buildings, and organization charts. The artifacts are easy

to observe but hard to decipher. Espoused values are the social principles, norms, goals,

and standards that the organization shows to the world; they exist in the minds of the

members and serve as visible motivations for actions, although these espoused values

(i.e., what the members say they do) do not always correspond to the enacted values (i.e.,

what they do) (Schein, 1992). Basic assumptions are underlying reasons for actions and

are no longer questioned but accepted as truth. They exist below the members'

consciousness. Organizational culture forms through integrating concepts into a cultural

paradigm that guides the socialization process of new members. Cultures can influence

the stability of groups.

Team Environment and Athlete Development

An athlete's progression and transition from novice to expert is greatly influenced

by their social environment, including peer interaction and culture (Burns et al., 2019;

Henriksen et al., 2010). The culture of sport organizations has typically been one in

which members adopt relational practices reflecting the values and assumptions of the

dominant group of heterosexuals, non-disabled, white males (Cunningham & Sagas,

2004; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Maitland, 2012). The field of sport management has

traditionally influenced research dedicated to organizational and team culture via

organizational psychology (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Sauvé et al. (2021) found

that athletes could benefit from greater ownership over developing their team culture.

Groups influence people's lives and help shape human behavior (Cartwright &

Zander, 1968). Bruner et al. (2017) stated that groups play particular importance in late

childhood and adolescence when peer groups provide much-needed support for

development. Stronger perceptions of membership in youth sport are associated with

enhanced personal and social development (Bruner et al., 2017). Identifying as part of a

sport team may be particularly important for youth to develop during tumultuous changes

and instability associated with adolescence psychosocially (Bruner et al., 2017). Douglas

and Carless (2006) stated that the dominant narrative in athletic culture emphasizes

winning performance and accomplishments. An effective support network for athletes

requires a team of people who embrace a proactive and collaborative approach to

performance, culture, and communication.

Social Identity

Social identity research in sport has enhanced our understanding of the social-

psychological processes that provide the foundation for individual and team functioning.

Rees et al. (2015) stated that groups are not simply external features of the world set for

individual behavior. Groups shape and transform through their capacity to connect to a

person's sense of self through internalization. Rees et al. (2018) referenced Turner's (1982) statement that a person's ability to define their social identity allows them to act as group members.

Social identities help individuals increase their self-esteem, invest in group-oriented behaviors and meaning, feel a sense of belonging, and raise their aspirations (Ashworth et al., 2008). In contrast, the loss or even threat of loss of social identity can harm self-concept and self-esteem (Slater et al., 2019; Slotter et al., 2015). A meta-analysis found that simply belonging to groups could promote well-being, but well-being intensified in connection to one's level of identification (Steffens et al., 2019). Jetten et al. (2012) suggested that social identification with groups could be a social cure for improving health and well-being. Fransen et al. (2020) stated that team identification is positively linked to psychological safety.

From a team standpoint, social identity principles offer an avenue for exploring vertical and horizontal relationships within the group. Haslam (2004) wrote that to understand perception and interaction in organizational contexts fully, researchers must do more to study the psychology of individuals as individuals. By exploring relationships and culture, we can better understand how social interaction is brought up within individuals' social identities. Lembke and Wilson (1998) argue that teams can only effectively function when members share a social identity. Psychological safety potentially impacts performance outcomes through social exchanges and how a group identifies with the organization (Newman et al., 2017).

Identity leadership, where the team's interests "are central and we's outplay the me's—appears to be a key component in developing an effective team" and has emerged

as one of the most defining qualities of high-quality athlete leaders (Fransen et al., 2020, p. 1). Identity leadership is defined as teams with high-identifying athletes that have demonstrated more resilience when facing adversities and perform better than teams lacking such a strong sense of we and us (Morgan et al., 2017). Effectively, leaders help create a shared understanding of "we" and "us," which increases team identification that, in turn, causes athletes to feel mentally healthier and experience less burnout.

Cameron (2004) suggested that social identity consists of cognitive centrality, in-group effect, and in-group ties. Cognitive centrality refers to the importance placed on group membership by the individual. Cameron suggested that people belong to many social groups, but we may index their meaning and value differently. The in-group effect refers to the positive emotions experienced by the individual through their in-group experiences. Lastly, in-group ties refer to the strength of belonging and connection one experiences.

More recently, Hausser et al. (2019) suggested a model of the Social Identity Approach to Health and Well-Being. This model predicts that a group's shared identity affects the health and well-being of its group members, which differentiates between individual identification, group identification, and individually perceived group identification. The theory proposes that mutual social support (provided and received) and increased collective self-efficacy link group identification to health and well-being. Hausser et al. (2020) believed that group members should be more inclined to help one another the more all members identify with the group. The authors state growing empirical evidence suggesting that social identification increases how group members provide and receive social support. Cameron (2004) indicated that in-group ties could

offer a psychological glue that allows high identifiers to persevere during threats to the status of the positive image of the group. The theory further suggests that a group's self-efficacy in meeting challenges capably rises along with mutual support to meet the initial challenge.

Edmondson and Lei (2004) highlighted the role of identity leadership in creating psychological safety in their comprehensive review. Members who identify highly with their teams feel they have much in common. Fransen et al. (2020) found that this sense of safety came from two directions. First, the team-oriented perspective allowed psychological safety to inspire good teamwork, fostering resilience and athlete satisfaction with team performance. Secondly, it created a feeling of security that buffered against athlete burnout. We and our thinking improve team functioning and enhance well-being. A shared sense of "us" contributes to athletes feeling psychologically safe.

Within psychologically safe teams, team members are generally interested in their teammates, have positive intentions, and express mutual respect and competence even when mistakes occur (Newman et al., 2017). Frisch et al. (2014) found that social support received from persons the participants identified with was a more effective stress buffer than that obtained from those they did not. Hausser et al. (2019) argue that more strongly identified group members perceive in-group support as more helpful than weakly identified members.

Team Building

Highly effective organizations promote high-quality performance and individual thriving (Deci et al., 2017). The more cooperative, conscientious, agreeable, and

emotionally stable team members are, the easier it will be to create a high-performing

team (Prilleletensky et al., 2020). Prilleltensky et al. (2020) suggested that looking at

organizational culture and cultures of mattering is necessary. Cresswell and Eklund

(2007) produced one of the first studies to examine organizational culture exclusively in

sport. They conducted a year-long assessment on the impact of culture on burnout in

professional New Zealand rugby players. Players referenced poor relationships,

communication, honesty, and lack of openness with team and management as ingredients

to burnout, physical demands, injury, and non-selection.

According to Benson and Eys (2017), three things facilitate team building: 1)

coach-initiated role communication, 2) serial tactics, and 3) inclusionary social tactics.

Coach-initiated role communication tactics represent how coaches communicate the

expectations, scope, and progression of a player's role on the team (Chamberlain et al.,

2021). Serial tactics represent how veteran players share task-related information with

newcomers. Inclusionary social tactics represent the degree to which group-wide social

activities are shared group experiences that help to facilitate positive teammate

interactions (Chamberlain et al., 2021). A healthy, vibrant, safe, and productive culture

can be supportive, effective, and reflective. Supportive cultures affirm values and

appreciate people (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2020). Influential groups have goals and

communicate reflectively to promote a sense of belonging.

Care & Belonging

There are both well-being and performance benefits for developing a caring team

culture (Hickey & Cronin, 2021). Noddings (2013) argued that the relationship between

the caregivers (coaches) and the cared for in sport (athletes) is essential to help

individuals flourish. Noddings' Ethic of Care theory states that caring cultures offer three components: engrossment, motivational displacement, and reciprocation. Engrossment requires that individuals pay attention to each other to understand their needs. Motivational displacement requires that a person takes action to support others' interests over their own. Lastly, reciprocation refers to mutual engagement in the relationship through expressions of gratitude, accepting care, or committing to the relationship (Hickey & Cronin, 2021).

Humans have adapted to be in service of belonging to help them handle life's ups and downs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Those who do not have good supportive relationships experience more stress than those who do not. Forsyth and Burnett (2010) suggested that the most critical characteristic of human beings is the need for group membership, and these relationships help form a buffer against stress. Evidence suggests that being part of a supportive social network reduces stress even if others do not provide explicit emotional or practical support (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Watson et al. (2021) found that the sense of community associated with the athletic role gives athletes a sense of belonging.

Coach leadership was an antecedent for psychological safety and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship (Gosai et al., 2021). Gosai et al. (2021) found that when coaches attended to their players' needs, it empowered athletes to achieve more for themselves and encouraged them to work collaboratively towards shared goals because they felt more psychologically safe. They also found their relationship with their coaches more connected, stable, and cooperative.

Section Summary

The team environment is prominent in creating the conditions and opportunities for relational growth needed to support well-being and performance. The best cultures help athletes bring their whole selves to the group. Coaches play an essential role in developing cultures. The following section explores how coaches influence their student-athletes.

Psychological Safety

As noted earlier, psychological safety helps bridge the gap between performance and well-being. Psychologically safe environments are free of negative behaviors, including toxic relationships, degrading treatment, emotional abuse, and malevolence (Blynova et al., 2020; Kaye et al., 2015; Vella et al. (2022). In the context of a team sport, it has been described as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Leaders Performance Institute, 2021). This section describes its origins, components, and recent application to sport.

Origins & Description

Psychological safety has been a topic of considerable interest to researchers since the 1990s. Schein and Bennis (1965) initially identified the need for individuals to feel psychologically safe to take an interpersonal risk during uncertainty and change. The concept reemerged in scientific literature following Kahn's (1990) article on the benefits of psychological safety on personal engagement at work. He described how feelings of psychological safety allowed individuals to express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally while engaged in performance tasks. Edmondson (1999) then explored psychological safety's role in the collective learning process. Edmondson's definition is the most utilized in research studies (Newman et al., 2017). Clarke (2020) defined

psychological safety as a condition in which you feel included, safe to learn, safe to contribute, and safe to challenge the status quo without fear of being embarrassed, marginalized, or punished. Recently, Vella et al. (2022) defined psychological safety in sport as the perception that one is protected from or unlikely to be at risk of psychological harm.

Researchers have identified three pathways to psychological safety: organizational, team-based, and individual (Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017). Studies investigating the organizational pathway have explored relationships between psychological safety and human resources practices, social capital, quality relationships, and organizational climate (Edmonson & Lei, 2014). Social capital reflects how social relationships contribute to achieving an organization's goals through social networks, norms, obligations, and other patterns arising from social interactions (Milana & Maldaon, 2015). The team-oriented pathway has explored psychological safety through team learning, innovation, and performance. In comparison, the individual path looks at personal experiences of psychological safety related to engagement, commitment, learning from failure, and the ability to share one's opinions. Edmonson and Lei (2014) identified the group-level pathway as the most impactful.

Google's Peoples Analytics Team ran an internal project called Project Aristotle, which sought to look at what made the best teams at the company (Re, 2015). Groups were considered teams if they had interdependent working relationships that solved problems and made decisions together. Effectiveness was measured using a mix of quantitative and qualitative designs that included an executive evaluation of the team, a

team leader evaluation of the team, a team member evaluation of the team, and sales

performance against the quarterly quota (Re, 2015).

They found that who was on the team mattered less than how those team members

interacted (Re, 2015). After looking at 180 teams over two years, they found that

psychological safety was "far and away" the most critical factor in team performance (Re,

2015, p.1). This finding is consistent with previous research that states that organizations

with high levels of psychological safety display higher levels of organizational resilience

and performance mediated by team learning (Huang et al., 2008; Rangachari & Woods,

2020). A review by Edmondson & Lei (2014) found considerable support that

psychological safety promotes collective learning and reduces fear of speaking up.

Psychological safety helps team members be more likely to offer ideas, admit mistakes,

ask for help, and provide feedback.

Team psychological safety is not the same as team cohesiveness, a more

popularly researched term in sport literature. The terms differ because team cohesiveness

concerns staying unified by not expressing dissent (disagreement or challenge)

(Edmondson, 1999). In contrast, psychological safety concerns an individual's ability to

speak up and challenge the dominant view or cultural norm.

Facilitators and Barriers

Psychological safety impacts student-athletes within multiple levels of the ATDE

model; it is essential to recognize the facilitators and barriers to psychological safety.

Remtulla et al. (2021) identified eight facilitators of psychological safety in a qualitative

review of primary care teams. Those facilitators were leader and leader inclusiveness,

open culture, vocal personality, support in silos, boundary spanner, chairing meetings,

strong interpersonal relationships, and small groups. Leader inclusiveness was noted by welcoming people to the team, encouraging others, and having good listening skills (Remtulla et al., 2021). Open culture refers to a non-judgmental environment. Vocal personality refers to the inherent trait of voicing opinions confidently. Support in silos meant that the individuals could identify with a group of similar individuals and reduced power distance. Boundary spanners help to link sub-groups (Remtulla et al., 2021). The opportunity to chair meetings encouraged individuals to speak up. Speaking up occurs more often when individuals hold strong, longstanding interpersonal relationships with teammates. Small teams increase comfort and confidence while also preventing a feeling of being outnumbered (Remtulla et al., 2021).

Koopman et al. (2016) found low psychological safety levels in groups with negative interpersonal interactions marked by competition, mistrust, and guardedness. Workplace psychological safety barriers include bullying and hierarchical power structures (Appelbaum et al., 2016; Arnetz et al., 2019). Remtulla et al. (2021) identified four barriers to psychological safety in primary care teams: hierarchy, perceived lack of knowledge, personality, and leadership style. Other investigations on workplace psychological safety barriers pointed to bullying and hierarchical power structures (Appelbaum et al., 2016; Arnetz et al., 2019). A lack of quality relationships is likely to weaken interpersonal psychological safety. Low levels of psychological safety increase opportunities for exploitation, intimidation, and humiliation within the coach-athlete relationship (Gosai et al., 2021; Wachsmuth & Jowett, 2020).

Psychological Safety in Sport

Psychological safety is a relatively new concept within sport research (Fransen et al., 2020). In sport, psychological safety can show up in one's ability to communicate needs and opinions, as well as one's ability to take calculated technical and tactical risks. Athletes, by nature, share kinesthetically through sport, so their ability to fully express themselves depends on how psychologically safe they deem their environment. Risk also connects to growth opportunities. If one wants to expand their skill, power, speed, or any other sport or performance-related agility, it makes sense to feel uncomfortable experiencing the friction that causes learning.

Blynova et al. (2020) stated that forming socially and psychologically safe learning environments in sport is vital due to the need for social connection, attachment, and support. McLaren & Spink (2021) suggested that the relationship between communication and task cohesion may differ based on how psychologically safe members feel within the team. Previous research indicates that psychological safety helps reduce individuals' defense mechanisms around change and uncertainty and encourages them to focus on collective goals (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). To meet a student-athlete's psychological needs, coaches should encourage support, role clarity, and freedom of self-expression (Blynova et al., 2020).

Research conducted on medical teams found that psychological safety was higher when there was less staff turnover (Applebaum et al., 2020). This understanding makes team leaders and coaches important in supporting psychological safety due to grade promotion in high school teams. Despite the possible connection between psychological safety and student-athlete well-being, no research has yet been conducted. Fransen et al.

(2020) suggested that future intervention studies can teach leaders to foster a

psychologically safe sports environment.

Gosai et al. (2021) explored when leadership, relationships, and psychological

safety promote flourishing in sport and life. This study is relevant because it is one of the

first to look at psychological safety in a sport context and is interested in the concept's

impact on well-being. One hundred sixty-six team sport athletes completed surveys

measuring athletes' perceptions of coach transformational leadership behaviors, coach-

athlete relationship quality, team psychological safety, flourishing, and thriving (Gosai et

al.,2021). The survey analysis indicated that transformational coach leadership was a

precursor to team psychological safety and coach-athlete relationship quality (Gosai et

al., 2021). The researchers suggest that coaches and leaders have a significant role in

creating sporting environments that help athletes feel valued, connected, confident, and

comfortable. Gosai et al. (2021) stated that when this occurs, coaches and athletes enter a

process of integration where sport becomes an interpersonal pursuit.

Power Differentials

Power differentials occur within sport teams due to preexisting hierarchical

structures. Hierarchical structures negatively impact psychological safety by creating a

feeling of inferiority in team members and the perception that other members value their

opinions less, which increases hesitancy to voice opinions (Remtulla et al., 2021). Open

cultures can help negate the impact of hierarchy, but these need to be met at an

organizational level (Remtulla et al., 2021). Leaders must validate input and encourage

contribution from every individual regardless of position. Davis et al. (2021) suggests

that if coaches can satisfy their athlete's basic psychological needs by implementing

autonomy-supportive behaviors, they could act as a buffer against insecure parent

attachment and adversity in competition.

Leaders in psychologically safe environments are generally seen as accessible and

approachable (Edmundson & Redford, 2019). Psychologically safe groups tend to make

more mistakes than groups that are not, but this failure accelerates creativity and

performance rather than deters it. Coaches can positively or negatively affect athlete

health with the capacity to promote athlete burnout (Cresswell & Eklund, 2007) (Into et

al., 2020). Disempowering coaching leads to increased levels of burnout. Further research

is needed to understand more depth to help coaches empower all student-athletes

(Kochanek & Erickson, 2019).

Power distance describes the space between team members and leaders. A

qualitative study of coaches recognized for their ability to develop their players as people

found that developing relationships with their athletes was a critical factor in helping

athletes develop (Gould & Carson, 2010; Petipas, 2002). In mentoring research, closeness

between mentors and youth is associated with better-perceived relationships and

participation benefits (Parra et al., 2002). Jowett et al. (2003) found three elements

critical within the coach-athlete relationship: closeness or the degree of mutual trust and

respect, commitment or attempts to maintain the relationship, and complementary or

reciprocal behaviors of belonging. When players become leveled by playing ability, their

access to and relationship with coaches becomes impacted. People are more likely to

offer ideas, admit mistakes, ask for help, and provide feedback if they feel safe doing so

(Edmundson & Lei, 2014). As relational separation increases each person's experiences,

it is harder to cultivate growth, foster relationships, promote cultures that show mutual empathy, and empower individuals.

French et al. (1959) identified five bases of power: 1) expert power, 2) referent power, 3) legitimate power, 4) coercive power, and 5) reward power. In the sport context, expert power is based on the perceived knowledge of the coach. Referent power derives from the athlete's ability to see the coach as a reference point for their behavior or attitude. Legitimate power stems from the athlete believing that the coach has the right to influence them to do the position they hold. Coercive power originates from an athlete's desire to avoid a punishment earned from non-compliance. Reward compliance develops when the athlete seeks an award generated from compliance. Yukl (2006) found that influential leaders often rely on expert and referent power to lead (Rylander, 2015). In coaching, legitimate and expert power are the most common reasons athletes comply with coaches.

Leaders act as role models, advancing the group and crafting the shared narrative of who is "we." Hauser et al. (2019) argue that the individual identification of group members should match the emphasis on group-level leadership, and this shared identification creates more congruence in teams. Reicher et al. (2018) suggested that the more an individual can shape this shared group narrative of "who we are" and "what we do," the more they influence the actions of the group. It is only when leaders embody those narratives that group members will follow (Rees et al., 2015). Turner (2005) suggested that leaders seek power through followers rather than power over them.

Conflict Management

Barki and Hartwick (2004) stated that team conflict is a dynamic process between two parties who experience counterproductive emotional reactions to perceived disagreements that hinder goal achievement. Conflicts fall into two categories: task conflict and relationship conflict; the former refers to the dispute of group members about the tasks being performed, while the latter refers to interpersonal incompatibility among group members (Jehn, 1995). Team conflicts fluctuate throughout the season, and coaches are vital in creating and handling conflict in sports teams (Paradis et al., 2014; Gonzalez-Ponce et al., 2018).

Coaches can help student-athletes move beyond interpersonal conflict by shifting from caring cultures to transformative spaces. They can work towards becoming transformative educators by taking a problem-posing approach, working with their student-athletes to identify problems relative to them, and encouraging dialogue and critical reflection (Spaaij et al., 2016). This work requires consistent effort and attention from coaches to help reshape dominant structures.

