

Ithaca College

Digital Commons @ IC

---

Ithaca College Theses

---

2020

## Influential Coaching: An Exploratory Study of What Collegiate Swimmers Perceive to be Most Important

Jasmine Kierra Haas  
*Ithaca College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.ithaca.edu/ic\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.ithaca.edu/ic_theses)



Part of the [Sports Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Haas, Jasmine Kierra, "Influential Coaching: An Exploratory Study of What Collegiate Swimmers Perceive to be Most Important" (2020). *Ithaca College Theses*. 426.  
[https://digitalcommons.ithaca.edu/ic\\_theses/426](https://digitalcommons.ithaca.edu/ic_theses/426)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ IC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ithaca College Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ IC.

INFLUENTIAL COACHING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WHAT  
COLLEGIATE SWIMMERS PERCEIVE TO BE MOST IMPORTANT

---

A Master's Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate Program  
in Exercise and Sport Sciences  
Ithaca College

---

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Science

---

by

Jasmine Kierra Haas

May 2020

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER OF SCIENCE THESIS

This is to certify that the thesis of

Jasmine Kierra Haas

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in the School of Health Sciences and Human Performance at Ithaca College has been approved.

Thesis Adviser: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_

Chair, Graduate Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Dean of HSHP: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 7.15.20 \_\_\_\_\_

## ABSTRACT

Coaches hold an influential position in the lives of their athletes, both in and out of sport (Mastroleo et al., 2012). Although coaches hold this position regardless of their coaching styles or behaviors, it is difficult to define an “influential coach”, as the definition varies significantly across various populations. While several authors have examined positive and negative coaching behaviors, influential coaching also varies across demographics (Crust & Azadi, 2009; Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Hoffman, 2008; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). This suggests that “influential coaching” may be situational and subjective, and therefore benefit from qualitative research designed to establish a clearer and more holistic depiction of this coaching characteristic. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore what coaching behaviors student-athletes perceive as most influential. The author recruited seven student-athletes from the Division I and Division III levels. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview format. Following all data collection, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Qualitative Data Analyses (QDA). From these interviews, five common themes emerged. These themes were as follows: 1) An influential coach is socially competent, 2) An influential coach is a caring role model who creates a positive environment, 3) An influential coach is committed, 4) An influential coach is flexible, adaptive, and holistic, and 5) An influential coach is knowledgeable. These findings should benefit coaches in their continual development as influential leaders. Potential limitations of this study include, but are not limited to, a limited sample size, data being subjective and therefore lacking generalizability, and the possible influence of outside circumstances impacting athlete perceptions at the time of the scheduled interviews.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of Purpose .....	3
Research Question .....	3
Assumptions of the Study.....	3
Definition of Terms.....	3
Delimitations.....	4
Limitations .....	4
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	5
Introduction.....	5
Experiences of College Coaches.....	5
Coach-Leader Roles.....	11
Good Versus Poor Coaching.....	15
The Power of Influence in Coaching .....	20
3. METHODS .....	24
Research Design.....	24
Participants and Recruiting Strategies .....	24
Semi-Structured Interview Format .....	26
Bracketing Procedures .....	26
Study Procedures .....	28
Data Analyses .....	29

4. RESULTS .....	32
Common Themes .....	32
Common Theme #1: Socially Competent.....	33
Common Theme #2: Caring Role Models Who Create a Positive Environment.....	39
Common Theme #3: Committed .....	49
Common Theme #4: Flexible, Adaptive, and Holistic .....	52
Common Theme #5: Knowledgeable .....	57
5. DISCUSSION.....	61
6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	74
Summary .....	74
Conclusions.....	74
Recommendations for Future Research .....	75
REFERENCES .....	77
APPENDICES .....	88
APPENDIX A: Recruitment Statement .....	88
APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form .....	89
APPENDIX C: Interview Questions.....	93

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	
Subject Characteristics.....	25

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

No doubt, coaches are in a position of leadership. While there are many different styles of leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Burke et al., 2006; Vella, et al., 2010), leadership is just one of many roles in coaching. And, as any athlete or former athlete knows, some coaches stand out in their leadership roles, while other coaches do not. So what coaching traits are perceived by athletes as most influential?

Several authors have attempted to answer this question. For example, Hoffman (2008) examined the preferences of coaching qualities in Division I basketball players. Similarly, Kenow and Williams (1999) explored athlete perceptions of coaching behaviors, as related to the coach-athlete relationship. Becker (2009) investigated the views of elite level athletes concerning “great coaching.” All three studies concluded that the preferences and evaluations of coaching behaviors varied depending on the personal traits of each athlete and the surrounding environment, though common themes of the most desired traits could often be observed.