Calculated Risk-Taking

Growth requires conflict and stress, so an athlete must inevitably find discomfort on the path to talent development. Team leaders play a pivotal role in creating safe learning spaces for student-athletes. Members are likely to feel psychologically safe when a team leader is supportive, coach-oriented, and has non-defensive responses to questions and challenges. When team members act authoritarian, team members may be reluctant to engage in interpersonal risk, including discussing errors (Edmondson, 1996). Edmondson and Lei (2014) described that a central theme of psychological safety research was the generous contribution of ideas and actions.

Psychological safety is a belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, such as asking for help, admitting errors, or seeking feedback (Edmondson, 1999). Leung et al. (2014) noted that the leading account of psychological safety's effects is based on its tendency to encourage interpersonal risk-taking. Psychological safety enabled learning, experimenting, and new practice production (Tucker et al., 2007).

Learning itself can be risky, and the level of risk differs among teams but is mitigated by a team's tolerance of error (Edmundson, 1999). Psychologically challenging assumptions and beliefs can make someone uncomfortable but are also necessary for growth. Sauvé et al. (2021) found that athletes reported that sport required sacrifice, taking risks, and refusing to limit themselves physically. Athletes can lack awareness that their actions in sport can negatively influence their physical or psychological well-being (Sauve et al., 2021).

Speaking Up

Speaking up is upward-directed, promotive verbal communication (Edmundson & Lei, 2014; Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Speaking up is particularly important for creating awareness of challenges and opportunities for potential improvements to achieve shared goals (Nembhard & Edmundson, 2011). However, individuals sometimes feel like they live in safe environments to speak up. Status refers to the relative importance or influence one is afforded based on a categorization like education or experience (Jain et al., 2016). This could be experience, skill level, or social capital in high school sport. One's status is proportional to the ability to express oneself, particularly in interactions with others, where status becomes a mediating factor. Clark

(2020) described the ability to challenge the status quo as the fourth stage of psychological safety. In this stage, one can speak the truth without fear of retribution.

Psychologically safe teams communicate in ways that help them develop shared goals better, improve their understanding of individual roles, and share knowledge of mental models (Clark, 2020). In organizations, psychological safety increases voice behavior among employees and reduces silent behaviors. Teams that score high on identity measures are more likely to create environments where individuals are less fearful of repercussions for appearing incompetent or offering different opinions. They are also less afraid to make mistakes or try something new. Thus, cultivating a shared sense of "we" and "us" is related to psychological safety. Newman et al. (2017) noted that psychological safety benefits team members to offer honest feedback, collaborate, voice opinions, and experiment with new ideas to existing approaches.

Deter & Burris (2007) found that when workers needed to speak up, they missed opportunities to improve workplace practices and processes. Dissent is another word that is used interchangeably when speaking up in literature. Dissent has been defined as a form of employee voice and resistance (Kassing, 2011). Kassing (1998) identified three types of dissent: upward dissent, expressed to managers or people up the organizational hierarchy; lateral dissent, shared with peers; and displaced dissent, expressed to people outside the organization, like family or friends. Upward dissent is the most practical way to express disagreement in organizations and is a sign of healthy organizational culture (Kassing, 2011; Kassing & Kava, 2013). Lateral dissent is less effective and can contribute to unfavorable cultural climates.

Speaking up aids in upward communication, promoting improved processes, and warning of existing practices that may harm organizations (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). In medicine, Jain et al. (2016) found that nurses are lower in status than physicians withheld information regarding diagnosis and treatment because they felt unsafe in medical malpractice situations. Recent research has shown that when groups or teams speak up, it has more influence than individuals alone (Frazier & Bowler, 2015). Morrison (2011) suggested two speaking-up dimensions: voice safety and voice efficacy. The first refers to a speaker's belief that they will be safe and that speaking up is not a threat. The second dimension refers to their belief that speaking up will have a productive impact.

Cranmer and Buckner (2017) suggested that the well-defined hierarchical structuring of high school athletic teams may impact the ability of athletes to speak up. Reasons for this structuring included power disparities between adult coaches and adolescent athletes, team depth charts, and multiple levels of play. They found that starters were likelier than non-starters to voice vertical dissent and that this status was more influential than the perceived player-coach relationship status.

Athletes do not voice vertical dissent because they fear being labeled by coaches if they express dissent. 66% of athletes believed negative consequences would likely result from reporting bullying (Cranmer & Buckner, 2017). This fear of labeling makes them vulnerable to losing playing time and attention and strained relationships (Cranmer & Buckner, 2017). When athletes speak up, it is usually associated with strong peer relationships, which provide security and assurance that the player has the support of others. Cranmer and Buckner (2017) suggest that it is crucial to cultivate a social

environment where high school student-athletes form multiple quality relationships across organizational hierarchies. Student-athletes were more likely to voice their disagreements on team policies, playing time, and practices to teammates horizontally when they had poorer relationships with their coaches.

Relationships

Newman et al.'s (2017) review of psychological safety identified relationship networks as an antecedent to developing psychological safety. Supportive practices and relationships foster psychological safety and influence learning, performance, innovation, and creativity. As a psycho-social construct, psychological safety benefits from a relational focus instead of an interpersonal one. In addition, Leo et al. (2020) noted that sport teams require ongoing effective interactions among group members to facilitate team functioning. Cranmer and Buckner (2016) reported that to promote functional patterns of athlete dissent, coaches need to build quality relationships with athletes and climates that facilitate cohesion among athletes.

Creativity

Student-athletes must learn to regulate when to push and when to back off, but they must also learn how to meet the changing demands of their sport through creative modes. Oldham and Cummings (1996) defined creativity as generating useful or novel ideas. Creativity has two pathways: individual members' creativity and teams' creative performance (Hu et al., 2018). In sport, individual creativity research utilizes informational processing models of cognition that focus on tactical creativity. Researchers have examined how those novel ideas are reached by evaluating diverse opinions (Harvey & Kou, 2013). Menmert and Roca (2019) stated that creativity is a

crucial attribute for athletes because it allows athletes to meet the demands of their sport while making it more difficult for opponents to predict what they will do next. As team members feel higher levels of psychological safety, they are more likely to explore problem-solving to move projects forward individually and in teams.

Most studies of athletes and creativity have isolated the importance of cognitive processes (Memmert & Roca, 2019). One model of tactical creativity in sport emphasizes the development of the 7 D's: deliberate play, dimension games, diversification, deliberate memory, deliberate coaching, deliberate motivation, and deliberate practice (Memmert, 2015).

Even though this model focuses on individual development, it is easy to see how different interactions at multiple levels and psychological safety connect. Deliberate practice, for instance, requires that athletes identify a particular skill purposefully and systematically (Memmert, 2015). Ideally, an athlete would have an identified aspect you were trying to improve based on communication and feedback from a coach or peer. The athlete would need to feel safe enough to single out that aspect and put in the effort necessary to alter their current level of performance. They may also need to work on the element with others and under the instruction of others (Memmert, 2015). These skills work in collaboration because student-athletes live within a complex system.

Montouri and Purser (1997) suggested that cultural, methodological, and epistemological factors have shaped our knowledge of creativity, emphasizing literature from individualistic cultures. Glaveanu et al. (2019) described that creativity needs to be conceptualized as an embodied, multi-dimensional, culturally mediated, relational dynamic that is situated against other features. Vaughan et al. (2019) described the

challenge of developing creativity to enhance human potential as a social-ecological issue due to the number of interactions between people and environments that constitute human development, athletic skill, and creative moments. The authors argue that creativity in sport is not an individual accomplishment but rather co-created within an athlete-environment system.

Vaughan et al. (2019) suggested that the first step in understanding athlete creativity is cultivating a depth of understanding of culture and context alongside a nuanced appreciation of athlete-environment independence. To do this, they suggest looking at creativity in sport through a social-ecological lens because athlete creativity emerges from deeply contextualized athletic environments. The difficulty with creating learning environments in a sport that promotes creativity is the need to continuously calibrate socio-cultural variables that can intensify or reduce creative moments in specific contexts, suggesting that coaches need to attune themselves to their team's needs.

Newman et al. (2017) highlighted how perceptions of psychological safety were positively linked to creative thinking and risk-taking. Specifically, the review highlighted team-level perceptions of psychological safety that were positively related to innovation in research and design teams, manufacturing innovation, and knowledge creation. Tran (2020) found a positive relationship between coach humility and player creativity via knowledge sharing. Creativity requires people to be open to their problems, share ideas, learn from others, and be capable of honest evaluation (Hu et al., 2018).

Vulnerability

Team environments often make expressions of help-seeking and vulnerability difficult due to the stigma of reaching out. As a result, athletes mask stress, burnout, and

mental health concerns. Vulnerability is usually regarded as the state of being exposed or threatened. Still, it has also emerged recently in sport psychology literature as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure that led to growth. When individuals feel psychologically unsafe in their team, they will be reluctant to demonstrate their vulnerabilities even if it benefits the team. They believe it puts them at risk of appearing incompetent or weak to others (Edmondson, 1999; Haslem et al., 2020).

Mane (2019) found that vulnerability predicted psychological safety in groups. When coaches disclose their vulnerability, it encourages team members to willingly share their thoughts and feelings and communicate more relevant and complete information about concerns than without such disclosure. Hagglund et al. (2020) proposed a new two-part definition of vulnerability for sport and performance that highlights first the ability to accept and connect with all of one's feelings with compassion and, secondly, the courage and capacity to share experiences, seek support, and know when to share, with whom and to what extent. One concern with vulnerability is its relationship with identity. Wakefield et al. (2019) argued that strongly identified individuals tend to adhere to group norms even if they promote risky behavior or behavior that increases individuals' vulnerability.

Section Summary

Psychological safety supports conditions for positive performance and well-being outcomes (Leaders, 2021). It pushes team members' comfort zones and sparks meaningful development. Requirements for psychological safety encourage team members to display a genuine interest in their teammates, have positive intentions for one another, and offer shared respect for each other's competency (Newman et al., 2017). The following section will explore literature related to team culture in sport.

Athlete Well-Being

This section explores what athlete well-being means and how it connects to mental health and performance. It differentiates between flourishing, thriving, and mattering while introducing the concepts of athletic identity and burnout. This section also briefly covers the role of relationships in supporting student-athlete well-being.

Well-Being in Sport

One challenge for athletes is protecting and stimulating personal well-being in a performance context (Lundqvist & Sandin, 2014). Well-being is often seen as a luxury in athletic teams. Athletes responding to an Australian Institute of Sport (2020) survey described how well-being is viewed as an addition to sport, not an inherent aspect that supports and drives optimal performance. Study participants referenced discontinuing well-being culture and initiatives once demands intensified or a conflict between performance and well-being was generated.

Sport cultures have traditionally followed corporate models to create systematic approaches to winning (Westerbeek & Hahn, 2013). However, these approaches can dehumanize individuals. Supporting an athlete's humanness should not be contrary to performance excellence but complementary since personal well-being leads to performance excellence (Miller & Kerr, 2012). Adopting humanizing behaviors is linked to greater athlete well-being and performance success while dehumanizing behaviors have not been linked to success (Christoff, 2014).

Brady (2022) suggests that well-being is fundamental to health, developmental progress, and performance outcomes, so it is susceptible to being solely a performance variable in sport. As a result, people more charged with athlete care may need more

familiarity with the multiple demands that impact athlete well-being. Positive emotions and well-being are likely to play a much more significant role in successful sport performance than previously recognized (McCarty, 2011; Ruiz & Rabozza, 2022). Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) found that those with higher levels of well-being also had higher motivation to set new goals.

Athletic Identity

In 2019, Gianluigi Buffon, then 41 years old, penned a Letter to My Younger Self for The Player's Tribune. Buffon addressed the letter to his 17-year-old self, warning him how he would eventually lose himself to his sport and forget who he was. This loss of self, he writes, will lead Buffon into depression. He shared how he needed a balance between being a fearless footballer and a curious human, writing that:

> A fearless person can easily forget that they have a mind. If you live your life in a nihilistic way, thinking only about football, your soul will start to wither. Eventually, you will become so depressed that you won't even want to leave your bed (Buffon, 2019, p.1).

He described the importance of looking for inspiration in things outside of football to avoid deterioration into the robotic state that began to plague him in his mid-twenties when he was at the height of his game and fame. Buffon described that he began to center his athletic narrative at 12 after watching Cameroon in the 1990 World Cup. For him, being an athlete required a singular focus and caused him to lose touch with his soul. Buffon is not alone in creating a dichotomy between person and athlete; this process is made more difficult during high school due to developmental age.

Athletic Identity Formation

With the increase of focus on student-athlete well-being, it is vital to understand the role of self-perceptions or athletic identity development in sport (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017; Newton et al., 2020). Athletic identity serves as a social role and a framework for understanding (Brewer et al., 1993).

Identity develops mainly during adolescence, and optimal development is most likely when individuals explore diverse roles, social connections, and activities (Super, 1980; Watson et al., 2021). Through exploration, an individual can identify values, interests, and skills that may interest them moving forward (Watson et al., 2013). This period of exploration also offers opportunities to develop coping skills and efficacy, which can help them transition into adulthood (Brewer & Pettipas, 2017). However, student-athletes can prioritize a sport, so they need to fully engage in the exploration process (Pettipas et al., 2013).

Erickson (1968) described the importance of developing one's social identity during late childhood and adolescence. Part of this development comes from an expansion of social networks beyond family. The sport team environment provides the requisite developmental connection for opportunities to socially bond, identify with peers, and engage in personal growth and development and is often associated with positive behavioral outcomes (Bruner et al., 2017; Guest & Schneider, 2003).

Athletes maintain their athletic identity through personal and social factors (Stephan & Brewer, 2007). Individual factors include lifestyle and appearance, while social factors include supportive structures that enable training and recognition from others. Newton et al. (2020) found that personality and athletic identities become

interwoven over time and that athletic identity that athletic identities are an intimate part

of an athlete's self. Competition and practice help to reinforce athletic identity.

Student-athletes also feel they must choose between being athletes or students with

their teachers and other students in their classes (Watson et al., 2021). Student-athletes

are at their athletic peak when the risk of developing mental health problems is high

(Watson et al., 2021). Watson et al. (2021) stated that the significant dilemma over

identifying as an athlete is that it gives little opportunity to explore other aspects of the

self, which can create one-dimensional individuals. Social Identity is associated with

increased self-worth, commitment, perceived effort, and greater team cohesion (Burner et

al., 2014; Martin et al., 2015; Bruner et al., 2017).

A stronger athletic identity equates to higher performance outcomes and

enjoyment in sport (Edison et al., 2021). However, identity comes at a price, as a stronger

athletic identity contributes to lower levels of help-seeking and higher levels of gender

role conflict and over-conformity to athlete ethos (Edison et al., 2021). This over-valuing

of sport ethos can cause one to push boundaries to keep one's identity or continue

participating in sport, like using performance-enhancing substances or playing through

injury (Coakley, 2004; Coker-Cranney, 2017; Edison et al., 2021). Buffon described how

this ethos caused him to portray himself as a strong man and a movie character, and this

portrayal caused him to lock his emotions in a cellar to the detriment of his soul (Buffon,

2019).

Athletic identity can be a double-edged sword. At times, it helps an athlete train

harder or take on challenges; at others, it isolates and restricts the definition of what it

means for the athlete to be themselves. Buffon's letter is an essential reminder for all

athletes about athletic identity's role in human functioning and well-being. He writes:

> If you are not taking care of your soul and looking for inspiration in things outside
>
> of football, you will deteriorate. I would like to be much more curious about the
>
> world around you when you are still young. You will save yourself, and
>
> especially your family, many heartaches. (Buffon, 2019, p.1)

Learning how to fit sport participation into one's narrative is not an isolated

process but rather one that relies on an environment that allows them to feel safe enough

to make interpersonal changes. If we recognize that we grow through relationships, we

must understand how we show up in those relationships.

Mental Health

Peak competitive years for elite athletes tend to overlap with the peak age to risk

the onset of mental disorders (Sabato et al., 2016; Gulliver et al., 2012). Mental health

concerns often originate during adolescence (Weissman et al., 1999). The number of

adolescents experiencing high levels of depressive symptoms is 23% - 45 % (Jewett et

al., 2014). Jewett et al. (2014) argue that because of the tendency of poor mental health to

track into adulthood, it is necessary to find proactive support that can help adolescents.

Beamish and Ritchie (2006) found that the longer one pursues and closes in on athletic

success, the harder it is to distinguish between health and pathology.

The concern for athlete mental health has proliferated over the last decade due to

the high prevalence of mental health issues among elite athletes, the belief that sport

culture may contribute to a stigma against help-seeking behavior, and that sport

organizations view that mental health concerns only arise in weak athletes (Lundqvist &

Andersson, 2021). Lundqvist and Andersson (2021) suggest that elite sports should

mirror society's mental health literacy and awareness needs.

Common themes in athlete mental health research suggest that athletic

environments can be reactive and inconsistent, stigmatizing, lacking in confidentiality

parameters, and providing insufficient resources (AIS, 2020). Athletes view their systems

as reactive and driven by crises instead of proactive and preventative. This inconsistency

derives from how athletes receive support at differing levels. Purcell et al. (2019)

suggested a need to understand the ecological system the athlete participates in when

considering interventions and supports for mental health.

Research suggests that supportive coaches who promote autonomy within the

developmental environment help foster higher levels of well-being in their athletes (Neil

et al., 2018). The ability to influence a healthy motivational climate is linked to greater

well-being through self-worth and growth.

Relationships & Mattering

Relationships can provide a solid social scaffold that can help alleviate symptoms

of stress for the athlete associated with lows of competition, injury, and performance

demands (Burns et al., 2019). Education for coaches and support staff may be needed to

help them support their well-being (Burns et al., 2019). Creating supportive interpersonal

relationships is not a passive process but a dynamic interplay that evolves and grows as

the athlete moves along the developmental pathway (Burns et al., 2019). Sauvé et al.

(2021) recommended that sports organizations focus on fostering interpersonal

connectivity within the athlete's environment, establishing longer-term training plans that

are effectively communicated with athletes, and exploring opportunities to solicit and integrate athletes into decision-making.

Mattering to others is a developmental aspect of how our self-concept evolves through interpersonal relationships (Elliot et al., 2004). Elliot (2009) defines mattering as the perception that we are a significant part of the world around us. In line with Relational Cultural Theory, mattering to others influences how our self-concept evolves through interpersonal relationships. For teens, mattering is crucial for healthy development. The more teens feel like they matter, the better their academic records and engagement in school, the higher their levels of participation in community events, and the lower the risk of suicide (Flett, 2018). In Watson et al.'s (2021) study of 11 college student-athletes, they found that most athletes believe sport makes them feel better about themselves, potentially due to the role sport participation plays in supporting the community.

When the culture is rewarding, affirming, and supportive, people can derive a significant meaning of mattering related to greater autonomy, life satisfaction, physical health, and overall well-being (Flett, 2018). When absent, people suffer and inflict pain on themselves and others, including their teammates (Prilleltensky, 2019).

Flourishing & Thriving

Flourishing is the state of mental health in which an individual has positive feelings and functioning in life (Keys, 2002). Ashfield et al. (2012) explained that flourishing occurs internally regardless of athletic performance. For athletes, flourishing consists of positive feelings and affective states and fulfillment of areas of perceived importance. Maintaining relationships influences the flourishing experience and connects

meaningful relationships to happiness and psychological well-being (Demir, 2010). Research has shown that family and friends can support an athlete. In contrast, a positive player-coach relationship can support well-being and performance through athletic demands, performance outcomes, athlete training schedules, and decision-making (Becker, 2009).