These coaching questions are complex, as the answers may depend on any number of variables. The literature shows that the “good” traits desired from one coach, or even traits that stand out from one coach to the next, vary widely based on the athlete (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; Kenow & Williams, 1999). As human perception is subjective, this is not surprising. Several athlete perspectives have been explored to date, including preferential differences based on gender, age, level of play, and psychological profile (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Parker et al, 2012; Philippe & Seiler, 2006; Williams,



et al., 2003). For instance, female athletes seem to prefer coaches who are well versed in sport-specific knowledge and skilled in teaching physical technique (Stewart, 2016). On the other hand, male athletes seem to prefer a coach who is socially skilled and able to effectively communicate a skill through interactions with their athletes and by making them feel heard, understood, and cared for (Philippe & Seiler, 2006). Concerning psychological factors, Crust & Azadi (2009) found that mentally tough athletes preferred more instruction and feedback, compared to less mentally tough athletes. As indicated, influential coaching can vary based on the team, the sport, or even the individual athlete. In short, more research is necessary in order to properly explore this topic, as well as better understand athlete perceptions and coaching behaviors. In the end, coaches with such knowledge should be able to provide more effective coaching.

One important implication for such research is its usefulness in coach development and education. Another population that could benefit from this research would be sport psychology consultants working with athletic team and coaches. Consultants are often viewed primarily as working with athletes, but performance can be directly influenced by the coach-athlete relationship and interaction (Zhang & Chelladurai, 2013). Therefore, to be most effective in implementing performance enhancement skills, it is important for consultants to understand not only the athlete, but also how an athlete perceives and is influenced by the behaviors of his or her coach.

There are many gaps in the current literature as related to the aforementioned coaching questions. For instance, do athlete perceptions differ between individual and team sports? Do team captains perceive coaching behaviors in a different manner than their teammates who do not hold leadership positions? Do perceptions differ from sport

to sport, or do other demographic factors hold more weight? What more can we understand about this topic as it relates to gender? These questions cannot be answered in a single study, but all likely hold implications for how coaches lead their athletes and teams, as well as a coach's overall coaching effectiveness.

#### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn about the perceptions of student-athletes as related to the leadership behaviors of their coaches. This study is designed to explore what athletes perceive to be the most influential coaching attributes. Knowing how athletes differentiate between influential and less-influential coaching behaviors should aid future coaches in developing more influential coaching practices.

#### Research Question

The research question for this study is: What coaching attributes are perceived by athletes as most influential?

#### Assumptions of the Study

1. Participants have a level of awareness about their feelings toward their coaches.
2. Participants are truthful and accurate in their answers to the interview questions.
3. Participant's answers are representative of their athlete peers as a whole.

#### Definition of Terms

1. Leadership- the process of influencing others to take action toward certain goals (Burns, 1998).
2. Influence- a change in one's thoughts, behaviors, or mindset which originates in another individual or group (Raven, 1964).

### Delimitations

1. Only individual sport athletes were interviewed for this study.
2. The participants sampled were only college athletes.

### Limitations

1. Results cannot be generalized to youth, high school, recreational, or elite athletes.
2. Results are based on subjective perceptions of a small sample, impacting the generalizability of the results.
3. Interviews were only conducted once, impacting the results by time of season, class standing, performance, or various other day-to-day events.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Coaches hold a position of leadership that enables them to directly influence their athletes (Bartone, 2006). While there is plenty of research examining what makes a “good coach” (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al., 2012; Stewart, 2016; Stammers, 2016), there is little research describing the perceptions of athletes in differentiating good versus influential coaching. This chapter includes an overview of the existing research on the experiences of college coaches, coach-leader roles, good versus poor coaching, and the power of influence in coaching.

#### Experiences of College Coaches

College coaches hold important positions in serving as role models for their athletes (Balyi, et al., 2013). Being a coach is an influential role, especially for college athletes who may be away from home for the first time and see their coach as a substitute parental figure (Tunick, et al., 2009). No doubt, a coach’s own training and athletic experiences will influence their development as leaders and help to mold their various coaching styles (Erickson, et al., 2007).

The average age of intercollegiate coaches is mid to late 30s, with a standard deviation of 9 years (Harris, 2005; Waryasz, et al., 2015). Over half of the coaches in these studies reported receiving a bachelor’s degree with an exercise science background. In addition, nearly 70% of these coaches have earned a master’s degree, as well as various other coaching certifications (Waryasz et al., 2015).

Many coaches reported previous experience as college athletes, supporting an earlier claim by Acosta and Carpenter (2014) that many current collegiate coaches are former athletes who have pursued a coaching position following their retirement from sport.

Competitive sport experiences, which many coaches take part in prior to becoming coaches, can socialize individuals in unique ways. For example, sport can influence how gender identity is formed and expressed (Cogan & Machin, 2009). College athletes may also require unique skills to help balance the stressors that have been shown to uniquely impact the college athletic experience (Ahlgren-Bedics & Monda, 2009; Ferrante & Etzel, 2009). In addition, collegiate athletes often miss out on many social and academic experiences (Stevens & Scholefield, 2009). Across some levels of college sports, athletes may also have access to a plethora of resources not available to the non-athlete. While this can be positive in terms of helping to balance the various demands of the student-athlete, it may also hinder the development of certain life skills that may later leave the individual developmentally unprepared in comparison to other peers (Stevens & Scholefield, 2009).

Individual personal attributes should also be considered when assessing how coaches develop. According to Stevens and Scholefield (2009), college athletes are likely to develop higher levels of commitment and resilience than what is required of their non-sport peers. They may also develop leadership qualities at a young age due to their various team roles and skill sets (Komives, et al., 2005). Despite these early leadership experiences, many athletes may still need help in balancing the numerous athletic, academic, and personal demands of college athletics. High levels of sport competition

can also lead to the development of a more competitive, aggressive, and emotionally restrictive persona both personally and professionally (Stevens & Scholefield, 2009).

Most intercollegiate coaches are men. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) found that 63% of head coaches were male and 37% of head coaches were female across Division I and II collegiate sports (The Institute of Diversity and Ethics in Sport, 2017). This male majority holds true for both male and female sports, and across all Divisions, though at lower percentages for Division III. Current literature, however, primarily focuses on the experiences of female collegiate coaches (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Kamphoff, 2010; Moran-Miller & Flores, 2011).

Recent findings have shown that this disparity in gender is especially pronounced within NCAA swimming and diving (LaVoi, et al., 2019). LaVoi and colleagues (2019) found that out of 26 Division I sports, swimming and diving were in the bottom tier of rankings based on percentage of female head coaches of female teams. In the 2018-2019 season, only 31 of 194 swim teams and only 38 of 176 diving teams at the Division I level had a female head coach. These numbers are much lower than the general athletic population, as the average percentage for Division I head coaching positions of female teams was 41.7% as of 2018 (Hart, 2018). LaVoi and colleagues (2019) reported grades based on the percentage of each sport with female coaches, with an 'A' being given for 70%-100% of the teams having a female coach and an 'F' being given for 0%-24% of the teams having a female coach. Since 2012, both swimming and diving have received 'F' grades yearly, and the percentages of female coaches are continuing to slowly decline (Anderson, 2019). Composition of coaching staffs was also explored by LaVoi and colleagues (2019), and these authors found that swimming and diving, sports that

typically have 5-6 coaches on staff, have numerous opportunities to hire female coaches, but despite this, one in five swimming and diving team coaching staffs are entirely male. Of the 194 swim teams studied, only four teams were entirely female, and 32 were entirely male; for diving, only one out of 176 teams was entirely female, and six were entirely male (LaVoi et al., 2019).

This “male majority” may come as a surprise, as research shows that female athletes tend to prefer female coaches (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). This male majority may also be surprising given Title IX. When Title IX commenced in 1972, females held 90% of the coaching positions for women’s athletic teams; as of 2014, this number had dropped to 43.4% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). This drop in the number of female coaches is thought to be, in part, due to the differing background of coaches today; whereas coaches in the past were often physical educators also being paid for teaching, coaches now are primarily former athletes who transition into coaching positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). There are several other potential reasons for these changes. One possible reason is a lack of female role models (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Moran-Miller & Flores, 2011). Kamphoff (2010) concluded that female coaches leave their jobs more often than male coaches, due to time and family commitments. Kamphoff (2010) also presented other possible demographic factors of relevance, including sexual orientation. Several female coaches participating in this study identified as lesbian, and they talked about the need to hide their sexual orientations in the workplace due to a fear of being fired or an increased difficulty in signing recruits. On a similar note, research detailing the experiences of gay male intercollegiate coaches are limited in comparison to the experiences of lesbian coaches (Kamphoff, 2010; Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2001). However,

homophobic attitudes are likely to be directed toward gay male coaches in a similar manner as to lesbian coaches, though the extent of these similarities is unknown.