Brown et al. (2017) defined thriving as the collective experience of development and success. The authors noted that this definition offered a holistic understanding of the term. Galli & Reel (2012) suggest that thriving in sports may change life philosophy through enhanced appreciation of one's narrative through improved sport functioning and interpersonal relationships through increased closeness to others. Brown et al. (2018) found that athletes view thriving as a sustained high level of performance, optimistic outlook, focused, in control, experiencing holistic development, and having a sense of belonging. Brown et al. (2018) described how thriving was experienced as an upward progression and may include experiencing holistic growth and a sense of belonging.

Thriving differs from flourishing in that it concerns social and emotional well-being and physical wellness (Brown et al., 2018). Additionally, Sarkar and Fletcher (2014) found that thriving encapsulates performance and not just one's subjective well-being. Subjective well-being refers to how people experience and evaluate their lives and specific domains and activities. The facilitators of thriving can be divided into two categories: personal enablers and contextual enablers. Contextual enablers include support from others in the environment and features of the environment itself. Personal enablers are psychosocial characteristics that create engagement in tasks, maintain hard work, and enable athletes to manage stressors. (Brown et al., 2018).

Burnout

Sport burnout is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of 1) exhaustion in sports, 2) sport devaluation or cynicism towards sport, and 3) feelings of inadequacy as an athlete (Raedeke, 1997; Into et al., 2020). Exhaustion in sport can be physical or emotional and can originate from intense training or competition, among other things. Cynicism is related to a negative feeling towards training or competition. Feelings of inadequacy are linked to a reduced sense of accomplishment and a lack of competence in one's performance (Into et al., 2020).

Sport burnout occurs when the demand of the sport continuously exceeds the athlete's resources. Sabato et al. (2016) found that it is common for 12-13-year-olds to train 15-20 hours per week in gymnastics or tennis training centers. Sport specialization and overtraining may generate depressive symptomology among elite youth athletes. Intensive and specialized training risk includes adverse psychological stress and premature withdrawal from participation (Sabato, 2016). Early specialization is linked with adverse outcomes for youths, such as increased overuse injuries, burnout, dropout, overtraining, and decreased social development (Ford & Williams, 2017, p. 120).

Scotto di Luzio et al. (2018) examined the relationship between the sport and a sense of community, athlete burnout, engagement, and motivation in adolescent athletes. A total of 250 teenage athletes were involved in the study. Athletes' perceptions of burnout, engagement, and motivation differed based on how strongly they felt connected to their sport community. Strong connections to the community positively correlated with well-being and an absence of burnout (Scotto di Luzio et al., 2018)

Section Summary

Athletes' well-being is central to showing up in the world and can help them participate fully. Evidence shows that well-being does support performance outcomes. Diener et al. (2018) found that many outcomes associated with well-being depend on culture and values within the environment in which people reside. With many athletes identifying with their teams as a culture, it is crucial to understand how those environments impact well-being.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of this study's three guiding theories: Holistic Ecological Approach, Relational Cultural Theory, and Self-Determination Theory. This overview also highlighted how these three are connected. Then, I reviewed factors influencing student-athletes and coaches at multiple ecological levels. This account also included a review of psychological safety, which has proven critical at various levels. Starting from the outside and working in, I began with a description of sports culture that described the sports-industrial complex, gender, and the great sports myth. The next level of team leadership is defined as coach and player leadership. The team culture section centered on team building, social identity, care, and belonging, while the individual well-being section focused on athletic identity, mental health, relationships, mattering, and thriving. Psychological safety was also emphasized because of its relevance at multiple levels of the student-athlete experience. Chapter 3 describes the rationale for using grounded theory while providing background on the sampling, data collection, and data analysis. The participant coaches are also introduced.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

This research was guided by my desire to learn more about how high school sports can be transformative for student-athletes. Due to traditional hierarchal power structures, coaches significantly influence the student-athlete experience. Consequently, coaches serve as gatekeepers to the student-athlete experience through how they run and organize their teams.

This section covers the rationale for taking a constructive approach based on wanting to learn from the coaches' beliefs and experiences. The constructive approach connects to the decision to use a grounded theory methodology. I entered this study without a hypothesis and wanted to learn from the coaches, in their own words, how they understood the relationship between performance and well-being. This chapter describes the sampling method and the iterative process of collecting and analyzing data, as well as introduces the participant coaches.

Epistemological Stance

As mentioned in the introduction, this research used a constructivist approach. Constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek to understand their life and work world and that meanings form through interaction with others and historical and cultural norms in individuals' lives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Gergen (1985, p. 266) wrote that constructivism seeks to understand "common forms of understanding as they now exist as they have existed in prior historical periods, and as they may exist shall creative attention be so directed." This research intended to hear the experiences and beliefs of the coach

participants so that creative attention could be directed at supporting student-athlete well-being.

Constructivism suggests that people are active in building and constructing their understanding through social interactions with their environment. This understanding helps to connect the three theories guiding this proposal: Holistic Ecological Approach, focusing on development via the environment; Relational Cultural Theory, which emphasizes growth through relationships within those environments; and Self-Determination Theory, which focuses on individual motivations. Since these individual perceptions are subjective due to their intrapersonal nature, it is impossible to gain an unbiased view of the world (Wergin et al., 2018). Gergen (1996, p. 13) stated that constructivism is "closely tied to cultural life, inviting passionate engagement; linking intellectual work with change-oriented practices." These constructivist epistemological assumptions guide how I conceptualized this research by learning from coaches about their experiences.

A grounded theory recognizes multiple biased perspectives of reality to achieve a realistic and representative data view (Wergin et al., 2018). A constructivist grounded theory rejects notions of emergence and objectivity and focuses on constructing meaning through the researcher's and participant's interaction (Annells, 1997; Charmaz, 2006; Weed, 2009). Charmaz (2000, p. 524) supported constructivist grounded theory because "data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the 'discovered' reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts". A grounded theory aligns with my constructivist stance because it honors people's stories and experiences while allowing me to engage in meaning-making.

Research Design

This study aimed to understand coaches' lived experiences and perceptions of how team environments contributed to supporting student-athlete well-being and performance. Driven by this purpose and the limited empirical research exploring topics like psychological safety and mattering in team sport, a constructivist grounded theory methodology framed the collection and data analysis. Constructivist grounded theory helps inductively understand a social process, with knowledge constructed from participant experiences (Patton, 2002). It uses an inductive approach grounded in participant experience and words while the researcher and the participants build the emerging theory (Melvin & Ginsberg, 2018). Grounded theory studies begin with open questions, and the researcher learns from the participants how they make sense of the world and are products of an iterative process where data collection, coding, and analysis happen simultaneously and recursively, not as discrete steps that lead to one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Sbaraini et al., 2011).

Role of Researcher/Reflexivity

Bryant and Charmaz (2010) noted that constructivist grounded theory considers participant and researcher standpoints and emphasizes reflexivity and pragmatism. The methods we choose influence "what we see; what we bring to the study influences what we can see" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 27).

To conduct this research transparently, I needed to formally recognize and grapple with what I bring to this study regarding identifications, locations, experiences, and beliefs. I am a white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual male who fulfills the role of husband, father, middle-class professional, educator, counselor, coach, and doctoral

student. I am also a former athlete with a kaleidoscope of positive and negative sports

experiences that continue to influence me beyond the playing field. In this controlled

environment, I experienced success and failure, formed relationships, suffered physical

injuries, and found sanctuary. I anticipated that these experiences influenced my research

process. I was cautious not to fall victim to belief in the great sports myth and the benefits

of hegemonic masculinity that are often idealized in sports cultures. I did not want to

miss or underappreciate the challenges facing specific populations, including athletes

identifying as female, non-binary, BIPOC, or lower socioeconomic status, and those who

play non-traditional or individual sports.

Sport significantly impacted my social-emotional development and helped form

how I see the world. My professional journey continues this connection through my

private mental skills practice working with coaches and athletes and as a wellness

director at a prep school where I collaborate with the athletics department. These

professional experiences, plus recent examples drawn from elite sports and current

academic research, provide the impetus for exploring this topic in more depth.

I used memo writing to help reflect on how this impacts the interview questions,

the coding, the analysis, and the relationships towards and with participants. Lempert

(2007) noted that an essential component of grounded theory research is writing memos.

This reflection process can help limit the negative impact of power imbalance (Levitt,

2021). Flick (2018, p. 27) suggests that continuously writing about research is a

prerequisite for reflexivity about the study, participants, data, findings, and outcomes.

Sampling Strategy

Grounded theory usually starts with purposeful sampling and later uses theoretical sampling to select participants who can best contribute to the developing theory (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Due to the iterative nature of the grounded theory process, theory construction occurs in parallel with data collection and analyses. Along with the emerging theoretical concepts, theoretical sampling of new participants also occurs (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling provides the initial data that the researcher analyses. This initial purposive sampling directs the collection and generation of data that help answer the research question (Tie et al., 2019). The researcher collects, codes, and analyses this initial data before further data collection occurs. Grounded theory researchers select participants due to their relevance to the research topic and not to construct a statistically representative sample of the general population (Flick, 2018). The participants chosen for the purposeful sampling step met the following criteria: a) be a high school head coach, b) coach a team sport, and c) coach a team within New England. I provided a copy of the recruitment flyer in Appendix B.

Theoretical Sampling

The theoretical sampling allows the researcher to follow leads in the data by sampling new participants or material that provides relevant information (Tie, 2019). Theoretical sampling helps "identify and follow clues from the analysis, fill gaps, clarify uncertainties, check hunches and test interpretations as the study progresses" (Tie, 2019, p. 5). Charmaz (2000) stated that theoretical sampling aims not to increase the size of the original sample but rather to refine ideas. Weed (2009) noted that a standard error in

applying theoretical sampling is the perception that it simply refers to a process where the analysis begins once the first data has been collected and proceeds concurrently with data collection.

Consistently applying theoretical sampling helps researchers to decide from the progress of analysis whom or which groups to include next to their sample (Flick, 2018, p. 24). Charmaz (2014) argued that the researcher does not use theoretical sampling to represent a population or to increase the generalizability of the results but rather to theory development. She suggests that the purposes of theoretical sampling are to delineate the properties of a category, check hunches about categories, saturate the properties of a category, distinguish between categories, clarify relationships between emerging categories, and identify variation in the process (Charmaz, 2014). I continued theoretical sampling until theoretical saturation occurred. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) define saturation as when new data neither provides new properties of a category nor further insights into the theory.

Participants

All but one of the participants currently serves as a head coach, with one stepping away the previous year. Five of the coaches were female, and three were persons of color. Ten of the Thirteen coaches were in their 30s-40s. Six coaches had experience coaching both male and female athletes. On average, they had been head coaches for 10.4 years. Four coached at private/independent schools and ten at public schools. One public school is a vocational school. Six public school coaches identified their schools as suburban, one urban, one as high-density suburb, and two as rural.

Table 1

Demographic Descriptions of Coaches

Coach	Description
Audrey	White female in her 30s. She coaches girls' lacrosse at an independent school. She has been a head coach for six years.
Bill	White male in his 40s. He coaches boys' basketball at a suburban public school. He has been a head coach for 12 years.
Calvin	Black male in his 30s. He coaches girls' basketball at an urban public school. He has coached for 18 years and been a head coach for 9 years
Chris	White male in his 50's. He coaches boys' hockey at a suburban public school. He has coached for 20 years and been a head coach for 12 years.
Desmond	Black male in his 40s. He coaches football at an independent prep school. He began coaching right after college and has coached at multiple levels.
Jacob	White male in his 30s. He coaches girls' and boys' volleyball at a high-density suburb public school. He has been a head coach for seven years.
John	White male in his 30s. He coaches football and track and field at a suburban vocational school. He has been coaching for 14 years and has been a head coach for five years.
Joseph	White male in his 70s. He coaches football at a rural public school. He has been coaching for over 40 years.
Lisa	Black female in her 30s. She coached hockey at a suburban public school. She coached for 10 years.

Melissa	White female in her 20s. She coaches volleyball at a rural public school. She has coached for 7 years and has been a head coach for 3 years.
Olivia	White female in her 30s. She coaches field hockey at an independent suburban school. She has been a head coach for five years.
Rebecca	White female in her 40s. She coaches boys and girls track at a suburban public school. She has been a head coach for 12 years.
Sean	White male in his 40s. He coaches girls' soccer at a rural private school. He has been coaching for 14 years.

Data Generation

I iteratively performed data collection, generation, and analysis in constructivist grounded theory, using constant comparison to inform and refine future sampling and data analysis. This process continues until theoretical saturation occurs. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, and I transcribed them using MAXQDA. I conducted two pilot interviews to improve the interview guide's focus, content, and clarity. The guide continued to be adjusted with each phase to reflect participant insight. I checked the transcription against the recording to ensure validity and better immerse myself in the data before coding.

Interviews should be a "gently guided one-sided conversation that explores research participants' perspective on their personal experience with the research topic" (Charmaz, 2014, p.56). Charmaz outlined several vital characteristics for conducting interviews: selecting research participants with first-hand experience of the research topic and conducting an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and situations using open-ended questions. Researchers should focus on obtaining objective, detailed

responses emphasizing the research participants' perspective, meaning, and experience.

Lastly, researchers should follow up on "unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints, implicit

views, and accounts of action (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56).

I interviewed 13 participants, which aligns with Levitt et al.'s (2017) finding that

13 participants comprise the average number. The first 3 participants were selected using

purposeful sampling, and the rest using theoretical sampling. Cruickshanks et al. (2015)

suggested that the researcher interview the final two participants to obtain perceptions of

the developed model and refine the theory. Feedback in these final interviews focused on

practicality and their truth.

Hermans (2004) suggests that researchers should refrain from trying to rediscover

theoretical concepts but rather the interviewee's insights and experiences. Flick (2018)

recommends that the researcher avoid reproducing research questions but use everyday

language devoid of scientific terminology. The interview protocol evolved due to

reflection from the pilot study, discussions with peers and colleagues, and Ulrich's (1999)

critical points for evaluating interview questions.

The interview protocol emerged from the key components described in my

literature review. Specifically, I drew from interview guides provided by Behan (2016),

Pychyl et al. (2022), Remtulla et al. (2021), and Suave et al. (2022). These interview

guides provided examples of creating open-ended questions, pacing interview questions,

and simplifying language.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory coding is a generic term that covers different approaches that

have developed over the years (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz's constructivist approach has

been the prominent version for the past two decades and was used to guide this research

(Flick, 2018). Charmaz (2014, pg. 111) suggests labeling data segments that summarize

and account for the segments they refer to using codes. According to Charmaz (2006),

coding provides a pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory

to explain the data. Charmaz's approach includes three ways of coding: initial, focused,

and theoretical (Flick, 2018).

Initial Coding

I performed line-by-line open coding to minimize the influence of personal bias

and promote more openness in reading the data (Flick, 2018). A constant comparative

method is applied and should direct the coding as an attitude (Flick, 2018, p. 70).

According to Weed (2009), the process of constant comparison holds together the

iterative analytical process in grounded theory. This process starts with comparing data

and data, then data and codes, then between codes and concepts, and then concepts and

literature (Weed, 2009). Wergin et al. (2018) recommended constantly comparing new

data to previously developed concept categories and relationships between categories.

Focused Coding

The second step in Charmaz's approach is called focused coding. In this step, I

discovered the most frequent initial codes that make the most analytical sense (Flick,

2018). Then, I attempted to move beyond induction and deduction to include the concept

of abduction. Abduction occurs when the researcher observes an unexplainable or

surprising finding from inductive data (Flick, 2018). Abduction emphasizes the role of

the researcher in the analysis process and what they see, discover, and link together

(Charmaz, 2008).

Theoretical Coding

The last step of theoretical codes helped me clarify and sharpen the analysis and was used to impose a forced framework (Charmaz, 2014). In creating theoretical codes, Charmaz recommends "using concepts from existing literature and existing theories and different types of analytic logic from pre-existing theories" (Flick, 2018, p. 71). MAXQDA was used for open coding to establish concepts and categories with distinct core properties and dimensions.

Memo-writing

As noted briefly in the reflexivity section, memo-writing helped me structure my reflexive self-awareness, create a space for theoretical reflection, support the indexing of rationale and steps in the analysis, and offer opportunities for reasoning on coding decisions (Levitt, 2021). Three common forms of memoing are theoretical, operational, and coding. Theoretical memoing provides a space to reflect on assumptions, expectations, and hopes for analysis (Levitt, 2021). Memoing allowed me to keep track of my decision-making during the research. I used coding memoing to help create categories and labels within data (Levitt, 2021).

Saturation refers to the point in analysis when the addition of new data no longer generates new categories. Charmaz (2006) argues that saturation is reached when gathering new data no longer sparks new theoretical insights or extends the concept. Levitt (2021) wrote that a distinguishing feature of grounded theory is developing a hierarchical structure of categories that support an emerging theory. This structure emerges through constant comparison, allowing a theory to emerge from organizing initial experiences into higher-order categories that reflect shared experiences across

initial categories (Levitt, 2021). This structure offered me clarity on how central findings

emerged. After organizing most ideas into categories, I reviewed the hierarchal structure.

This process corresponded with the first sign of saturation. (Levitt, 2021).

Validity Strategies

Charmaz (2014) provides a set of criteria to adhere to when conducting grounded

theory research to increase validity. These criteria include credibility, originality,

resonance, and usefulness. Credibility reflects collecting sufficient data, systematically

comparing, and generating links between data and arguments. To encourage credibility, I

shared my research purpose and identity position to form a relationship with the

participants. Originality measures the development of new categories, insights, social and

theoretical significance, and challenges to existing ideas. Resonance refers to sense-

making for participants, while usefulness refers to transferability to contributing to a

better world (Flick, 2018, p. 103). To help meet these criteria, I cross-checked each

transcript to the original recording, was flexible and open in the interview process, and

worked closely with my committee chair to ensure my use of best practices.

I created meaning units to help generate a better understanding of the data.

Meaning units are initial responses drawn from the original interviews or texts, and each

provides a preliminary answer to the question of a study (Levitt, 2021, p.51). Levitt

(2021) recommends that researchers structure these unit labels into sentences or sentence

fragments to capture best the processes, functions, and contexts described in the unit titles

(Levitt, 2021). Levitt stated that using meaning units is more efficient, focuses on the

research question, and allows for a more natural, unstructured understanding. The

contrast between creating meaning units and initial coding practices allowed me to look

at the material through multiple lenses and attempt to add to the validity of being a sole researcher.

Ethical Issues

I ensured participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw anytime. Participants will remain anonymous, and their confidentiality will be protected. All responses were anonymized before analysis and were not subject to future data sharing. I was also mindful of my role as a researcher rather than a clinician. As some of the responses elicited powerful `emotions from coaches, I attempted to bring out the experiences and knowledge of the coaches rather than helping them make sense of them. I also had available the name of a local counselor for each coach to talk to if they felt it necessary following the interview. I did not interview any coaches with whom I work personally.

Multicultural, Diversity, or Social Justice Issues

I attempted to obtain a diverse sample of coaches based on ethnicity, race, gender, and sex for this research. I also tried to have diversity in the population of players coached. Levitt (2021) stated that researchers in grounded theory studies only seek to recruit some forms of diversity. For this research, I was most interested in exploring concepts of power and identity that impact student-athlete growth within their environments and relationships, so I interviewed coaches who provided a range of experiences. Using Zoom helped make the interview process more accessible. It was beneficial to receive feedback on my interview guide from others to ensure my questions are inclusive.

Pilot

Two pilot interviews were conducted with high school coaches to assess questions in the interview protocol and to have more practice in conducting semi-structured interviews. Several questions were removed, adjusted, or added between the two. Interviews. Following the second interview, I refined the questions based on discussions with peers, post-interview discussions with pilot participants, and reviewing Ulrich's guide for interview questions. After the pilot studies, theoretical coding revealed themes I had not anticipated, including fun, parental involvement, and hierarchy.