Race is another common demographic focus within intercollegiate coach profiling. According to The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (2017), over 83% of all head coaching positions were held by white individuals. This was true for both male and female teams, across all NCAA divisions. African-American coaches in particular are considered scarce in the college coaching world, and in fact, are so few that across male Division III teams, female coaches outnumber them for head coaching positions (Harrison, et al., 2009; The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, 2017). Research from Harrison and colleagues (2009) also supported the notion that those of a minority race tend to be hired in coaching positions less frequently. However, research from Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley (2001) found that the reason for fewer black collegiate coaches may be because black coaches tend to leave the coaching profession more frequently than white coaches. These same researchers hypothesized that these exits from the profession may be due to either a lack of interest in the position or discrimination within the field itself.

Across intercollegiate athletics, Division I seems to be the most racially diverse of the three NCAA divisions, with track and field coaches being one of the most diverse groups (The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, 2017). Racial diversity also seems to be increasing among assistant NCAA coaches, at least in comparison to diversity across head coaches (The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, 2017). This is important to note as assistant coaching positions are often seen as stepping stones to head coaching positions. Additionally, one important consideration when examining the racial



demographics of NCAA coaches is the knowledge of how the NCAA collects demographic data. For example, coach data is collected by position and not in sum. This means that there could, in some cases, be double counting in occurrence. For example, if an individual held more than one official position, such as a coach for two different teams, they could be counted twice. In the end, this could skew the data and cause inaccurate portrayal of the actual demographics representing NCAA coaches.

When examining the experiences of intercollegiate coaches, it is important to also consider the environment in which this population resides and works. Certainly, specific NCAA and coaching guidelines, the norms and expectations of each sport, and the individual needs of each coach and athlete all work together to create a unique sporting environment. Coaches continue to face many growing athlete concerns, including the prevalence of mental illness, depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, academic pressures, injury concerns, sexual misconduct, social media, and various parent-related issues (Ferrante & Etzel, 2009; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Mastroleo, et al., 2012; Tunick, et al., 2009).

In summary, college coaches are primarily white and former collegiate athlete males in their 30s, though the current research does not comprehensively portray this population in terms of their experiences. Coaches are often committed and resilient, and generally have encountered leadership opportunities prior to beginning their coaching careers. Coaches also operate in a unique environment full of various stressors that require many different domains of competency.

### Coach-Leader Roles

There are many factors that contribute to a coach's leadership development (Komives, et al., 2005; Wethner & Trudel, 2006). Komives and colleagues (2005) have stated that leadership begins at a young age, and develops in six stages: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identification, leadership differentiation, generativity, and integration/synthesis. In their model, developing leaders must first recognize that leaders exist. Next, they must encounter group experiences and participate in a variety of organizations and activities. In the third stage, individuals realize that groups they are engaging in consist of leaders and followers. They then realize that anyone in a group can become a leader and begin committing to meaningful group goals. Finally, they incorporate leadership as part of their identity and start to lead on a daily basis. Similarly, Wethner and Trudel (2006) found that coaches rely on many resources and experiences throughout a lifetime as part of the leadership development process. These authors also stated that coaches' development is a continual process of growth, even at the elite level. Important factors in this development included curiosity, open-mindedness, and self-reflection.

Authors also highlight interactions with others and implementation of feedback as common themes in the process of a coach's leadership development (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Werthner & Trudel, 2006). Social interaction is also an influential factor, as Komives and colleagues (2005) have discussed. These authors indicated that others act as role models, such as older family members helping to build one's character, older peers providing inspiration, and friends acting supportively and providing affirmation for leadership behaviors.

The literature provides several differing perspectives and styles of leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Hammermeister & Chase, 2008; Turman, 2001; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2010). Different perspectives of leadership include servant leadership, transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, authentic leadership, and spiritual leadership. Coaches often display a range of styles in their leadership behaviors; however, altruistic leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership are three perspectives that seem to be popular among many coaches (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Vella, et al., 2010). Vella and colleagues (2010) noted that it is difficult to study or recommend any one style of leadership in coaching as many styles are required, and coaches must often be dynamic, as coaching requires adaptation and improvisation. This again emphasizes the need for coaches to develop a skilled awareness of self, others, and the social context, as previously mentioned in Wethner & Trudel (2006).

Determining which leadership styles are most effective is a complex process, as effectiveness can be defined in many ways. As cited in Wethner and Trudel (2006), researchers have measured leadership effectiveness in terms of cohesion, self-esteem, mood, emotion, outcome, and motivational climate. This suggests that different leadership styles may be necessary for obtaining different outcomes. Effectiveness of leadership styles could additionally differ from team to team or athlete to athlete, as supported by the situational leadership model (Turman, 2001). For example, Hammermeister and Chase (2008) found that high school athletes preferred a servant leadership style to other styles of leadership. On the other hand, Vella and colleagues (2013) found that coaches implementing transformational leadership behavior produced athletes who set more goals, developed more social skills, and experienced fewer

negative outcomes. Turman (2001) further supported the need for flexible leadership in coaching with the finding that athlete perceptions of supportive coaching differed largely depending on their current year of sport participation.

Coaches can hold a lot of influence over the athletes they lead. It has been shown that coaches not only impact the behaviors of their athletes on the field, but also in their personal development and life choices (Mastroleo et al., 2012). Therefore, coaches should be very aware of what values and behaviors they are modeling as leaders for their athletes, both in and out of sport. Ethical modeling can be challenging, especially for coaches working at the intercollegiate level where financial and outcome pressures abound. Leaders in intercollegiate athletics are often faced with the decision of *doing things right* versus *doing the right thing*, and in these cases the literature shows that they often choose *doing things right* (Burton & Peachey, 2014). For example, coaches often choose to abide by the rules set by the NCAA or the organization they work for, rather than doing what is most beneficial for their athletes (Burton & Peachey, 2014).

Another important component of coach leadership is the relationship between a coach's leadership role and team performance (Hampson & Jowett, 2012; Jowett & Chaundy, 2014). To be an effective leader, the coach must first build a level of trust with his or her athletes. According to Zhang and Chelladurai (2013), athletes' development of trust with their coach depends on their perceptions of certain coaching attributes. These include fairness, acting in the athlete's best interest, adhering to agreed-upon standards, and a coach's level of competency. Developing these attributes would likely be an important addition to a coach's leadership development process.

Leadership behaviors of coaches have been shown to impact other aspects of athlete performance as well. For example, Jowett and Chaundy (2004) found that coach leadership behaviors had a significant impact on the development of team cohesion. These authors also found that the influence of leadership behavior was closely tied to the relationship with the student-athlete. Thus, coaches might also benefit by refining their interpersonal and relational skills, as they move toward developing strong team cohesion.

Also interesting is how coach leadership behavior can impact individual and team-efficacy. Hampson and Jowett (2012) found that athletes perceived the more supportive coaches to produce teams with higher collective efficacies. However, coaches who were viewed as excluding athletes from the decision-making process were seen to negatively impact collective team-efficacy. Athletes in this study identified commitment to their teammates and the goals at hand as well as closeness, both in how they perceived the strength of their relationship to other team members and how close they thought their teammates perceived them to be, as factors that had the greatest influence on team-efficacy. In short, the importance of strong leadership abilities is supported across many studies (Giacobbi, et al., 2002; Price & Weiss, 2011), reinforcing the need for coaches to be socially competent and motivated, as well as effective communicators.

In sum, developing a strong leadership style is important to the success of a team. A coach's leadership development is influenced by many different factors, including formal education, mentoring, and experiences as both a coach and a former athlete. The most effective leadership style for a coach will vary largely based on the nature of the sport and the team personnel and dynamics. Finally, how a coach develops his or her

personal leadership style, how they develop their interpersonal skills, as well as how they relate to and connect with their athletes, all impact leadership effectiveness.

### Good Versus Poor Coaching

It is a challenge to define a “good coach” because the definition varies significantly across individuals. Preferences for coach behaviors have been shown to differ by gender (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Philippe & Seiler, 2006; Stewart, 2016; Stammers, 2016), psychological profile (Crust & Azadi, 2009; Kenow & Williams, 1992, 1999; Williams, et al., 2003), generation (Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al., 2012), and level of play (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; LaVoi, 2007).

Female athletes often prioritize a coach’s knowledge and ability to teach, as well as his or her fairness, honesty, and commitment to the development of sportsmanship. They may not, however, place much importance on the preparation of athletes to play at an elite level (Stammers, 2016; Stewart, 2016). Male athletes, on the other hand, prioritize a coach’s social competence as most important, with the teaching of physical skills as secondary (Philippe & Seiler, 2006). Female athletes have a need for clear goals and the explanation of actions from their coaches (Stammers 2016). Many female athletes also believe that a male coach may not be as effective as a female coach due to their previous negative experiences with a male coach or their lack of exposure to a male coach (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). These same authors found that many female athletes expressed a distaste for any male or female coach’s behaviors that appeared “too masculine” in nature. These behaviors were described as excess aggressiveness, rough language, poor communication, condescension, inflexibility, and lack of empathy. In this study, female coaches were also perceived as being better “mental coaches” due to some

of their underlying personal characteristics. Female athletes believed that coaching female athletes might be more challenging than coaching males, as males were seen as being more accepting of various coaching styles (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). It should be noted that there is more existing research on the perspectives of female athletes, with little attention given to male athlete perceptions of coaching behaviors.