Chapter Summary

This chapter describes the rationale and process of performing this grounded theory study. Fourteen coaches from New England high schools participated in semi-structured interviews via ZOOM. I transcribed those interviews and coded them using MAXQDA. I used grounded theory methodology for coding. Grounded theory allowed me to center the coaches' thoughts and experiences to create a new understanding of how they viewed team culture and the relationship between performance and well-being. A constructivist grounded theory process aligned with the guiding theories supports the idea that we build our understanding through connection with others.

The first three interviews were subject to open coding of narrative descriptions, grouped into categories via axial coding. I compared those codes with codes that emerged from follow-up interviews. I repeated these steps until data saturation occurred. Through an iterative data collection and analysis process using semi-structured interviews, I identified common themes built off previous coaching research. Those themes are presented in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5. In addition, this chapter also introduces you to the participants who become the central voices of Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

As described in Chapter One, this study investigates how high school coaches view the team environment's role in performance and well-being outcomes. This chapter will explain how the thirteen participant coaches responded to semi-structured interview questions related to the central research question. I was particularly interested in coaches' views on three main topics: 1) how coaches built team culture, 2) the relationship between performance and well-being, and 3) how coaches believe they can best support student-athletes.

This chapter centers on the rich descriptions these coaches shared in their own words. Three themes emerged from these conversations: coaches' understanding of themselves, how they support their student-athlete development, and how they build healthy team cultures. Coaches understand themselves, dive into how they make meaning of their personal history, and apply it to their work with student-athletes. Supporting student-athlete development touches on how the player-coach relationship can promote or hinder well-being. The last section in this chapter describes the building blocks and detriments of a healthy team culture.

These three themes build off each other because they look through the coaches themselves. They rest as individuals in their ecological system and build relationships and culture. The culture and relationships they help create form the middle layers of the student-athlete's ecological system. The rest of this chapter introduces these themes and their component sections, leveraging the coaches' thoughts and experiences.

Coaches' Understanding of Themselves

This section describes what participants shared about their early experiences with sports, what allowed them to play their best as athletes, reflections on the impact of their coaches, their transition to coaching, and their current coaching philosophy. It provides insight into the coach as an individual within their ecological system, the relationships that influenced them, and how they apply meaning-making from those to support their student-athletes.

Early Experiences with Sport

For each coach, sport has played an essential role in their life. As players and coaches, they have spent significant time and effort devoted to their sport(s). Each coach described how their parents promoted and supported an interest in sports. Five coaches shared that their parents were either high school or youth sports coaches. Those whose parents were not coaches believed their parents encouraged sports as a way for their children to connect to something they cared about. Audrey shared that her parents "really exposed me to a little bit of everything." Sean shared how his father's love of soccer was "part of the fabric of our household." Jacob shared how always being at his father's practices helped drive his desire to play and compete. For many, the connection between sport and parent continues as described by Bill: "It [basketball] defined the relationship with my dad…It continues to define it today." Melissa shared how her mother, a former coach, is a sounding board for issues related to "[team] culture and talking about relationships; she's someone to bounce ideas off of. She's definitely my biggest influence for sure."

The age of the coach noticeably impacted access to youth sports opportunities. The oldest coach, Joseph, shared that he had limited youth sports access until he switched

schools in 7th grade. The second most senior coach interviewed, Chris, shared that his youth sports programs were "at the earliest stages. It wasn't organized at that point". He described how neighborhood dads would get kids together to play. Coaches in their 40s and below all described easy access to sports programming, with the youngest coaches having additional opportunities via club organizations.

What Allowed them to Play Their Best?

Coaches described three buckets of needs that allowed them to play their best as athletes: a strong relationship with the coach, a sense of belonging, and feeling relaxed. All coaches described at least one of these criteria, with most endorsing at least two. Lisa, Melissa, Olivia, and Sean shared that a positive relationship with their coach helped them to play their best. Lisa shared that "it is the connection with the adult in charge. If the adult can establish the relationship and see you in a way that they can pull out your strengths. If I feel like my coach sees that I am good at [sport-specific skills], then that is essential." Olivia described the importance of getting honest feedback: "I didn't see that as a negative; I saw that as a wow, she's taking the time, she cares."

Ten coaches described feeling included and connected to teammates and family as a critical ingredient to playing their best: "having a support system," "faith in my teammates," "if I feel included, feel like you belong, and then you try harder," "environment," "good team with a good bond," "getting energy from my teammates," "being with people you enjoy," "encouragement," and "family support." For Calvin, he noticed a shift in what he needed. In high school, he reflected that he needed to feel connected to friends, but as he got older, he found he did his best when his focus shifted internally and pursued being the best player he could be. Bill, like others, described the

importance of an absence of stress as an ingredient for his best performances: "Just enjoy what it was like going to play because I like to play, not worried about feeling any pressure from other stuff."

Rebecca found my word choice odd in asking her what allowed her to run her best. Below, she describes how running allowed her to destress and be a better version of herself:

> Allow is a weird word like I did running because it was very freeing for me. It relieved stress for me. It helped me get through tough situations, like if I had a bad soccer game. I remember specifically coming home and throwing down my crap and going running because I was angry. So, running just allowed me to process and work through emotions and ultimately get to a point where when I was done with a run, I felt like a better version of myself. So, you know, it really wasn't a competitive thing for me until junior year. And even then, our team wasn't super serious. I mean I was good for our team, but it was still, it was way more fun than intense. And so, you know, nothing quote unquote allowed me to be my best. It was just that I, I was able to do well because I enjoyed it, and it made me feel like a better person when I did it.

Reflections on the Impact of Their Coaches

When I asked coaches to reflect on a person or experience that most informs their coaching, they often described a coach they had in youth, high school, or college sports. They highlighted both positive and negative experiences related to a sense of commitment and having someone who pushed them beyond their perceived limits.

Positive relationships guided nine coaches who felt driven to give back to others the support they had received. Joseph (over 50 years removed from his initial interactions with his coach) described him as "my hero" and how Joseph "zeroed in on being a teacher/coach" because of his coach's impact. Chris shared how one of his coaches had a "huge" and "outsized" influence on him because he appreciated that his coach had such high expectations. Audrey described how one of her coaches was a "huge motivator and really shaped who I am and what I chose to pursue." She credited this relationship with animating how she mentors her student-athletes.

Seven coaches referenced negative relationships as influencing them. Dave mentioned how he experienced a loss of motivation in college after his coach failed to hold his team accountable to the expectations he consistently outlined. Lisa referenced a former coach who "pitted kids against each other" and used derogatory language. The most poignant description came from Calvin, who shared that after graduating high school, he never wanted to touch a basketball again due to his experience with an "old school" coach. The coach used "a ton of microaggressions" towards him, including referring to him as "Bojangles." He also described an incident where he chose to study instead of attending an informal team gathering and found his car kicked in by his teammates. To derive meaning from these negative memories, he shared that "it really made me think a lot…and inform my coaching around what I want my culture to be like. Like how I want to support players and like how what, how I want to hold sports and situate sports for them to be productive members".

A sense of commitment describes the participants' appreciation of their former coaches' preparation, detail orientation, and practice planning. Sean described coaches as

"mediocre soccer guys but well organized and committed." Chris described one coach, whom he remembered fondly, as a "very detailed-oriented guy." Lisa described how she learned the importance of a strong practice plan to positively support the team environment.

Audrey, Chris, Olivia, and Sean described the importance of coaches who pushed them beyond their comfort zones. Chris prefaced his thoughts with the phrase, "It was different in those days," referring to the coaching style he grew up with. Audrey described her coach as positive and driven, saying she "always pushed me to give more to my team and for the people around me" on the field and in school.

Transition to Becoming a Coach

Coaches described multiple pathways to coaching. The four most likely reasons coaches got into the profession were to teach or coach, give back, stay involved with the game, and satisfy the suggestions of others. Audrey, Bill, and Dave described that coaching experiences with younger athletes during high school or college helped form the initial interest in the role. Chris and John shared their desire to support athletes by giving back. Calvin, Jacob, Joseph, Lisa, and Olivia shared that other coaches, athletic directors, or teachers had seen the qualities of a coach in them and encouraged them to get involved. Sean credited coaching with helping him get a foot in the door to teach, which helped him financially. Melissa, Desmond, and Rebecca began coaching to stay involved with their sport. Every coach shared how rewarding or fun it was to have the opportunity to coach their teams and that they derived some meaning from their craft. Personal identity was also important for those interested in the game. At times, it was explicit, as it

was for John, who shared: "It [sport] impacted my identity, and I knew there were other kids like me, so I wanted to impact them the same way."

Audrey, Dave, John, and Sean described how coaching requires a broader focus of attention than playing, alluding to the mindfulness required to observe and understand everyone's roles and needs versus solely focusing on their own. Coaches referred to needing to consider players' physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs within the team and outside while continuously serving as guardians of culture in a way players often dismiss. Bill, Desmond, and Melissa shared that they struggle with being unable to impact the outcome of an event or game like they once could as a player and believe they take losses harder than their players. Multiple coaches shared something similar to Bill, who stated, "I am more invested in the team input and output than our players." Jacob described how he better understands the relationship between skill and desire than he did as a player. He thought, "If you were not good you were not working hard enough." He now recognizes that part of his coaching role is working with players to help them get where they want to be.

Rebecca, a track coach who still competes and has her coach, said that the roles are different but still intertwined. She felt that she was able to talk to her athletes because "I've had this experience, I feel the same way. I do have doubts. I struggle on like five outta seven days when I'm tired, and I don't wanna go. I do worry that I can't hit my paces". She said conversations about this build trust between her and her athletes.

Current Coach Philosophy

This section will share how coaches described their coaching philosophy. One joked that it had been a while since he had been on a job interview, and a few paused

longer than on other questions. Only Joseph provided a philosophy that focused solely on

tactics. However, towards the end of our conversation, while reflecting on the importance

of connecting with his players, he briefly described an interaction with a former student-

athlete who played for him and stopped by to say hello. The player shared how important

Joseph was to him. His sentiments on that experience are represented in the chart below.

This chart illustrates each coach's current philosophy and is followed by reflections on

the experiences and knowledge that inform them.

Table 2

Coach's Current Philosophy

Coach	Philosophy
Audrey	"The first part of my philosophy is discipline; you need to follow the rules and pay attention to the details...The second part that is extremely important to me is team camaraderie and teamwork."
Bill	"Helping guys achieve and try to help set them up for success in life outside of athletics."
Calvin	"Be the coach I wish I had, somebody's who's caring, somebody who listens, somebody who supports, somebody who pushes...my coaching philosophy is really about being a good person and being successful can be synonymous."
Chris	"To be a good teacher and help these kids."
Dave	"Create a competitive environment where student-athletes can grow on and off the court."
Desmond	"It's in the details... there's a ton of minor details that they have to do to be able to do that, that job effectively. But it fits into the larger puzzle of what we're trying to do as a group. You can really take pride in those details and [find] enjoyment."
Jacob	"To empower and give my kids leadership roles within the team."

John	"We try to create great people, we want you to win in life."
Joseph	"Hopefully have a philosophy solid enough that someone will take something positive from it."
Lisa	"We believe in building good kids and if you've got good kids and good athletes, then you will win games."
Melissa	"Mutual respect… I have to respect you as an individual if I expect respect in return."
Olivia	"Always work hard, stay positive, and have fun."
Rebecca	"In a nutshell I want the girls to have fun but I also expect them to work hard."
Sean	"Creating an environment that let's everybody on my team flourish."

When asked to describe areas where they have grown, coaches mentioned social-emotional learning, team culture development, knowledge of generational differences, and relationship building. Many were embarrassed by things they had done or said when they started coaching and were grateful for the ability to learn and grow. Rebecca shared that she is "way more towards where I want to be with student-athletes than I was." Joseph added, "No matter what we do, if we think we know everything, we have already lost. There's always things to learn."

Audrey described a shift in her coaching style that was like others:

There's a lot of player-coach relationships that are authoritarian. I would say the majority of the coaching world is authoritarian, and I have been that coach in the past, but not anymore after coaching girls for this long. It doesn't work like that. They need to feel heard, and they need to feel like you care about them as an individual.

She further stated that the relationship would break if the student-athlete did not feel cared for or heard. In her opinion, this leads to a domino effect with other players

that eventually causes the team to check out. Lisa said players are different from they were 5, 10, 15, or 20 years ago. This development means that coaches must adapt and change. She said that if they do not adjust their coaching style, they will struggle to keep their role no matter how successful they are performance-wise. Olivia shared that she makes sure her team understands that "the field is bigger than the field," meaning that the game is important, but what you take away in life lessons and relationships is essential.

Each of these philosophies points towards a holistic approach to student-athlete development. In our discussion, there was a sense that "process" and continual improvement throughout the year were more valued than winning. Coaches seemed to understand their team's potential performance ceiling, so winning by itself was only sometimes centered, although many coaches shared that they wanted to win and were competitive.

Relationship Between Well-Being and Performance

All coaches said supporting student-athlete well-being was primary and performance secondary, with Rebecca and Calvin being the most adamant. When asked about the relationship between well-being and performance directly, eleven coaches fell into the "it is hand in hand" category, with three using that phrase.

All coaches saw a connection between well-being and performance while expressing the importance of relationship building. A few coaches, like Desmond, shared how they have grown in this area. He stated that early in his coaching career, he "certainly was not equipped to support people." But, like other coaches, he has learned to reach out for support. To Lisa, "a leader is someone who asks for help."

Dave was in the minority, viewing well-being and performance separately. He said:

I think they are two totally different avenues…obviously from a performance standpoint, you want to put the players on the floor that are going to give you the best chance to succeed… I just look at them as totally different things, like as a coach when we're in practice, like I'm coaching your performance, right? Like what you're doing as a human being, like I care about your well-being. But I look at them I guess totally separately.

Chris shared an anecdote highlighting a problem many coaches face at the high school level. Following a down year, a veteran teacher and coach at the school told him, "Now's when you find out if you really love coaching or you just like to win." Chris said he balances not letting people down (winning) and supporting student-athletes. Lisa said, "You have to be willing to sometimes say all right, maybe we aren't going to win this game or win this championship because that's at a cost to student well-being." Desmond said that when he was playing sports, people only cared if you could "produce," in contrast to now, where you need to "form relationships" and understand if a student needs to be pushed with a "kicked in the butt" or supported with an "arm around the shoulder."

Supporting Student-Athlete Development

This study aims to learn from coaches to serve student-athletes better. It should also be noted that, as Melissa stated, being a student-athlete can be challenging. The student-athlete has the opportunity to influence team culture and player-coach relationships, but hierarchical barriers exist due to age, talent level, and leadership role. This section outlines how coaches perceive their impact on student-athletes and the environments they help to create.

Academic Expectations

Every coach shared that it is vital to hold student-athletes to academic standards. They differed, however, in how they managed conflict around academic pressure. Some were more open to students missing a practice to meet the demands of classes, while others were less enthused. Independent of how they felt, most coaches described the need for students to learn how to manage their time or find balance. Chris was one of many coaches who found academic tension to be an opportunity for a teachable moment, mentioning that when a player misses practice for studying, he lets them know about the importance of learning how to manage their time so that they can prepare for what is coming up in their lives.

Lisa and Rebecca shared how their school's emphasis on academics increased pressure on student-athletes. Rebecca referred to her school as "crazy intense." Coaches frequently discussed the importance of finding balance and the need for student-athletes to learn time management skills. Olivia stated, "A successful student-athlete is being responsible and taking on that responsibility to self-advocate." Coaches described how course load, extracurricular activities, family, and community pressures all pulled from the student-athlete experience. Calvin, Lisa, and Melissa explained the importance of relationships with administration, teachers, student-athletes, and parents who can help. Lisa shared, "It's not just about the coach; it's about the whole community. Who are the other adults that can help?"

Sean spoke of the challenge of working with other members of his school community to understand the importance of the opportunities sports create for some students and the commitment they require:

I've, as a coach, have had to convince my colleagues that we need to give them

time and space when they have a competitive club tournament that might yield

results for them in terms of, in terms of getting into college. You know, that might

mean that they, they can't do certain thing in the evenings or on a weekend or

whatever. The other interesting dynamic at school, though, I think, is how to

balance that student-athlete role with the kids who aren't athletes, right? And so,

these kids, interestingly, might be allocating their minds and in their bodies

almost all their time to academic pursuits. And we might be exceptional in that

way. So, they see soccer practice as an infringement upon that time.

Performance Expectations

Eleven coaches shared how they try to support their players by understanding and

helping them meet their needs. Olivia described the importance of getting honest

feedback from a coach when she was a player: "I didn't see that as a negative, I saw that

as a wow, she's taking the time, she cares." Bill offered how a team building workshop

changed how he approached goal setting with his team. The goal-setting workshop

focused on uncovering why the players played basketball. To his surprise, "literally every

single kid was like stress relief, escape, or memory of a loved one." After learning this,

Bill thought, "I really can't be concerned about winning because you're not." This

understanding helped him recalibrate his coaching to fit the goals of his players.

The communication between coaches and student-athletes is at the core of setting

individual player expectations. Calvin described his process:

"I don't expect you to be good at basketball. It is not an expectation that I have.

The expectation I have is that you show up, participate, and work hard everyday,

and that you trust me. At any point you think what my coaching is doing is not

ideal for you, that you communicate that so that I can be a better coach."

How coaches viewed a successful team directly impacted their expectations.

Olivia expressed that the most significant indicator of a successful team is that you see

the players together off the field outside of the sport season which informs her "that we

have built this culture and this family and this community that even when the season ends

they don't want to spend time apart". Winning is important to her but secondary. A team

that wins but is disconnected, in conflict, or disrespectful to opponents is not successful,

in her view. She summed up her feeling, stating, "It's what you do off the field. I think

that is so much more important".

Many coaches shared their strategies for working with their goal-setting process,

ranging from check-ins with players to weekly notecards that identified individual, team,

and academic goals. Two coaches even instituted goal setting throughout their program

at the sub-varsity level. Olivia had her athletes share their goals weekly in a team circle

so that the team helped to hold the players accountable.

Rebecca, who mentioned the terms goal or goals 33 times in her interview, shared

this regarding emphasizing performance or well-being in goal setting:

If an athlete is taken care of and feels safe and feels like they can be honest, then

they're going to perform better. If they're feeling like their injuries or their

feelings are being neglected. Eventually, they're going to crack. They're going to

stop performing. So, I think you have to be able to connect with every one of your

athletes. I think that's extremely important, and you also have to be able to push

them to get the most out of them. But there is a fine line between pushing too far

and someone could crack, whether it's physically or mentally. And so, you have to

know your athletes and get to know them personally to be able to find that happy

medium. And everyone is motivated by different things. Like some people want

to be, you know, yelled at and direct information. Some people want to be pulled

aside, and some people have a really hard time with constructive criticism, so you

have to find a way to give them that feedback safely. So they're not feeling

threatened. But I think no matter what, when an athlete feels safe and that they

can connect with you and talk to you, you're going to get the best performance out

of them that you can. As long as you're cultivating an environment where they

feel safe and where you know them and you know every single one on your field,

that's really important, and it's hard to do with a big team.

Coaches offered many examples of going above and beyond the typical basics of

coaching to build relationships. Olivia shared one example that highlights a multilevel

approach centered on supportive relationships. Olivia described helping a student-athlete

overcome an injury's emotional and physical challenges. Oliva learned about the student-

athlete's concerns in a group that Olivia and the school counselors ran on student-athlete

mental health. This student-athlete was pressured by another coach in a different sport to

return to play. Olivia connected her with a college athlete going through a similar injury

rehab she saw via a social media post. The two athletes formed a relationship based on a

shared experience. This example stood out because of the preventative nature of the

group, which served as an open forum for the students, and Olivia's willingness to connect to internal and external resources for support.

Coaches shared many stories and examples of supporting student-athlete well-being, including but not limited to access to food, gender transition, and athletic injury management. Each example centered on the transformative potential of healthy player-coach relationships. Desmond described something many coaches touched on when he said that "the goal is always to be more proactive than reactive" in supporting student-athletes.

Creativity

Desmond shared that a player's ability to be creative "all goes back to personal relationships that you're having with your players." Through deep conversations, players build trust, enabling them to find new solutions to problems during and outside competition. Beyond conversations and relationships, coaches encourage creativity through their team's tactics and strategy. Strategy linking to creativity was more prevalent in team sports like soccer, basketball, and hockey than in individual sports like track. Calvin described a player's engagement in this offense as a "trust-building process." He also asks his players to improve or reimagine drills to make them more engaging, all with the intent of opening a door for them "to have [creativity] on the fly; I want them to try something new." Chris took a similar approach to his hockey team, saying that although he stresses a structured grinding defensive system, he allows his players to express themselves, be creative, and have fun in the offensive zone.

Speaking Up

Ten of the coaches interviewed described times in either high school or college when they wished they had spoken up but did not during their playing careers. Coaches mentioned fear as a reason for not speaking up. The examples coaches gave about not speaking up during their playing days included many themes from their role on the team (Sean, Jacob, and Melissa), fairness (Audrey and John), and behavior (Dave and Chris).

Like many coaches, Melissa shared that she felt unsafe speaking to her coach about her role on the team. Here, she describes the fear she has of speaking up:

I didn't necessarily have the best communicating relationship with my coach at the time, and I didn't feel comfortable going to them with concerns or just being able to voice kind of what I was feeling and didn't think that that was valued. So I think that, like, led a lot too, like, also why I just stopped playing. I didn't feel supported to be able to go and have that conversation. Like I didn't feel like that door was open. They said the door was open, but based on the interactions that I had had with them, even throughout the two seasons that I was there like I, I never truly felt like it was a safe space for me to go and express that.

Dave alluded to the difficulty in not speaking up and the influence of different hierarchies at play: "I should have spoken up, but I also think it's really difficult. Like, I think it's difficult to speak to power. I think it's difficult to speak to a coach or a player who may be better than you".

White male coaches were more likely to share that they had experienced this. John shared an example of not calling out a poor team culture on his college team. He

shared that as a player, he lacked confidence and felt it was somebody else's job to speak up.

In contrast, women and minority coaches were more likely to share as Calvin did, "this is going to sound crazy, but I did speak up pretty regularly and pretty often, and that put me at odds with a lot of coaches, and if it wasn't for my performance, I'm sure I would have been off some teams." After offering an example of an interaction with his college coach he challenged, Calvin shared that he felt "ostracized because I did say more." Upon further reflection, he stated, "what's important about sports is that it gives you a safe place to say how you feel and be who you are. Not have to kind of like quiet that down anywhere." Rebecca described some of the challenges women coaches face:

> "I've been really lucky. I feel from my experiences as an athlete that I've been able
> to get the most out of what's given to me, you know, as a soccer player in high
> school as a runner as a runner now, you know, I feel like my voice is pretty well
> heard…it's been tricky as a woman. There's not a lot of women coaches. And I've
> had some situations, not many, but enough that like you know, I've felt slighted.
> Because someone has literally congratulated my assistant who's a man thinking he
> was the head coach right in front of my face".

Encouraging Student Voice

Lisa shared that she is impressed with the differences between this generation of young athletes and the one she belongs to. She described that today's student-athletes are not "willing to put up with B.S." compared to when she was younger. She said this difference allows the current generation to call out negative behaviors of coaches without fear of retribution. This willingness, she believes, elevates voices and promotes shared

leadership. Overall, coaches appreciate this generation's ability to speak their minds, contrasting their playing experience. They described having to "blindly" follow the direction of their coaches in the locker room or on the field. They said players are fearless in calling them out if their communication or actions are inappropriate, which challenges coaches to be more thoughtful and intentional.

Desmond described it this way, "it forces us to, to be better and to, to evolve and to really be really good [with] how we communicate…My generation of coaches is a bit envious of this generation of players because they do feel that agency, whereas as we didn't." The coaches highlighted the following avenues to help elevate student-athlete voice: emphasize it, have continuous dialogue with players, improve relationships, implement purposeful activities/processes, and establish leadership groups. Coaches often discussed student voice in the dual context of performance and well-being, with the performance aspect seen as lower-hanging fruit.

Calvin shared the importance of encouraging student-athlete voices for both performance and well-being. "I am always working to elevate voices," whether on the court, classroom, or culture-wise. Calvin recalled when a former player contacted him to discuss a serious incident. He said she shared this with him because of the space he created in their team and the confidence she gained from being part of a group that supported elevating female voices, which he said are so often silenced.

For some coaches, experiences of not speaking up as a player had noticeably impacted how they interact with their players and promote students' voices. Melissa shared that her players will be in the adult world soon, "so it's okay to allow them to have opinions on what's going on and have a say." Jacob said he wanted his student-athletes to

feel empowered and have a voice to contribute to the team daily. He reflected that his thoughts about his inability to share his concerns with his high school coach have encouraged this thinking. He wanted his student-athletes to know: "It's their program, not the school's program, and not my program. This is high school sports; we try to teach more life skills than anything else. I want kids to be themselves and express themselves." In one conversation with his team, Jacob found that academic issues were causing stress for his student-athletes, so they mutually agreed to alter the practice times.

John shared an example of how speaking up can directly lead to better performance outcomes: " If my quarterback comes off the field and says, 'I want to throw the wheel route because this is what I see, ' then we are gonna throw a wheel.' He mentioned that relationships and trust make this easier to do. John also encouraged school leaders in other contexts to include students in the planning and processing. Oliva mentioned soliciting her players' opinions about what they see at half-time and the end of games.

Audrey recommends breaking down barriers of the "intimidating relationship" by having one-on-one conversations with athletes. Many coaches held pre- and post-season meetings with all players, with some having scheduled mid-season check-ins. All made themselves available for check-ins with players struggling with performance or well-being. Chris asks his captains to write him an honest letter about the season at the end of the season about what the team did well and did not do well.

Bill shared how he uses specific practice drills to encourage elevating student voices for his basketball teams. His players have partners throughout the year and can work on skill development at specific practice segments. At those times, the goal that he

gives his players is to share what they would like to work on with their partner and for both to offer support and feedback to each other.

Dave has found that simply asking players at each grade level their thoughts has helped. He also shared an index card activity he uses with his players, during which he anonymously and individually asks them to identify something the team should start doing, something they should stop doing, and something they should keep doing. He said this exercise opened his eyes because more than a third of his team suggested he stop worrying about the officials during games and focus on coaching them. He credits this exercise for giving students who may not raise their hands the ability to "provide feedback in a very non-threatening way." Olivia has found that her players are surprised by her asking, "What can she do better as a coach?"

On a more macro level, some schools have started implementing leader development councils for student-athletes. Lisa shared that her school created an athletic advisory council, which she says she had to speak up to include four student-athletes, "A bunch of adults isn't going to sit in a room and talk about athletics and student-athletes if there are no student-athletes in the room." Melissa mentioned that she had been out of high school for ten years, and she feels that creating space for students to speak up has improved and that coaches have become more aware of student-athlete needs.

Preventing Harm & Recognizing Hazing

Coaches spoke about ensuring they communicated with student-athletes and were physically present on buses and locker rooms to ensure students were safe and protected. Joe shared how his team dealt with a hazing incident a few years prior. The coach offered the importance of transparency and ensuring you do not hide anything. He said that kids

will be kids and that you need to check on them and have good captains that help create a culture of unacceptable behavior. Although he did not describe precisely how his team was shaped and grew from the incident, he did offer the importance of communication and reflection as keys to moving beyond it.

Jacob said every team must sign an anti-bullying/hazing policy every year. He reads it at the beginning of every season, "whether kids are actually listening to me. I really don't know." He said his team's best defense against harmful behavior is the culture they have created within the program and ensuring student-athletes understand the expectations. The Cultivating Healthy Team Environments section will cover the role of culture in depth.

Encouraging Comfort Zone Expansion

In sharing how often they work with athletes to push themselves, coaches offered statements like "all the time," "constantly", and "literally all I do", but they also acknowledged it was not always easy: "I struggle with it", "one of the hardest things we do as coaches," and "that's really hard." Three categories emerged from how coaches support student-athletes to push themselves: create a safe and trusting environment, develop strong player-coach relationships, and help student-athletes see the benefits of stress.

Building a safe and trusting environment emerged as a critical component of helping student-athletes expand their comfort zones. Coaches endorsed the idea that athletes need to be in a place of safety, trust, and comfort before they can take risks to move beyond their current limits. John shared that he tells his players, "This is a safe environment; there is no threat here, so it is okay to be uncomfortable." He said that he

readily acknowledges that it will be complex and challenging at times, and that's okay,

but it is not the most difficult thing you will ever have to go through. Calvin shared that

sometimes safety does not come from the environment but rather from a person's internal

dialogue. He described how some student-athletes tend towards perfectionism, which

makes the environment feel unsafe because there is always a threat of failure. To remedy

this, he is clear with his players that "if I am not yelling at you, you do not need to be

yelling at yourself; if I am not mad at you, you don't get to be mad at you." Rachel said

you hope that even if a player lacks confidence, they can get to a point where they

understand that "my coach trusts me, my coach believes in me, and my teammates

believe in me."

Developing solid relationships with student-athletes is one of the easiest ways to

build safe and trusting environments. All coaches talked about the importance of

developing relationships with students so that they could learn how to motivate them best

and speak to them about taking calculated risks. Chris said, "You have to figure out what

makes them tick, what motivates them, and what's important." Lisa said, "When players

feel that they are respected and honored as an individual, it makes them feel heard and

that they are part of everything, and they are more likely to be brave." This knowledge

stems, according to coaches, from conversations with players. Coaches described having

challenging conversations about role, playing time, leadership, and skill use.

The final theme to emerge from comfort zone expansion was changing the

narrative on stress. Coaches discussed how they attempt to alter student-athlete

relationships to stress from threat to challenge, identifying encouragement of making

mistakes, team strategies, and drill selection. Coaches who mentioned changing the

narrative on failure or stress linked it back to conversation and relationships. Lisa shared

how it is essential to normalize stress and help student-athletes recognize that discomfort

does not have to be a bad thing. Through those interactions, they try to create safety and

assurance that the student-athlete can take this risk. Eleven coaches described

encouraging mistakes and letting their athletes know that some would be accepted in the

learning process. Chris explained how he worked with a young defenseman to join the

rush more. He and other coaches let the player know that they felt he could do it and

didn't expect it to be perfect, and if he got "burned once or twice, don't worry." Dave

said, "I am constantly coaching my players to make new mistakes." He said he tells his

players that mistakes made by pushing their limits are good because it allows coaches to

accept or correct them. Melissa shared how her team promotes a "goldfish mentality."

She wants her players to have a short memory and move on from mistakes quickly. To do

this, she must work through her discomfort with becoming "heated" when she sees a

mistake because they are trying to do what she has asked and need their space to learn.

Coaches referenced drills or activities they use to create competitive and stressful

environments for their players. These were done to help encourage growth and acclimate

players to the stress they may see in a game situation. Dave described how when he

started coaching, "I liked everything in Kumbaya land," but now recognizes that players

can only grow when they move beyond comfort. Embracing this, he has moved like many

other coaches to smaller competitive games because "that's where growth is." Bill

described a drill he does that his players report as their favorite drill but puts them under

"tremendous stress. Jacob shared that his favorite way to push his student-athletes is not

through a drill but rather by having them support youth camps because they have to

communicate, problem-solve, and coach younger kids. In that experience, they learn that

it is okay that a kid makes mistakes while trying, and they may see the player-coach

relationship in another light.

Not all coaches feel comfortable despite recognizing the importance of strategies

to improve growth. Sean described this tension:

> "In my playing career, I benefited most from coaches who pushed me harder than
>
> I thought I could go. So, I need to be better at telling a kid directly that they can
>
> and need to do more and challenge themselves. I err on the side of caution. I am
>
> afraid almost to push kids too far at the risk of them breaking, abandoning the
>
> team, or having a parent call or complain."

Cultivating a Healthy Team Environment

All coaches thought that team culture was essential for team performance and

well-being. When asked to describe factors that supported healthy team culture, the

coaches identified buy-in, clear expectations, communication, relationships, and

supportive behaviors. In their interviews, coaches shared that players in healthy cultures

have a "commitment to our program," "be all in," "on board with what we are doing,"

"getting everyone on the same page," "be selfless," and "create a culture of selflessness."

Building Blocks of Healthy Teams

In creating buy-in, some coaches alluded to the importance of collecting student

voices around goals, rules, and values. Others spoke of the importance of reducing

hierarchical interference, which I will describe in more detail in the team culture barriers

section. Coaches thought that student-athlete leaders help create buy-in. Jacob stated that

"empowering" student-athletes was the number one culture builder: "They feel a sense of

pride in, in themselves having that leadership they know that if they do make the team, that they are part of something special."

What players buy into or are on board with can be described as the expectations or goals of the team. Thirteen coaches shared the importance of having clear goals and values for the team that student-athletes helped identify. John referred to this as working with student-athletes to develop "a process." Melissa, who spends significant time working with her team on individual and collective goals, said, "You're not going to have necessarily the same goals, right? Or understand what those goals are. And I think part of that is communication, honesty, and being real."

Supportive behaviors include team meals, coach preparation, positive interactions, check-ins, and travel games. Multiple coaches mentioned food as a tool for bringing teams together. When asked what factors support building healthy team cultures, Calvin responded quickly, "Food...legitimately like everybody wants to eat, and when we think about things that bring us together, meals are really important. Sharing meals, sharing food, sharing culture. These things kind of really build into us understanding each other in a very different way."

Coaches differed on the need for peer friendship but were unanimous in their desire for respect and teamwork. Some coaches, like Audrey, stated, "The closer the players are off the field, the better they play on the field." In contrast, others favored Chris's view, "I don't need you to be best friends, but you guys need to take care of each other." What was clear among the coaches interviewed was that there needed to be a level of respect between players. Coaches believed that players earned respect through playing together and getting to know each other better. Coaches mentioned bus rides, overnight

travel, team fundraising, youth clinics, and purposeful practice partners as ways to help build respect. Multiple coaches shared how they were intentional about who works together during drills to help players connect with peers.

Ingredients to creating a transformative team culture included "inclusive language," "developing individual relationships with kids," "celebrating small wins in practice," and "daily fist bumps." These behaviors helped build trust and helped build up relationships that made it easier for coaches to hold players accountable. Accountability was vital to coaches. Coaches wanted to set clear and challenging expectations for their players and believed holding them responsible for the team's values, rules, and expectations allowed them to move forward successfully. The coaches who mentioned preparation described the importance of organizing and creating thoughtful and purposeful practice plans. Student-athletes, they surmised, know when you do not take the time to plan, and their response is often shown in the effort they offer you. Melissa and Olivia tried to build connections between varsity and sub-varsity athletes. Melissa included both groups in warmups, while Olivia established a big sister little sister program where one older student will share a handwritten note of encouragement with a younger student.

Leadership

The role of team captains proved important to the coaches I interviewed. This section presents how coaches think about captain selection, characteristics of captains, expectations for captains, and formal or informal training.

Captain Selection

Coaches offered four strategies they used to select captains: coaches elect (Jacob, Melissa, Olivia, Rebecca, and Sean), players elect (Joseph), both players and coaches elect (Audrey, Chris, and John), and no captains (Bill and Dave). It should be noted that there is a fine line between coaches elect, and players and coaches elect because multiple coaches endorsed a variation of coaches elect shared where solicited feedback from their players. Joseph, the only one to use players elect, shared that he felt that captain selection is a "popularity contest" but said that the hardest-working student-athletes were usually voted in. Dave was one of the two coaches who chose not to name captains, and he said he thought the designation would "pigeonhole leadership throughout the team." He said that a 9th grader emerged as one of his team leaders last year, and he is not sure that could have happened if they had traditional captains. Coaches seemed to be frustrated with the attention given to the role of captain outside of the team environment, especially the importance it may carry on a college application or in deciding who runs a booster club event. What was more important to coaches were the characteristics and behaviors of their leaders.

Characteristics & Responsibilities of Captains

Four of the coaches I spoke with shared that they have changed how they select coaches as they have gained experience. Rebecca's sentiments were typical: "When I started, it was 'Who's popular and wants a title for their resume'…but I learned over the years that it does not help me as a coach."

The coaches interviewed shared that they wanted their leaders to "make my life easier," "have the voice", "be a sounding board," "goes above and beyond," "get a pulse of the team," "give ownership of the team," and "my lifeline to the team." Many coaches

discussed the importance of representing the program on and off the field and helping

teammates do the same. Melissa said that they do not have to tell her everything, but if

it's going to benefit the health of our team...mentally or physically, I want to know". For

example, she shared how some of her captains approached her a few years ago to let her

know the players were tired and needed a day off. She said she had not known and

appreciated the disclosure when they approached her.

Formal and Informal Leadership Development

All coaches described using informal strategies for developing student leaders.

This training mainly occurred during conversations and check-ins between coaches and

senior leaders. Desmond was the only coach who mentioned a formal student-athlete

leadership program at their school. His independent school is looking to implement a

program soon.

Sean described his evolution in developing team leaders, stating that he saw all

his athletes as inexperienced and young when he was younger. In hindsight, he said that

was a mistake because he did not allow them to have any ownership of the team and exert

their influence on the team. Today, he meets with his captains 15 minutes before practice.

Most coaches describe their ideal student leaders as being receptive to younger student-

athletes, committed to the team, and responsive to the coaching staff. Olivia shared that

she encourages all her seniors to be leaders with or without a captain's designation. John

was straightforward in his response to a question about developing student leaders, "I do

a poor job developing leaders." He stated that he struggled with this because he needed to

understand clearly what a captain or student leadership is.

Conflict Management

When asked about conflict, coaches offered various thoughts centered on communicating with their players. Subthemes that emerged included differences in gender, the use of conflict as a tool for growth and development, and the timing of conflict management. Every coach shared that honest and direct communication with players was the key to managing conflict. They described the importance of concepts like "pipeline to your players," "finger on the pulse," "doors open," "heart-to-heart," "direct communication," "open communication," and "be transparent." Coaches perceived their ability to communicate with their players about conflict as something that grows with experience. Desmond shared that "even as coaches, we are unfinished products" when describing his evolution in conflict management. He believes the COVID pandemic aided an evolution that encouraged communication: "As coaches, we could only talk to our players."

Coaches also alluded to gender differences with conflict. Jacob, who coaches both girls and boys, said the most significant difference between the genders is that, in his experience, boys can show up for practice and practice. They can block out things that his girls have difficulty doing. In his experience, conflict for girls tends to carry over into practice. Audrey, Rebecca, Melissa, and Lisa expressed their experience of excess "drama" coaching girls. Melissa shared that last season, she talked with her girls to understand that they do not have to be best friends but must work together to build respect and subsequent trust to accomplish their goals. Calvin said that to prevent one of the most significant sources of conflict for his girls' team, he has a rule that players cannot date anybody else on the team. "I am really big on creating safe spaces for LGBTQ, and I am very loud about that as an advocate for my team, but I think some of

those [ideas] get conflated." There was also a feeling that boys handled issues

themselves. That disagreement can be worked out during play or in a locker room. John

described seeing players upset with each other during practice, walking out of the locker

room, and laughing with each other, a statement echoed by other boys' coaches. Melissa

summarized this statement: "Girls have to team bond in order to fight, whereas guys have

to fight in order to bond." Olivia, who has coached boys and girls, substituted the word

"drama" with "competitive" to describe girls. The girls are competitive in everything they

do, "how they look, how they dress, what they got on their exam," boys, in her opinion,

only turn the competitive level up for game days. Partly due to this, she believes boys can

let go and recover from conflict faster.

Coaches shared how they often embraced teachable moments and made

connections between the event and future action—teaching student-athletes how to shift

their perspective from others to an internal perspective, which allows them to help them

recognize how they are influencing the situation and the team. Some described teaching

student-athletes about body language and how people may feel or express different

emotions in the same problem. Desmond said it was important for student-athletes to

share their voices and for others to listen and have difficult conversations.