Psychological makeup also seems to influence what coaching behaviors are desired by an athlete. Mentally tough athletes were found to prefer more training-related and instructive behavior from their coaches than their non-mentally tough peers. These athletes displayed preferences for coaching behaviors that focused on improving performance and developing skills (Crust & Azadi, 2009). Research also shows that an athlete's level of anxiety and self-confidence can have an impact on how they perceive the behaviors of their coach (Kenow & Williams, 1992; Williams et al., 2003). This is further supported by Kenow and Williams (1999), who found a relationship between coach-athlete compatibility and perceptions of coaching behaviors.

Generation is another factor that can affect athlete perceptions of coaching behaviors (Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al., 2012). However, the current literature is unclear about whether the difference in perceptions stems from chronological age or the environmental factors surrounding years of athletic development. Athletes from the Millennial generation often speak about the importance and quality of the coach-athlete relationship, while Generation Z athletes emphasize the importance of how a coach communicates (Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al., 2012). Although these coaching behaviors (at least in these studies) were emphasized differently, both generations ranked communication and relationship quality highly in terms of importance, demonstrating

that generational differences may not be as pronounced as other demographic factors previously mentioned.

Level of play is one final factor shown to influence athletes' perceptions of coaching behaviors. For example, Jowett and Cockerill (2003) found that elite athletes emphasize the importance of a strong coach-athlete emotional bond. These athletes talked about the need for mutual caring and a coach's ability to properly articulate his or her caring. These athletes saw the relationship between closeness and communication as synergistic, because while communication helped strengthen the relationship, it also seemed that stronger relationships made communicating more comfortable and frequent.

A finding by LaVoi (2007) further expanded on the differing views of NCAA athletes by expanding upon level of play and gender. In this study, female Division I athletes cited communication, respect, and trustworthiness as the most important coaching traits, while Division III female athletes reported communication, levels of comfort, and mutuality as most important. Division III female athletes placed more of an emphasis on the importance of communication than Division I females. In contrast, Division I male athletes valued communication more highly than their Division III counterparts, and while both cited the importance of trustworthiness in their coaches, Division I males placed more importance on their coaches showing respect, while Division III males preferred a feeling of comfort with their coaches (LaVoi, 2007). In sum, desirable coaching qualities included communication, getting to know the athlete well, knowledge and teaching ability, and provision of social support (Becker, 2009; Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Gearity & Murray, 2010; Hoffman, 2008; LaVoi, 2007; Parker et al., 2012). Commonly cited undesirable coaching qualities included bad communication,



disrespect of athletes, and lack of credibility (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Gearity & Murray, 2010; Jowett, 2003).

Communication is the most common theme in terms of what athletes seem to desire from a good coach. For example, athletes often emphasize the value of a coach being approachable and accessible (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; LaVoi, 2007). They often describe effective communication as direct and coherent (Hoffman, 2008). Good communication might also mean that athletes have a voice in team decisions and that a coach listens well and understands them (Becker, 2009; Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Philippe & Seiler, 2006; Stammers, 2016). In addition, coach communication has been cited as being important in how the coach communicates with the team as a whole, and how the coach communicates with athletes on an individual level (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008). Athletes want coaches to communicate effectively about performance feedback, technique and tactical information, roles, expectations, feelings toward athletes, and team and individual goals. In short, it is also important for coaches to clearly articulate and communicate all goals (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

Poor communication is often viewed as a negative coaching behavior. Fasting and Pfister (2000) reported athletes disliking communication that was too rough or aggressive. Youth athletes, in particular, report a dislike for yelling, viewing it as an expression of anger (Parker et al., 2012). Athletes also reported strongly disliking communication that did not clearly explain decisions and actions (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Stammers, 2016).

How effective a coach is at getting to know his or her athletes is also important. In Jowett and Cockerill (2003), elite athletes cited the importance of a mutual commitment

to each other from both the coach and the athlete. In several studies (Becker, 2009; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Philippe & Seiler, 2006), athletes talked about good coaches as holding roles similar to that of a parent or other family members. Athletes in these studies expressed a desire for their coaches to be able to balance several roles, including supporting them personally and being emotionally close to them, while still remaining professional and goal-minded during training. In a study by Becker (2009), athletes stated that a coach who got to know them well allowed them to feel important as athletes, yet still imperfect as humans.

When athletes talk about poor coaching, they often mention coaches who are disrespectful. This includes making athletes feel inferior, taking no interest in them or their personal issues, not showing them respect as experts in their sport, and disregarding their fears (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Stammers, 2016). Concerning poor coaching, Gearity and Murray (2010) also cited inequitable treatment of athletes, negative attitude, lying to athletes, degrading athletes, and inhibiting the mental skills of athletes through dividing the team and causing self-doubt.

Knowledge and teaching of various skills was another common positive coaching theme throughout the literature (Becker, 2009; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Parker et al., 2012; Philippe & Seiler, 2006; Stammers, 2016; Stewart, 2016). Several authors refer to the term “role model” in describing desired coaching qualities (Hoffman, 2008; Stewart & Owens, 2011). This theme is mirrored in the statements of athletes’ who perceive a “good coach” to be both knowledgeable and experienced (Becker, 2009; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Parker et al., 2012; Philippe & Seiler, 2006; Stammers, 2016; Stewart, 2016), as well as a good teacher (Becker, 2009; Stewart, 2016). Many athletes mentioned

high expectations for skill development as an important part of a coach being a good teacher (Hoffman, 2008; Stewart & Owens, 2011). Coach credibility is also important. For example, coaches who do not seem confident in their decision-making are often seen as less competent and therefore less credible (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003).

Provision of social support is also related to good coaching. Social support has been described as displaying concern for the welfare of athletes, creating a positive atmosphere, showing care, acting as a confidant, and establishing a clear support system for the individual athlete (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al., 2012; Stammers, 2016; Stewart & Owens, 2011). Provision of social support seems to be a desirable coaching behavior on both an individual (personal) and team (group) level. For example, “good coaches” were those who created positive environments where athletes could feel comfortable being themselves and making mistakes as they developed their skills (Becker, 2009; Parker et al., 2012).

In conclusion, “good coaching behaviors” are very subjective, and differ largely across many demographics. Preferences and observations of what makes a good coach differ across genders, levels of play, and generation, and have additionally been shown to be impacted by certain psychological factors. This implies that “good coaching” may not be one formulated concept, but largely situational.

### The Power of Influence in Coaching

Social influence is defined by Raven (1964) as a change in one’s thoughts, behaviors, or mindset which originated in another individual or group. Social influence, referred to simply as “influence” from here on, has been studied in the realm of sociology for many years (Carron, et al., 1996; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Marsden & Friedkin,

1993; Raven, 1964; Tanford & Penrod, 1984), but little research has been conducted on the topic of influence in relation to leadership (Hogg, 2010; Oc & Bashshur, 2013; Vecchio, 2007), or coaching (Gillet, et al., 2010; Vealey, et al., 1998; Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986). Research examining coach influence is generally focused on a specific factor, such as a coach's influence on an athlete's level of motivation (Barber, et al., 1999; Keegan, et al., 2009) or risk of burnout (Lemyre, et al., 2006; Vealey, et al., 1998), rather than a broader view of a coach's influence on the development and success of an individual athlete.

Attributes of influential coach leaders may also be identified by examining the more general leadership literature. For example, in a study of why certain academic leaders are more influential than others, Julius and colleagues (1999) found that more influential leaders better understood how to work with others, were able to manage interpersonal conflicts well which allowed them to run more efficient but diverse groups and were flexible in the way they led and held their position of authority. These authors also found that more influential decision makers were often proactive and encouraging of others in their pursuit of goals. Influential leaders did not need to be the head of the organization in which they led, but they usually were well-connected either in location or frequency of communication with other individuals in the organization (Julius, et al., 1999). These leaders also generally had good relationships with their superiors and had some level of control over how resources were allocated. The leaders in this study also possessed certain personal attributes, such as high moral integrity, a vision consistent with the values of the organization, good judgement, expertise, social and political skills, flexibility, sensitivity, empathy, selflessness, and a sense of humility. These individuals

presented an attractive front to others in how they looked, dressed, and where and with whom they interacted during personal and professional hours. Influential leaders seem to be strategic in how they facilitate change by choosing when and how to influence, and by surrounding themselves with individuals who are intelligent, driven, loyal, and energetic. They seek accountability, self-motivation, and goal-minded individuals to work with (Julius, et al., 1999).

In addition to the attributes laid out by Julius and colleagues (1999), Hackman and Wageman (2004) stated that leaders can always facilitate change, but that there are situations where even the best leaders cannot lead a team to success, especially when doing so would require changing factors outside their control. Instead, effective leaders focus on the factors they can control, such as helping team members to work together in ways that best highlight individual strengths and avoid downfalls to performance, such as social loafing or under-utilization of individual skill sets. According to Hackman and Wageman (2004), leaders have the most impact on their team when things go wrong or when unexpected events remove external factors that normally dictate team functioning and limit a leader's ability to effectively create change.