All but two coaches believed in taking care of conflict immediately, so it would

be good for the team. In these situations, coaches described the conflict as having virus-

like tendencies that could infiltrate a locker room or culture and cause disruption.

Rebecca's thoughts represent this majority opinion: "You gotta get that stuff out there and

get it dealt with because once you have that stuff floating around, it just trickles down

and really puts a damper on what's going on." Her rationale was, "even if it's awkward

and uncomfortable, I'd rather throw them down and sort of hash it out than ignore it and just push it behind me and hope that it goes away."

Calvin and Audrey differed from the rest of the coaches in the immediacy of conflict resolution and offered different approaches to the pace of response to conflict. Calvin suggested that he prefers to give his players the opportunity they need for self-reflection before encouraging dialogue. He thought that student-athletes should "take whatever time you need to get back to a place where you can come back, and we can solve this together because being on a team means you don't get to opt out. We are together this whole time, no matter what." Audrey offered that she likes for her players to find solutions independently and only begin intervening when she sees the conflict impacting the play on the field. At that point, she serves as a resource and a guide for her players.

Confidence in managing conflict grew with experience. One of the most confident coaches in dealing with conflict was Lisa, who shared that she thrives in conflict. She said that when she sees conflict, she thinks, "We are not doing this; I don't have time for this." She said that you could not be afraid of feelings, "it's okay to be emotional; it's okay to feel what you are feeling, but let's figure out the root so we can manage our way through this; and that has to happen openly as a team with whoever is involved because what's healthy for you as an individual is also what's healthy for the team." Some coaches alluded to how they encouraged conflict between the lines in practice to create space for growth. One of them, Dave, stated that he encourages conflict: "I like a little bit of conflict in practice." He uses this controlled conflict as a teaching tool to teach his players the difference between healthy conflict and competitiveness.

Calvin provided an example of a proactive strategy he uses with his team. Hoping to create a shared sense of empathy within the team, he hosts an annual Martin Luther King Day breakfast in which his team participates in some "pretty vulnerable team-building activities about life journey." He believes these activities help players learn more about each other and support his mission to create a caring culture.

Coaches offered many examples of conflict resolution with their players. However, Sean provided a transformative example of a multi-tiered response to conflict that summarized many of the strategies used by his peers. Sean shared how he engaged a student-athlete he described as "mean-spirited" in calling out her teammates during games and behind their backs. Sean explained that the younger player was the team's most skilled player but one who had alienated her teammates. His first intervention was to talk with the player one-on-one. That conversation focused on pointing out the impact of negative communication on her team, refocusing expectations of her high school versus club team, and encouraging her to take on a leadership role. He said this approach did not work, and the tension grew. The next step was to engage a caregiver to help develop a shared message, which again fell short. The third step was to engage the team's captains. He shared that he saw what was happening. He wanted them and his other players to know that he was aware of the issue, and he wanted them to know that this player needed their support. He learned from his captains that they felt uncomfortable and hurt by what the player said. At that point, Sean took a fourth step and substituted a practice for a team trip to a local coffee shop. He shared how he saw the verbal attacks eroding the team's energy and cohesiveness and that if they continued, he would ask the player to step away from the team. Sean shared how this intervention helped. The player

in question took purposeful action to support her teammates better, and the team

responded with better, more energized play to conclude the season.

Relationships

Relationships emerged as one of the most essential elements of successful team

cultures. Building relationships with their student-athletes is a continuous process that

requires nurturing. This takes place in both formal and non-formal routes. Non-formal

interventions included unscheduled interactions like daily check-ins, temperature checks,

supporting areas of interest outside of sport, and casual conversations. Dave shared that

asking his players a simple question about chicken patty day at lunch could help him take

a player's temperature before practice. He said, "You really do not know what people are

going through." He described how he has had days when he may be struggling personally

but had to show up and coach. He said it is essential that he looks at his players through

the same lens. Many coaches expressed that they wanted their players to know they could

come to them with anything,

Coaches performed formal check-ins in 1-on-1 or 1-on-2 meetings with players.

They shared how they would meet with individual players throughout the year. The

typical progression was preseason, during the season, before playoffs, and following the

post-season. It was important for coaches to make sure that their players did not feel like

they were in trouble but just wanted to have a formal way of connecting with them and

checking on their needs and concerns.

Trust is a central tenant of relationships, which many coaches discussed as

necessary. Trust for coaches crossed both well-being and performance. Players had to

know that a coach had their best interests in mind in games and life. Jacob described how

he builds trust with his players through his commitment to communication, honesty, and

approach to individual and team matters. Calvin took his thoughts on trust further, saying

he tries to move from "trust to faith." He believed this process helped move a student-

athlete from "seeing to believing." Multiple coaches alluded to the importance of asking

the right questions to help open students up. Melissa shared how a student asked for a

practice off because she was having a tough day. Melissa obliged but wanted to ensure

that the student had someone with her because "the last thing we need for a high school

kid going through some mental stuff" is to be alone.

One vital relationship that emerged was the importance of coaches' presence in

the school. Ten coaches interviewed were teachers in the school or district they coached.

The three most prevalent benefits of having a presence in the building were getting to

know the whole student-athlete, a better understanding of the internal and external

stressors, and an appreciation for the balance required to be a student-athlete. Joseph felt

that the perfect football coaching staff has 2 to 3 coaches in the building, which allows

them to notice conflicts as they emerge. Melissa felt that teaching in the school where

you coach gives you a "leg up" because it helps one "build community" with teachers that

encourages respect between academics and athletics. Desmond, who has the advantage of

working at a boarding school, mentioned, "There's always an evening dinner table, you

know, discussion, whether it's at, in a dining hall or at a sporting event or something like

that. There's always, ways that you can kind of check in with those guys."

Beyond downward communication with players, coaches described the benefits of

having peer-to-peer relationships and upward communication with administration.

Coaches did better when they believed an athletic director or school administration had

their back. They also spoke about how their relationships with teachers, guidance

counselors, and DEI practitioners eased the stressors they were dealing with.

Barriers to Cultivating Healthy Team Environments

Each coach labeled barriers that impact team culture development. The key

barriers identified were the coaches, student leadership, external voices, perceived

investment, and communication.

Those mentioning the coach themselves as a barrier listed a range of coaching

behaviors that hinder building a healthy culture, including poor relationships with

players, lack of transparency, lack of modeling expected behaviors, and lack of concern

for culture building. Transparency emerged as helping the student-athletes understand the

"why?" and the "how?". Coaches pointed out that this generation needs to know the

answers to those two questions. Multiple coaches cited that when they played, they did

what a coach asked them, but this generation was different. This was met with mixed

levels of comfort, but for the most part, coaches thought this was positive and helped

them to be more intentional and thoughtful with their coaching. Most coaches referenced

the importance of holding themselves accountable. Coaches described a lack of

accountability that hurt team culture because when players perceived their coaches as not

living up to the standards they set for the team, they were pushed away. Dave stated, "I

really try to be accountable. Like when I mess something up, I want our entire team and

staff to know like, no, like this was done wrong. It was because of me." He said this

allows him to be accountable for my actions, "whether it's our head coach, whether it's

your best player, whether it's a senior on your team I think it just becomes easier for

everyone to accept when the people in probably more of a position of power are able to

model that like authentically."

Lisa offered her thoughts on the characteristics of a coach that may become

barriers to team culture:

"I think the barrier to successful team culture is the coach. If you have a coach

who doesn't know kids or doesn't know the sport or doesn't know that kind of

stuff, that is the fundamental barrier. Because I do believe, like at the end of the

day, yes, it's about the kids, but the adults are the ones in charge, and the adults

are the ones who create the culture. And if they don't have the ability to manage

people, manage emotions, have conversations with people, ask for help when

needed. If that leadership skillset doesn't exist, then the culture doesn't exist."

Poor student leadership was viewed as a barrier, particularly among upper-level

students, but not exclusive to team captains. Coaches described that team culture

struggled when student leaders allowed hierarchies to develop, most commonly by grade.

This struggle came in many forms, but most often cited were negative comments to

teammates, non-equitable distribution of tasks, and fairness. Chris described how his

team uses two locker rooms at their practice rink, and he noticed a divide growing and

that the team was divided by age. He explained how when certain groups of

upperclassmen come into leadership, they believe they have earned the right to operate

hierarchically. Chris said his teams have leaders, not necessarily captains, who help

establish that the team is a "family." To avoid this, Olivia has a rule that equipment pick-

up is on a rotation basis and not designated to newer or younger team members, as is

often the case.

External sources that could distract student-athletes from the team goals and message were also barriers. These include parents, social media, and peers. Coaches described parental influence as being something that can erode team culture. Bill said he was concerned about conversations at home and in the car. John said some experiences about counterproductive parental influence stemmed from a lack of "trust in coaches, respect for the profession, [the understanding] that what we're trying to do is absolutely in the best interest of the program and the kids."

A second external influence was social media. Coaches describe social media and technology as positive and negative. Social media provides players with access to information for recruiting, knowledge, and communication. Many coaches describe the benefits of the ease of communicating with players and their families via texts for things like check-ins or practice updates. However, social media could draw a student-athlete's attention away from the collective team and put more of an emphasis on stats and being seen and heard.

Poor communication was listed as a significant barrier. Coaches described that if you cannot communicate effectively, there will be a lot of misunderstandings. Poor communication could show up as a lack of clarity of goals and understanding needs of players' wants and needs. Coaches described how certain players differed between their personal goals and those of the team and said that it was essential for everyone to be aware and work towards a common goal. Playing time was highlighted and described as hurting team culture, particularly as the season progressed. Dave explained how culture was easy at the beginning of the year, but certain players pulled away once the season started, and he settled into a playing rotation. To alleviate this, many coaches discussed

the importance of frequent check-ins with players. Also falling into this category was

how teams talked and digested losing. Many coaches felt they needed more player buy-

in. More than one coach mentioned that some players did not know how to win or what a

winning team culture was like. Rachel described how her track teams can have upwards

of 60 student-athletes and that not all are there to run and compete. Without proper

communication and alignment of goals, those extra participants can 'become toxic to the

group".

Community Expectations

Some coaches mentioned the role of the school and the local community in

impacting academic expectations, student-athletes' interest in a sport, and public schools'

pride in their town. One way is how the school views sports.

Coaches shared how if other programs were strong, it would help build a culture

of winning. This culture of winning can result from a player playing on another winning

team bringing those experiences to their team or more fans at games. Many coaches

spoke about the support they derived from parents and the community. However, it also

showed up to some coaches in the form of bias. Calvin described how his team is hurt by

how the school thinks about sports as male. He shared that it makes it harder for his

female players to believe in the "process because you're not getting watered from

anywhere besides the people in your circle and on your team."

Coaches offered strategies for helping manage team expectations throughout the

year. Some focused on values "love and sacrifice," "respect and trust," others on tactical

"aggressive forecheck" and "defense wins championships," others on ways of being and

doing "energy, attitude, and effort," and some described segmenting the season into parts

and having collective team check-ins that allow them to reassess their goals

collaboratively.

Coaches would connect to youth programs in their areas to help start a

relationship with young athletes in the town. Joseph described how his town ran a flag

football league. Other coaches discussed the importance of local camps that they

supported. Joseph said that this practice led to him having more elementary school water

boys than high school players on Saturdays.

Chapter Summary

This section provided findings from fourteen interviews conducted with high

school head coaches in New England. The interviews explored how these coaches

support their student-athletes' well-being and performance. Three main themes emerged

about how they understand themselves, support student-athletes, and develop team

cultures.

Understanding themselves requires coaches to understand how previous

experiences and knowledge influence them today. Specifically, they described their early

experiences in sport, family impact, factors that allowed them to play their best, the

influence of their coaches, how they transitioned to becoming a coach, and ultimately

their coaching philosophy. Coaching philosophy served as a guidepost for the actions and

behaviors of coaches.

Supporting student-athlete well-being contained the sub-themes of promoting

creativity, encouraging speaking up, preventing harm, and expanding comfort zones.

Coaching style and tactics benefit creativity. Many coaches desire to create environments

where student-athletes feel safe speaking up. Preventing harm and encouraging comfort

zone expansion both necessitate strong, trusting relationships.

Coaches identified the building blocks and barriers of healthy team cultures. These

centered around the development of student leaders. Establishing relationships and

setting clear expectations was at the heart of building team culture. Coaches also shared

their thoughts on managing conflict.

      The next chapter will explore how these findings relate to the previously

researched information described in Chapter 2. It will also cover this research's

limitations, social justice application, implications for future research, and best

practices.

Chapter V: Discussion

Introduction

This qualitative study explores high school coaches' perceptions of how their role in developing team environments contributes to student-athlete well-being and performance. The team environment is at the heart of the student-athlete experience and serves as the container in which these experiences play out. Coaches at the high school level serve as artisans of team culture and influence the shape of these containers and what elements fill them. Listening to them lets one hear how their building process works and what supplies they use in crafting those student-athlete experiences through culture.

The participant coaches were open and reflective. They each indexed well-being over performance. In doing so, they described the importance of intentional relationship building. They also described how their beliefs in building relationships derived from messages they received from their childhood families, their sports history, and their coaching experience. They recognized the roles that power and communication played within teams and offered strategies to leverage them for the well-being of their student-athletes. Coaches also shared the support needed to be successful.

This study is structured around three main themes. The first theme explores the coaches' self-understanding, encompassing their personal athletic experiences, motivations for coaching, and current coaching philosophy. The second theme focuses on supporting student-athlete development, which involves managing expectations, promoting well-being, fostering autonomy, and preventing harm. The third theme delves into creating a healthy team culture, examining the factors that can hinder or facilitate it.

These three themes are critical influencers of student-athlete well-being and performance outcomes.

This research explores coaches' understanding of themselves, player-coach relationships, and sport team culture. This chapter concludes with a section on the study's limitations, areas for future research, and a summary.

Discussion of Findings

At their core, each theme is relational. A coach's relationship with themselves is intrapersonal, while their relationship with their players and teams is interpersonal. Throughout these discussions, coaches described the importance of promoting well-being through deepening relationships at multiple levels. These are shown in Figure 1 below. To build a transformative culture, The coach moves outward on an ecological model from self to others to a shared community. The last ring is the team as transformative. When the bottom three layers are met, more opportunities for transformation occur.

Figure 1

Well-being Support Model
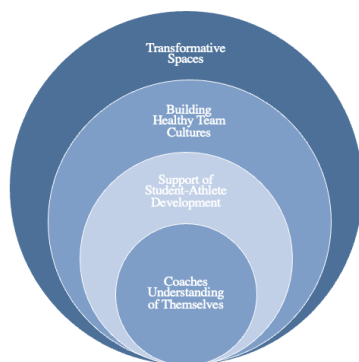
Coach's Understanding of Themselves

The first pillar of importance is a coach's understanding of themselves. This pillar includes how coaches perceive their history, coaching pathways, and philosophy. This

self-awareness impacts their ability to care for themselves and provide leadership to others. In this section, I will discuss coaches' playing experience, the impact of their coaches, pathways to becoming a coach, and their current coach philosophy.

Sport Experience Before Coaching

The family system proved central to each participant's youth sports experience. Parents surfaced as gatekeepers for introducing coaches to sports in their youth and supporting them as they aged. Each coach described their family's involvement with sports as positive and supportive. It benefited coaches when their parents looked at sport not as something to accomplish but rather as something to participate in. How parents view their child's sports participation can impact multiple relationships, including the internal dialogue that addresses identity. Even if they were not the principal figure in a coach's connection to sport, parents took on various roles to facilitate their child's love of their sport in the background. No coach described feeling pressured to meet their parents' expectations.

Interestingly, coaches admitted that dealing with the parents of their student-athletes was one of the most challenging aspects of coaching. Coaches' relationships with parents are an integral part of the high school coaching process because parents have a crucial role in determining the climate (Miller et al., 2012; Mossman et al., 2021). Of most significant concern for coaches in this study is pushing back against parenting strategies that promote a climate focused on results, performance, and punishing mistakes. This performance-based mindset can over-emphasize results and turn the focus to performance over well-being; in these cases, a lack of performance threatens the development of the life skills necessary for student-athletes to be better versions of

themselves. Those life skills include identity exploration, building relationships, self-

awareness, and self-reflection.

This desire derives from a sports-industrial complex that leaves parents hoping to

secure a college scholarship (Last, 2022). As the sport-industrial complex has grown, so

has the demand from parents. This demand has impacted relationships between parents

and children, parents and coaches, and coaches and student-athletes. Parents are looking

more and more for a return on investment and too often see coaches as the gatekeepers to

that investment. As student-athletes age, parental influence transfers to peers and other

adult leaders. One area for growth for coaches would be to learn how to work with

parents but be clear about expectations and goals. Lemelin et al. (2022) found that when

parents and coaches are both autonomy-supportive, athletes see an increase in subjective

well-being.

As expected, every coach participated in youth sports, but the coach's age

impacted the access and formality of that experience. Youth sports have become

increasingly structured as the sports-industrial complex has grown in the US from its

origins as a way for students to fill unstructured free time after school to a market

expected to a projected $77 billion by 2026 (University of Kansas, 2023). The age of the

coaches interviewed correlated to this adjustment. Older coaches described the subtle

shift from informal play from neighborhood parents organizing games to the

development of local leagues. These formal leagues have recently transformed the club

sports environment in which younger coaches participate. Club sports offer the potential

benefits of increased competition, accelerating skill development, improved coaching,

and opportunities to travel. In addition, they have been credited with providing additional

opportunities for high school students who do not make their school team but can afford to participate in an alternative setting, giving further opportunities for high school students who do not complete their school team but can afford to partake in an alternative setting. Conversely, they also increase burnout-related challenges caused by early specialization, stress, and time commitment (Smith, 2014).

The coaches interviewed began participating in sports not to win or achieve but to connect with others and have fun. These experiences began to shape who they were and how they interacted with their families. As they moved from youth to more competitive sport they played their best when they had a strong relationship with their coach, felt a sense of belonging, and felt comfortable. Coaches shared that sports participation allowed them to be a better version of themselves primarily due to the relationships they built. Not surprisingly, coaches shared that they coach for many of the same reasons they played for to be part of something bigger than themselves, have fun, and give back.

Each participant described being shaped by their former coaches. Some former coaches described former coaches negatively, while others remembered them fondly. Independent of a positive or negative experience, the most critical aspect of coaches' understanding of their experience with sport coaches was the meaning they derived from the relationship. The more profound the emotional impact on either side of the positive/negative spectrum fueled the coach's mission. Lee et al. (2023) stated that coaches dominate the relationships between players and coaches because they have power over athletes in setting goals, monitoring their training, and controlling their playing time. These personal experiences influenced how coaches think about many facets of coaching, from support, tactics, preparations, rules, and team culture. The

former coaches served as teachers, their voices and memories remaining years later. If

adolescence is about finding yourself and moving away from your parents, coaches help

assist students to move towards autonomy (Muess et al., 2005; Harter, 2017). Through

these experiences, study participants identified three characteristics of good coaching:

commitment, attention to detail, and a coach's ability to push a player out of their comfort

zone.

Pathways to Coaching

Coaches find their way to becoming coaches differently. The four most likely

were a desire to teach or coach, a calling to give back, a preference for staying involved

in the game, and following the suggestions of others. I was surprised to learn how many

coaches entered coaching because someone saw something in them that they thought

would translate into a future coach. It would be beneficial to look at the pathway to high

school sports coaching in more depth and identify how new coaches can be supported

similarly to new teachers. 82% of New England coaches from youth through high school

shared that the biggest motivations for coaching were a love of teaching, a desire to

develop young people in their community, and working with young people (Anderson-

Butcher & Bates, 2023).

Part of the learning curve identified by coaches is a clearer understanding of the

differences between playing and coaching. The coaches described the need for a broader

focus while coaching. Coaches described how, during their playing days, they were

allowed to focus solely on themselves and their performance. Another key difference is

that they believe they have less impact on the game than their players. Instead of scoring,

making a tackle, or running faster, they need to monitor each player's physical,

psychological, spiritual, and social needs while trying to win and develop a positive culture.

Coaching Philosophy

These experiences helped to shape how coaches understand themselves and how they coach. Cushion et al. (2003) found that coaches have established deep-rooted behaviors due to past experiences ranging from instilled values from childhood to social interactions and experience as coaches and athletes. Bennie & O'Connor (2010) expanded this to include work experience, vicarious learning experiences, and previous playing experiences. Coaches do this, whether consciously or subconsciously, through their coaching philosophy. Coach philosophy requires self-awareness and engagement in self-reflection that allow for the identification of core values (Ferner et al., 2023).

In this study, each coach's philosophy included supporting well-being over performance. Only Lisa mentioned winning games, which was at the end of a quote stating, "If you build kids and if you have good kids and good athletes, you'll win games." Collins et al. (2009) found that highly successful high school football coaches recognized for positively influencing student-athlete lives had well-thought-out philosophies emphasizing personal development. Miller et al. (2012) found that outstanding coaches want to help young people reach their potential on and off the field. similarly, in this study, the central theme of the philosophies was to build better people on and off the field. In these philosophies, sport was a tool for helping adolescents sharpen their ability to navigate life challenges and be better versions of themselves. Despite increased specialization in sports and external pressures to succeed, it is hopeful that these participants emphasized well-being over performance.

These philosophies also described how so many coaches found well-being and performance to go hand in hand. Multiple coaches referenced a similar experience as either a player or coach, saying it is hard to perform when you have things going on. These comments provided a clear sense of appreciation for humanness. Some coaches felt challenged by the idea that well-being came before performance. Gomes et al. (2018) found that coaches believed that others outside their team feel that wins and losses determine their success. This focus narrows the perspective from which the impact of coaches is judged. Joseph, for example, became emotional in describing how a former student-athlete came back to visit him, acknowledging that it made him feel like he had a similar impact to his former coach and teacher, whom he called his hero.

Coaching philosophies, in this study, were found to change with experience. As many coaches noted, they prefer where they are now to what they had thought when they started. The oldest participant, Joseph, expressed the importance of continual progress and said, "No matter what we do if we think we know everything, we've already lost. There's always things to learn". Many coaches described wanting to learn more about caring for their athletes' social-emotional needs.

Entering this research, I thought coaches would index performance over well-being more often. However, the opposite was true for participants. All the coaches indicated that player well-being was first and foremost and provided examples of navigating this tension. Coaches exist in their ecological system, including their players, assistant coaches, and parents. Within these ecological systems, tensions are pushing and pulling on them. A clear sense of values and philosophy help deal with the vicissitudes of the game and build a groundwork for promoting pillar two: student-athlete development.

Student-Athlete Development

The coach-student-athlete relationship is crucial to an athlete's performance and well-being (Cote & Gilbert, 2009; Jowett et al., 2017). Every coach discussed the importance of establishing solid relationships with their players as the bedrock for successful performance or well-being outcomes. Those relationships were influenced by trust, communication, and teamwork. Coach-athlete relationships and social support positively correlate with sport-related well-being (Simmons & Bird, 2023).

Relationships

Theodore Roosevelt's quote about people not caring how much you know unless they know how much you care sums up how the participant coaches viewed their role. Relationships permeated every topic covered by the coaches. Coaches said that trust and communication were at the heart of relationships. Strong player-coach relationships do more than support the individual; they help establish the building blocks of a community. Cranmer and Myers (2015) found that socially cohesive teammate relationships positively relate to quality athlete-coach communication.

Both individual and team environments require trust. Trust connects athletes to coaches and is the basis of all interactions (Behan et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2023). In this study participants pointed to the need to support coaches in learning to improve trust and communication with their student-athletes. Camiré (2015, p. 134) also found that coaching is a "blend of art and science," with coaches needing to learn how to practice the art of building relationships.

Player-Coach Relationships

Coaches influence athletes' growth and performance. Aalberg and Sæther (2016) argue that supportive environments with regular communication between players and coaches positively impact player development. In this study, each coach discussed the importance of healthy communication between players and coaches.

I anticipated relationships being central to my discussions, but I underestimated their importance. In these interviews, I learned that coaches see themselves less in the traditional authoritarian role and more as cultivators or gardeners. Relationships and team cultures were not something to be created or built but planned and cared for. Coaches in Independent Schools may have more say on who comes into their program through recruitment, but that allows them to pick the soil. All coaches can choose how they organize, support, and nourish. They can build a garden-like environment that supports flourishing or makes it challenging to prosper. One that solely focuses on crop yield or one that is sustainable.

Gardening may take time, but it is not a passive pursuit. Gardeners have their hands in the dirt, sweat in the sun, and get wet in the rain. They are consistent, organized, and effortful. They know when they need to attend to one plant more than another. They also know how to dose stress appropriately to see the best results. They also need to be honest with themselves and about the plants. They focus on building a solid biome for growth. They help shield their crops from harmful pests and help others bring something positive.

Due to their role, coaches have more influence over the player-coach relationship; however, like all relationships, a bi-directional give and take is required. Coaches also have a relationship with team culture by how much effort and care they take to cultivate

it. Culture is not something that needs to be built for it to exist. However, it can be

nurtured. Coaches and athletes are interdependent, so how one thinks, feels, thinks, and

behaves is impacted by the habits of others.

So, the gardener is working on the garden environment and the individual

plants. On an individual level, coaches described the importance of informal and formal

check-ins. For them, contacting student-athletes daily was essential to show that they

cared and gauge how their athletes felt. Formal check-ins were used to dive deeper.

Coaches described the importance of asking the right questions to help a student-athlete

become vulnerable. They also know that the individual plant impacts the environment

and can impact their focus. You put your players in the best place to succeed. Creating

healthy team cultures will be discussed more in the section on team culture.

Coaches as Teachers

Many coaches endorsed the importance of being present in the building to build

relationships with students, teachers, and administration. 11 of the 14 coaches taught in

the district that they coached in. This proximity allowed them to monitor the pulse of

their student-athletes more and be more proactive in response to challenges. Specifically,

they credited this with allowing them to know the whole student-athlete, better

understand internal and external stressors, and appreciate the balance required to be a

student-athlete.

Camiré (2015, p. 133) endorsed this stating that being a teacher-coach fosters the

relationship-building process through the "high-density interactions inherent" in the dual

roles. This positioning makes it essential for teacher-coaches to stress that students are

people before athletes, a theme that permeated the interviews for this research (Camiré,

2015). Rocchie & Camiré (2018) found that the dual role of teacher/coach positively influenced their identity and increased their job satisfaction. The biggest hurdle for teachers/coaches is balancing supporting the work and family obligations.

Expectations

How coaches understand and manage their team's expectations on multiple levels offers insight into whether performance or well-being is highlighted. Coaches in this study described working with their student-athletes to be the best version of themselves. To do that, coaches must work to ensure that their student-athletes understand the expectations and values of their coaches, which helps align personal philosophy to actions. According to coaches, performance outcomes were overrated. In their research on supporting Generation Z athletes, Gould et al. (2019) found that coaches needed to set clear expectations for practice, behavior, and engagement that the athletes understood. Ferner et al. (2023) found that their players only sometimes see or understand coaches' philosophies.

Eleven coaches described managing expectations through goal setting. According to Van den Berg and Surujial (2020), players perceive goal setting, feedback, coach guidance, and a long-term focus as positively interrelated factors of their current talent environment. Most coaches in this study conducted the goal-setting interventions in individual player meetings. Some of those coaches instituted similar practices at sub-varsity levels as well. In this regard, athletes and coaches could benefit from education on goal-setting theory and implementation practices.

Edmonds (2002) wrote that meaningful goals are necessary to begin the team learning process and that psychological safety enhances the power of such goals. Without

a goal, Edmonds reflected that there is no clear direction to move toward and no

motivation to do so. Coaches endorsed this belief, stating that goals give students a clear

understanding of where they are now and where they can direct their attention, focus,

beliefs, and actions. Healthy relationships are essential because without them, a person

will not be able to engage in the learning process entirely. Coaches described working

with their assistant coaches and team leaders to ensure that all players feel a sense of

belonging. Edmonds (2002) stated that the team leader could shape and strengthen the

collective learning process both directly and indirectly by fostering psychological safety

and, in turn, setting goals.

Fundamental to being a high school coach is supporting the student in student-

athletes. Coaches in this study were unanimous in believing that coaches should help

their student-athletes academically. Academic demands are the top reason students

refrain from participating in high school sports. Coaches shared a variety of strategies to

support their student-athletes. Some were more open to students missing practice to meet

their demands and promote improved study habits and time management. Most coaches

referred to the importance of student-athletes finding balance and learning to take steps to

practice regulating themselves. The key is clear dialogue between coaches, players,

families, teachers, and administration to be aware of where each student is and provide

spaces for them to meet their demands and provide feedback.

Supporting Student-Athlete Well-being

This section will explore some of the pathways identified as avenues to

supporting student-athletes' well-being, including but not limited to academics, athletic

injury, emotional and social stress, and relationships. Abos et al. (2021) suggest that

coaches reduce the frequency and intensity of controlling behaviors (controlling the use

of rewards, negative conditional regard, intimidation, and excessive personal control) and

shift toward need-supportive behaviors (autonomy and competency support). These need

supportive behaviors that align with characteristics of psychologically safe

environments.

Creativity, Expression, and Trust

Creativity is essential to many teams because it can be a healthy response to

constant change (Liu et al., 2016). Kurt Vonnegut once noted that practicing any art,

whether well or poorly, is a way to grow your soul. Sport is, and will always be,

connected to art because both express humanity and the human spirit in many forms

(Wohlstrom, 2021). The connection between creative expression and the inner world of

the athlete is only half of its connection to well-being. The other half is physical and

emotional, where creativity increases positive emotions, lessens depressive symptoms,

reduces stress, decreases anxiety, and improves immune system functioning (Malchiodi,

2015). As Desmond mentioned, a player's ability to be creative "all goes back to the

player-coach relationship."

Coaches promote creativity in their sport through encouragement, tactical

strategy, and practice drills. Team sports such as hockey and basketball were more likely

to describe the importance of creativity versus individual sports like track and field.

Creativity requires trust in self, coach, and teammates, encouraging players to move past

vulnerability towards expansion. To support creativity, participants in this study

described selecting specific drills or tactical offensive strategies that would allow athletes

to respond creatively. For example, basketball coaches described using a motion offense

in which their players followed simple rules but followed and reacted to what they saw on the court instead of setting rigid plays.

Speaking Up

Many coaches provided examples of times they wished they had spoken up as an athlete and did not. The most common themes were related to role, fairness, and behavior. Fear proved the most common reason for not speaking up, with many feeling pressured by the hierarchical structures of their teams. One interesting finding was that in this small group, white male coaches reported feeling they wished they spoke up but did not more than other groups. By contrast, most women and coaches of color commented that they always spoke their minds. Researchers should explore further to learn if there is any influence of race or gender in speaking up in the coaching or athlete community. Thinking about times when they did not speak up brought up strong emotions for some of these coaches, which again highlights the importance not of what happened but of how each coach made meaning from the experience. Each coach interviewed was in favor of encouraging students to speak up. Speaking up is one of the interpersonal risks that players can make in psychologically safe team environments (Saxe & Hardin, 2022). When athletes feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to exhibit positive communication outcomes, including knowledge sharing, voicing concerns, and information sharing (Saxe and Hardin, 2022).

According to coaches, there are generational differences at play. Today's student-athletes are likelier to "call out B.S." without fear of retribution. How coaches index this generational difference influences their relationship with their student-athletes. The coaches who spoke directly about the generational difference mainly described how their

understanding had changed positively, one wrapped in growth and new learnings.

Specifically, they spoke about wishing they had the same agency when they played. This

understanding allows them the opportunity to elevate voices and promote shared

leadership. It also shows a subtle dismantling of traditional power structures intent on

one-way communication. Through elevating voice, coaches found pathways to increasing

both well-being and performance. These could be in a timeout, listening to a player

describe what they saw on the field, or discovering that the team needs a day off.

To encourage speaking up, coaches recommend building supportive relationships,

holding individual and small group meetings, establishing practice partners, and creating

intentional feedback sessions. Coaches recommended holding informal and formal

individual meetings with student-athletes. They also found ways, either through grade-

level, positional groups, or leadership council meetings, to focus group-like learning

experiences. Bill provided an example of creating practice partners that perform drills

together throughout the year, intending to observe, listen, and give each other feedback.

Cranmer & Buckner (2017) suggest that it is crucial to cultivate a social

environment where high school student-athletes form multiple quality relationships

across organizational hierarchies, increasing their likelihood of speaking up to voice their

disagreements on team policies, playing time, and practices to their teammates

horizontally when they had poorer relationships with their coaches. Calvin shared a

powerful example of speaking up from a former player who reached out to discuss a

sexual assault. He described how the culture the team built allowed this player to come

back and share her story, "that's one of the things that we worked on during our time

together...having her be able to find her voice and not hide it."

Safe from Harm, Safe to Push Boundaries

In a sporting environment, the challenge becomes how coaches can help their players take calculated risks in their effort, attitude, leadership, and play. Saxe & Hardin (2022) found that when coaching behaviors were psychologically harmful, players shifted their energy from trying to improve to surviving (not making a coach upset or making a mistake).

The energy in this study rose when coaches described how they help their student-athletes expand their comfort zone. This t emerged as a fundamental aspect of their understanding of coaching, with coaches describing the importance of developing a safe and trusting environment, building solid player-coach relationships, and working to help students have a healthier relationship with stress. Coaches shared that to help athletes step out of their comfort zone, they first needed to be in one. Coaches shared that this comfort comes from the team environment, their relationship with the coach, and a player's internal dialogue.

Building a trusting relationship was important. Study participants did not endorse behaviors associated with authoritarian coaching styles but described relationships centered on authoritative or authentic ones. Again, coaches talked about the importance of individual conversations with players. They stressed that these conversations were honest and provided feedback and action steps.

Coaches also recognized that one of the key barriers to athletes feeling comfortable enough to step out of their comfort zone is to help them improve their self-awareness and self-talk. Participants spoke about actively encouraging student-athletes to adopt mental models aligned with principles related to growth mindset and positive

psychology. To help with this, coaches described how they use practice drills and game experiences to help scaffold learning experiences with stress. Multiple coaches shared that one of the best ways they knew how to combat stress was to have their student-athletes coach at youth camps. These experiences offered student-athletes an alternate view of the learning process and helped them better understand the coach-athlete relationship. Coaches highlighted how this change in role gave them more insight into the role mistakes play in learning.

Despite the importance of pushing players outside their comfort zone to coaching, some coaches acknowledged that pushing kids was difficult. A few coaches admitted needing help to balance a warm, positive environment with a challenging one. Sean said it was difficult and acknowledged that he benefitted most from coaches who pushed him harder than he thought he could. This tension is an area where a clear personal philosophy and peer support could potentially improve coaches' help coaches bridge this gap between their values, thoughts, and values and discomfort.

The coach has been identified as a psychological safety gatekeeper (Vella, et al., 2022). When supporting psychological safety, they are accessible and communicative and have positive relationships with athletes. A high-quality relationship between coach and player is vital to psychological safety (Saxe and Hardin, 2022).

Conflict Management

Coaches unanimously believed that honesty and directness were the keys to conflict management. They perceived themselves as improving their conflict management skills over time, with one coach offering that they are unfinished products even as coaches.

Most coaches believed in taking care of any conflict right away. These coaches viewed conflict as a cancer-like illness that, if not eradicated, would spread and impact more of the team. The outliers preferred to wait to challenge student-athletes to do the necessary internal work and try on their own to solve their problems. If an athlete could not solve it, they would be there to assist them. This is in line with Camiré et al. (2018), who suggested that when coaches solve the issues for young athletes, it limits their ability to learn new life skills.

The difference between genders and style of conflict resolution was noted. Melissa stated that boys had to fight to bond, whereas girls had to bond to fight. She found it more likely that male athletes would move on from a conflict with a peer or coach than females. Most girls' coaches, including three women, described this as "drama," but one shared that what many refer to as drama with girls is more a product of competitiveness and that her girls competed in everything. The connection between gender and cohesion in sport was illustrated by Carron et al. (2002), who found that gender influenced the cohesion–performance relationship. In particular, the research showed that perceptions of cohesion in female athletes are more related to performance than in male athletes. More recently, Turgeon et al. (2022) found that high school athletes who identify as girls who experienced relatedness frustration and autonomy frustration were more susceptible to experiencing poorer mental health outcomes than boys and girls who did not.

To improve conflict management in high school teams, coaches believed they could find better teachable moments to discuss management strategies and provide more opportunities for dialogue. One avenue offered by coaches in this study was to help

student-athletes shift focus from internal to external so that their players could step

outside themselves. The measures were reactive, so a future emphasis on proactive

support is warranted.

Leadership Development

Only 12% of high school coaches nationally report having their players

participate in a leadership development program, although 90% thought it was a good

idea (Voelker et al., 2019). Sports provide an environment for developing young people's

leadership, and the most common form of peer leadership in high school sports is the

team captain (Gould, 2016; Voelker et al., 2019). Team leaders help shape and frame

their peers' culture and are critical components of the team environment.

Team Captains

The selection of team captains offered some of the most divergent views from

participants. Where coaches differed the most was how they selected captains. Coaches

identified four strategies for choosing captains: coaches elect, players elect, players and

coaches elect, and no captains. Some coaches admitted that they needed more support

with the captain's importance and significance in a college application or school politics.

There is room to provide discussion and for coaches to learn about the best strategies for

choosing a captain and to help define the roles and responsibilities. John said he struggled

because he did not understand a captain's role.

Fransen et al. (2019) found that captains are mainly selected because of attributes

unrelated to leadership. The most common reason a player is elected captain is their

playing ability and experience. Fransen et al. (2019) listed the ideal traits of a team

captain, as answered by coaches, as motivating and encouraging teammates, having

social skills, caring for a good team atmosphere, and being a good listener. These results were consistent between genders and players and coaches. A recent national survey found that the top characteristics coaches want in a captain are work ethic, expecting a high level of performance from self and others, and showing respect to others on the team (Voelker et al., 2019). Coaches endorsed these findings throughout my interviews.

Coaches described their best captain as someone who served as a liaison between players and coaching staff. This liaison would be an exemplar on and off the field, encouraging teammates to make good decisions through their words or actions. Cotterell and Cheetham (2017) found that captains are expected to embody team culture. Specific to high school team captains, Voelker et al. (2011) found that captains reported responsibilities, including building relationships, managing conflict, enforcing team roles, mentoring, and mentally preparing players.

Team Culture

Coaches described the importance of developing a team culture based on relationships and trust. An exchange between players and coaches allows them to support each other. When athletes show respect and commitment to their coach, coaches are likelier to help in the present and future (Jowett et al., 2017). Due to the effort required to provide purposeful feedback, correct errors, and ensure successful outcomes, coaches, and student-athletes are more successful when a shared bond invites the other into the development process. This bond allows a student-athlete to receive the best coaching practices and leadership from their coaches and may allow the student-athlete to impact the training environment more readily (Jowett et al., 2017). A sincere working

relationship between coaches and student-athletes built on trust, respect, appreciation, commitment, and corporations provides a sound base for both groups to interact.

Quality coach-student-athlete relationships are at the heart of effective coaching; coaches and athletes must develop the skills to build successful relationships (Jowett et al., 2017). This topic is why coaches in this study believe high school coaches need to continue to learn about and discuss how to implement relationship-building into the context of practice. When student-athletes perceive their coaches as autonomy-supportive, they report higher subjective well-being and performance (Lemelin et al., 2022). Autonomy-supportive coaches are empathetic informational and encourage student-athlete decision-making (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

As mentioned earlier, the ability of a coach to share their vision or philosophy with the team is essential. Coaches are vital in determining the conditions explaining the link between participation and outcomes (Holt et al., 2017; Turgeon et al., 2019). Participants in this study believed chunking the season into segments that allow the recalibration of goals and a shared reflection was essential to building a culture based on a growth mindset. Camiré and Kendellen (2016) found that the social and competitive nature of high school sports can, based on how it is experienced, direct the psychosocial outcomes of the student-athlete.

Building Blocks of Team Culture

As described in Chapter 4, all coaches believed that team culture was essential for team performance and well-being. They identified buy-in, clear expectations, communication, relationships, and supportive behavior as the ingredients of healthy team cultures. This section will outline how coaches create a healthy team culture.

Buy-in is the acceptance and willingness to actively support and participate in something. It is a term commonly used in sports by coaches and players regarding collective goal pursuit. This pursuit often includes selfless action. University of Georgia football coach Kirby Smart described the connection in a 2022 press conference when highlighting the selfless buy-in of members of his coaching staff: "The buy-in of those four coaches, the alignment, the understanding of this program's bigger than me, and that I'll sacrifice for the program. They understand their role. They've done what they've been asked to do, and they embrace it" (Leigh, 2022).

To encourage buy-in, coaches in this study elevate student voices around goals, rules, values, and needs. They encourage breaking down traditional hierarchical structures that existed when they played as youth. They support empowering student-athletes and forming relationships between older and younger team members to reduce the hierarchical nature of grade level.

Supportive behaviors included team meals, coach preparation, positive interactions, check-in, and travel opportunities. Coaches described how everything could help build culture with the following best practices: promoting inclusive language, developing individual relationships, and ensuring daily check-ins. These behaviors support trust and communication and can include something as simple as a daily fist bump, allowing the coach to interact and check in with a player. Coaches in this study believed that care and trust were the two most essential factors for player-to-player relationships. Although there was a divide between needing to be friends versus needing to respect their peers, both groups of coaches believed that their players needed to care for and trust each other.

Communication

Coaches are involved in transferring knowledge through their interactions with them (Gomes, 2018). Most coaches value the need to have a cohesive and well-structured team. To implement this, they promote team spirit at social and task levels by speaking honestly, being transparent, asking for feedback, and centering respect and trust. Younger coaches in this study had more clarity around language and were more intentional.

Coaches spoke about the importance of promoting student voices to make student-athletes feel accepted and to help them better understand the team's culture. Student voice is subject to the power dynamics between player and coach. Players and coaches enter a social contract that gives power to coaches, like the supervisor-subordinate relationship (Kassing & Anderson, 2014). Cranmore and Buckner (2017) found that the quality of relationships between player and coach and the team environment influence patterns of dissent. This idea is important because it connects to elevating students' voices and disrupting power structures something younger coaches in this study seemed eager to do. Kassing (2011) noted that upward dissent is when dissent is shared in the power structure and is functional and the most desired form of expression within social groups. They found upward dissent when players could share their thoughts and concerns with coaches directly, which was healthy. Multiple coaches in this study shared how they experienced the tension of being unable to practice upward dissent when they were players. There was a sense in this study that the promotion of honest conversation was beneficial to the player-coach relationship.

Barriers to Team Culture

In this study, coaches' behavior, student leadership, external voices, investment, and communication were barriers to a healthy team culture. Coaches have the most substantial impact on anyone's team culture. This can negatively impact culture through poor student-coach relationships emerging from a lack of transparency, a lack of modeling expected behaviors, and a lack of concern for culture building. Participants suggested that coaches should walk the walk, find ways to have expectations for themselves, and work to meet those expectations. Participants expressed the importance of admitting mistakes in front of their teams to build trust.

A second area that hinders team culture is poor student leadership. Coaches recommended implementing strategies that break down traditional hierarchies, create a sense of family, and eliminate hazing. To break down hierarchies, coaches offered strategies for purposefully setting inclusive policies around buses, equipment pickup, and locker rooms.

Coaches also worried about external factors, including peers, parents, and social media. To mitigate this, they recommend open and honest dialogue and clear expectations. These conversations often revolved around playing time, which becomes more challenging as the season progresses. To help alleviate this, coaches recommend having non-performance outcome measures like values each player can reference and segmenting the season into chunks so that a player's mindset can recalibrate.

According to the coaches in this study, a fourth barrier is the investment level of all team members. They described how culture should include caring for players and being worthy of concern and effort. A few coaches said it may not grow as desired if you do not think about culture or let it emerge without guidance. In this regard, gardening

metaphors are appropriate. Coaches wanted to avoid forcing culture but needed the

essential nutrients, structure, and support to grow. This includes being willing to

intervene when necessary to weed and control pests or water. However, they must also

create enough opportunity and space for their players to grow and resist their

environments to become strong and healthy. One coach mentioned the importance of

being intentional when setting up practices and communicating with his Metropolitan

Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) student-athletes. METCO is a program

funded by the state of Massachusetts to expand educational opportunities, increase

diversity, and reduce racial isolation by permitting students from Boston to attend public

schools and participate in communities outside the city (METCO, 2023).

Social Justice Impact

Social Justice goals are inherent in sport. The social justice goal of creating

equitable environments is also a focus of athletics when coaches teach students that the

individual is much better as part of a team working toward a common goal (Amaro,

2022). Participants often described the importance of ensuring every student-athlete was

seen, heard, and valued. The more conscious they are of this, the more they can use their

locker rooms and practice sessions as educational opportunities to challenge student

perceptions about fairness and equality. Desmond explains this here:

> Every team has a different culture and personalities. There are a lot of different
>
> personalities from a lot of different walks of life, whether it be race,
>
> socioeconomic background, religion, political views, or other factors. Football's a
>
> great way to kind of put all that stuff aside because we're all trying to push and
>
> pull towards one goal.

Gender equity was the most often cited social justice issue described by coaches. Coaches who referenced inequity pointed to discrepancies in opportunities, respect, and resources between male and female athletes. Calvin touched on these in sharing his reason for wanting to coach a girls' team:

There was a lot going around in the school around gender equity and female athletics, just not being supported or seen in the same way or valued in the same way. So, I made a conscious decision to be there cause I was like, you know, these players deserve a good coach. They put the time in, they deserve somebody who knows the sport, wants to teach the sport and cares about them.

This research would have benefitted from a more direct questioning of coaches in this area, particularly around knowledge, comfort level, and time spent on social justice-related topics with their teams. Bishop et al. (2023) found that Canadian high school coaches who had a greater awareness of white privilege in society had more favorable attitudes towards social justice, higher importance attributed to climate change issues, greater understanding of prejudicial attitudes against the LGBT community, and a higher propensity to engage in antiracist behaviors. Amaro (2022) wrote that when school leaders help our students understand the social justice goals of focusing on truth, equity, and benefiting all of humanity and how they intersect with athletic goals of empowerment, teamwork, and sportsmanship, students then have the potential to become transformative leaders who can help make the world better for everyone.

Education and resources are pivotal to supporting the needs of high school student-athletes. Sean described helping a player transition from female to male. Sean had a good relationship with the student-athlete and leaned on recent educational

opportunities and the school counselor to best support the player he also had as a student.

In reflecting on the experience, Sean described it this way :

> The student-athlete] feels super comfortable in his skin and knows that I think I
> was there as a means of support. I'd encourage him to play whatever he chose in
> the course of his high school career. I think at this point in my career that matters
> more than wins and losses, to be very honest. I think that's how I've been able to
> show my support, and I think it's a unique opportunity for me as a male athlete to
> work with the girls to be that, that person for them. And I hope I am; I take that
> more seriously than anything else.

Limitations

I want to note multiple limitations concerning this project, including the limited

diversity of participants, the decision to focus solely on the coach's perspective, and the

need for performance-centered coaches. There were three coaches of color in this study; I

think a more diverse study would include more coaches of color and more from differing

racial backgrounds, especially the Latino population, which makes up 14% of

Massachusetts and 10% of the New England populations (Granberry et al., 2023). I

would also like to see a more evenly spread diversity of ages. I should have asked

coaches how race impacted their coaching experience, but I recognized upon review that

it would have been beneficial. Research could also look at how coaches think about

meeting the needs of their diverse players.

There appeared to be differences in how coaches talked about certain elements

influenced by their age. However, due to the small sample size, it is challenging to

understand if these differences are specific to those coaches or could be generalized to

larger groups. Only one coach was in the following age groups: 20s, 50s, or 70s. The rest were in their 30s or 40s.

Also, everything shared was from the coaches' perspective. Learning from other stakeholders, including current and former student-athletes, administrators, and parents, would be beneficial. Broadening the study would enable a more ecological understanding of the process and how each level understands the three main themes of this research: the coach's understanding of themselves, supporting student-athletes, and developing healthy team cultures.

I also needed to ask my earlier participants different questions that would have enriched the data. I would have asked more questions about coaches' relationships with student-athletes' parents, explored what was different between student-athletes today and when they played, investigated beliefs and opportunities around coach education, asked explicitly about social justice issues and preventing harm, and encouraged them to share what they learned most from coaching.

All participant coaches were open to discussing the topic of well-being, and all shared that they prioritized well-being over performance. This finding surprised me; I entered this research with the idea that coaches would be more mixed. There is more tension between these two ideas than what was described by the participants. More investigation is needed to discover the accuracy of this sentiment. Potentially, participants who agreed to participate were more willing than those who did not respond to talk about well-being. Speaking with coaches who focus on performance would add balance to this study.

In Chapter 3, I described the process I used to promote validity. There are more steps I could have taken to increase validity, including member checking. Member checking would have added to the validity of this research by returning data to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016).

Lastly, this research focused on coaches' beliefs about well-being and team culture. It fell short of looking at sport as transformative. In Model 1 the outer ring is dedicated to transformative potential of sport. I believe that emphasizing the first three layers of the model creates the opportunity for coaches to consciously push toward making their teams transformative spaces. Although some transformative examples were shared by coaches, this research did not cover transformative spaces in depth.

Future Considerations & Recommendations

Future research could benefit from comparing coaches based on age, as there was some variation even in a limited pool. Younger coaches were more comfortable discussing relationships and developed a more nuanced language around support, care, and belonging than their veteran peers. This finding did not mean older coaches were not compassionate or thoughtful about relationships; it was just that younger coaches used language with more granularity and ease.

Coaches would benefit from reflexive tools and understanding to become more aware of how experiences, tradition, culture, and relations of power inherent within social structures influence their practice. Formal or informal coach education programs allowing coaches to self-reflect, engage in discourse, and learn new skills would benefit coaches. These coach education programs could start by helping coaches make meaning of their beliefs about themselves and their coaching philosophy, improving their

understanding of supporting student-athletes, and providing strategies to build thriving team cultures. Partington (2020) suggested that coach education should work to distinguish between the tactical and technical aspects of philosophy and the pedagogical and ethical aspects.

In addition to coach education, coaches would benefit from regular feedback and evaluation opportunities. Although 46% of New England coaches find evaluations at least somewhat effective, 61% were not evaluated (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2023). Schools should work towards developing training, evaluation, and support for coaches on not just tactics and strategies but also the well-being domain.

This difference in the power dynamics between coaches and student-athletes has the potential to support or limit speaking up. Upward communication can be critical in helping organizations learn and succeed. When people at lower levels of the social hierarchy speak up, they challenge established norms, identify areas for growth, and make suggestions to improve their organization's well-being (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Likewise, the opposite is true in fear-based climates, where problems are not elevated due to a fear of making mistakes (Edmondson, 2019; Saxe & Hardin, 2022). This understanding aligns with Simons & Bird (2023), who suggested that NCAA coaches adopt Jowett & Meek's (2000) 3 Cs approach. Those are developing closeness, commitment, and complementarity. One area for improvement would be formal student leadership training. Outside of an independent school that was looking to initiate a leadership program, none of the coaches had a program for developing student leaders formally.

Promoting well-being at the high school level requires a team approach that addresses support and education at three levels: coaches, team environment, and student-athletes. All play a role in their well-being and that of others. At all three levels, team members need to be self-reflective, other-oriented, trusting, and supportive. This approach requires sharing power, encouraging coaches' voices, and building relationships.

According to Anderson-Butcher & Bates (2023) New England sport coaches are least confidant in their ability to help athletes navigate social media, link athletes to mental health resources, and refer athletes to supports for basic unmet needs. Roughly 70% of coaches were interested in future training in motivation, mental toughness, performance anxiety, team dynamics, mental health, effective communication, leadership development, and suicide protocols. A 2023 Ohio state law requires all coaches to complete a student-mental health training course (Ohio DEW, 2023). Massachusetts is working to pass similar legislation (Young, 2023).

Chapter Summary

This research highlighted three key areas that influence how coaches can help players be the best versions of themselves: better understanding themselves, supporting student-athletes, and developing healthy team cultures. Education and support are necessary to help coaches grow in these areas and meet the needs of their student-athletes.

High school students face many challenges. Sport can play a pivotal role in helping them to meet and overcome them. However, they can also be areas that cause harm. Helping coaches to see themselves as more than tacticians of a sport and more as

educators of the whole person can help lead to positive student outcomes. Doing this requires transitioning from traditional hierarchal and authoritarian coaching approaches to more student-athlete-centered authoritative ones. This transition can be aided by offering coaches opportunities to collaborate with peers, professional development, and administrative support. The participant coaches all favored supporting students over pursuing wins and losses, which suggests there exists a willingness amongst coaches to do this; however, as described in the limitations section, I have doubts that this group is fully reflective of the population.

High school sports offer student-athletes a wonderful opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills. Student-athletes learn how to respond to the vicissitudes of the games they play through positive and supporting relationships. When coaches think that is something that will just happen without intentional effort, they limit their agency. This is also the case when they leave it up to someone from someone from outside the team. The best coaches look to integrate concepts of well-being and team building in concert with their student-athletes. It was wonderful to hear from so many coaches who intentionally supported their student-athletes well-being. Sharing these ideas may encourage other coaches to adopt strategies to support their teams better.

In season 1 Episode 3 of Apple TV's Ted Lasso, the eponymous main character and head coach of the fictional AFC Richmond team tells a reporter, "For me, success is not about the wins and losses. It's about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves on and off the field" (Bikhchandani, 2021). In line with that quote, this research aimed to add to the literature on student-athlete well-being by asking coaches for their perceptions of how team environments contributed to supporting student-athlete

well-being and performance. High school coaches wield a powerful influence over the

players they coach by serving as custodians of the environment. Learning how they view

their role can impact future coach education, hiring practices, and behavioral norms and

expectations. It could help create inclusive and safe environments for all student-athletes.

These are spaces where students can feel brave enough to bring their authentic selves and

beliefs so that they can grow through connection. At its highest-level, sport can be

transformative. When coaches create cultures of well-being, they can start to help their

student-athletes look inward and outward to recognize the transformative power of sport.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

What sports did/do you play?

What sport do you coach?

How long have you been coaching?

How did you come to coach?

What differences do you see between being a player and a coach?

Where did your motivation come from as an athlete?

 What allowed you to play your best? (Internal/environmental)

How would you describe what a player/coach realtionship should be?

Can you describe a time as a player when you did not speak up and wish you did? What

prevented you?

Was there a person or playing experience that has most informed your coaching?

How would you describe your coaching philosophy?

In your opinion, what makes a team successful? A student-athlete?

What factors are most important to you in terms of building teams?

What are the barriers and facilitators of good team culture?

How have your relationships with coaches changed over time?

How do you get a student-athlete to step out of their comfort zone? Do you have an example?

What role do your student-athletes have in your team leadership? How do you develop this?

What do you understand athlete wellbeing to be?

How do you as a coach support student-athlete well-being?

How do you show players you care?

What is the relationship between well-being and performance?

Is there anything you would suggest that should be put in place to help connect student-athlete wellbeing and performance? Additional Thoughts/Comments.

Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer

Hi,

I am seeking varsity high school head coaches willing to share their perspectives on team

culture, performance, and well-being. My IRB-approved research project will use

interviews to learn more about how coaches perceive the relationship between well-being

and performance. I am sending this out to you so that you may share it with eligible

coaches you work with who may be interested in sharing their insights.

Purpose: Coaches play an important role in creating team cultures and supporting

student-athletes. Two consequences of those cultures are student-athlete well-being and

team performance. By listening to coaches' experiences and insights I would like to

further the coaching research so that coaches can learn from each other to best support

student-athletes.

Commitment: Participants will be asked to engage in one 60-90 minute audio-recorded

interview via Zoom.

Who Qualifies?

● Head Varsity High School Athletic Coaches 3 years experience

● Willing to answer questions about playing and coaching experience

About me: My name is Steve Brown, and I am a doctoral student at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. I have worked with student-athletes as a mental skills coach, athletic coach, and clinical counselor.

Sensitivity: Given the potentially sensitive nature of the topics to be discussed, extreme care will be taken to ensure the privacy and well-being of the participant are protected. This study is IRB-approved by Lesley University to protect participants. This project is being supervised by Dr. Susan Gere.

Next steps: If you are interested or have any questions please contact me at sbrown57@lesley.edu or call the number below. Please share this email with colleagues who may be working with this population.

Thank you,

Steve Brown

sbrown57@lesley.edu

Appendix C

Informed Consent Agreement

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this IRB-approved research study "What are coaches' perceptions of the influence of the sport environment on accelerating student-athlete performance and well-being." A description of the study's purpose, your involvement, your rights as a participant, and my contact information follows.

Purpose of the study:

Coaches play an important role in the team environment and in supporting student-athletes. Two consequences of those cultures are student-athlete well-being and team performance. By listening to coaches' experiences and insights I would like to further the coaching research so that coaches can learn from each other to best support student-athletes.

Involvement in the study:

You are being asked to participate in a recorded interview that will be approximately 60-90 minutes over Zoom. You will be asked about your experience as a student-athlete, your beliefs on what makes a successful team, and your understanding of supporting student-athlete well-being. You will also be asked to take a brief demographic questionnaire. Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no compensation.

Participant rights:

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and he may withdraw from the

project at any time for any reason. If you withdraw your information will be eliminated

from the study and destroyed. You may stop the interview at any point and decline to

answer any of the questions within the interview. Your contributions and any

information gathered from you, whether in the demographic form or the interview, will

be kept completely confidential.

Interview data, including direct quotes, may be used for academic purposes, such as

presentation, published research papers, or articles, but your name and any identifying

information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research and

all efforts will be made to uphold the confidentiality of research participants. You will be

given a pseudonym with any identifying information removed or concealed. We will use

numerical identifiers rather than your name on study records. Your name and other facts

that might identify you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

Recordings transcripts and interview data will be stored in a locked file cabinet or on a

password-protected computer and only I will have access to the information. Data will

be destroyed after five years. Questions about your participation are welcome and you

are encouraged to contact me at any time.

Risks and benefits:

Minimal risks are anticipated through your participation in this study. However, it is

possible that discussing your counseling experience may lead to feelings of vulnerability

and may bring up emotional or distressing reactions. You may stop the interview or

decline to answer any question. If you become distressed by talking about his

experience, and feel it will be helpful, you will be provided with a resource list of support

and counselor/therapists with who to process the response.

There is no direct benefit from participating in this study, but it may be beneficial to you

in that you may gain greater insight into your identity as a male student-athlete and his

relationship to counseling and find it beneficial to discuss those feelings and experiences

in a non-judgmental setting. Your contributions may also be beneficial to advancing

knowledge on this topic and improving student-athlete access to mental health services.

Questions, concerns, and contact information:

Please contact me at any time with questions or concerns that you may have. Signing this

form along with your guardian acknowledges his voluntary participation, your

understanding of your rights, and that you have received a copy of this consent form, so

please retain a copy for yourself.

Researcher: Steve Brown

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to

which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be

reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu

Date _____

Participant's Signature (Typing your name here serves as your signature, indicating that you have read, understand your rights, and agree to participate in this research study):

_____

Parent/Guardian Signature (typing your name here serves as your signature, indicating that you have read, understand your son's rights, and agree to his participation in this research study):

_____

Researcher's Signature: Steve Brown