In short, leaders hold the power to influence a group depending on their own interpretation of a situation, role modeling, facilitating discussion within the group, and the rules they choose to implement (Bartone, 2006). There are several widely accepted ways in which leaders may influence their followers. Some leaders influence by creating a positive image of themselves and fostering strong relationships, while others use tactics such as manipulation, deception, and trickery to facilitate change (Yukl & Chavez, 2002).

However, the most common method of influence is through use of a “simple request,” based on the leader’s power and position (Yukl & Chavez, 2002).

In conclusion, while “good coaching” is something that likely varies based on changing athlete perceptions and may differ based on what individuals view as influential, little is known about what makes an influential coach or how this is similar or dissimilar to “good coaching.” This current study is designed to address this gap in the research, examining coaching influence as perceived by student-athletes. There are positive implications in the athletic world for assessing athlete perceptions of coaching influence, especially for developing coaches or helping experienced coaches assess and develop their coaching effectiveness. In short, more research is warranted as it relates to influential coaching and positive coaching development.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

As an exploratory study, the purpose of this study was to explore what coaching traits athletes perceive to be most influential. Taking an exploratory approach allowed the researcher to explore the topic in depth, through open-ended questions, and by purposive interviews of selected participants. This chapter contains a description of the research design, participants and recruiting strategies, semi-structured interview format, bracketing procedures, study procedures, and data analyses. The research question for this study was: What coaching attributes are perceived by athletes as most influential?

#### Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to explore the perceptions of athletes in reference to influential coaching attributes. Qualitative research is a “process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 2007, pg. 249). A semi-structured interview guide was used as the primary data source (see below). This study was exploratory, examining phenomena in which there was no definitive outcome (Yin, 2003). Currently, there exists little research on the selected topic, and no research emphasizing the use of the aforementioned qualitative phenomenological research design.

#### Participants and Recruiting Strategies

Participants consisted of seven student-athletes (male,  $n = 4$ ; female,  $n = 3$ ) who were currently competing as part of a varsity swimming program at one of two collegiate

institutions. Athletes were recruited from a small, private NCAA Division III college and from a large, public NCAA Division I university. All athletes were recruited based on an established and continuing relationship the researcher held with each team. No attempt was made to control for gender of the athletes or coaches. All participants were recruited through email and personal contact. All subjects were provided with informed consent forms via email or paper format prior to participating in this study. The study was approved by the Ithaca College Internal Review Board (IRB). Participants ranged from 20 to 21 years of age, with a mean age of 20.7 years ( $SD = 0.5$ ). Participants had an average of 3.1 years of collegiate swimming experience ( $SD = 0.9$ ) and an average of 14.6 swim coaches ( $SD = 8.8$ ) throughout their careers. The sample consisted of two sophomores, two juniors, and three seniors. These athletes grew up swimming primarily in the Northeast region of the United States, with the exceptions of two athletes, one who grew up swimming in the Midwest and one in Europe. All athletes had competed at the collegiate level for several years at the time of this study, with one athlete also competing as part of a National team.

### Table

#### *Subject Characteristics (N = 7)*

Parameter	Mean $\pm$ SD	Range
Age (Years)	20.7 $\pm$ 0.5	20 – 21
Number of Siblings	1.9 $\pm$ 1.2	1 – 4
Number of Coaches	14.6 $\pm$ 8.8	4 – 30
Years on Team	3 $\pm$ 1.2	1 – 4
Years of Collegiate Experience	3.1 $\pm$ 0.9	2 – 4



### Semi-Structured Interview Format

In order to explore these athletes' coaching perceptions, a semi-structured interview was conducted. This interview consisted of questions about influential coaching attributes that each athlete observed in his or her coach. Based on the responses provided, the interviewer then probed further to gain a more detailed understanding of "influential coaching," as well as the coaching actions and attributes that were most desirable. All interviews were recorded using a digital device (audio recorder). Files were then kept on a password protected hard drive.

### Bracketing Procedures

A self-reflective journal was kept prior to data collection to help control for researcher biases. This journal followed guidelines outlined by Ahern (1999).

1. Professional and personal interests in undertaking this research were first explored. This included an examination of the power hierarchy of this research process and all those involved. This meant examining how the research process was influenced by the decisions made by mentors, other researchers, and others who may hold more "power" than the primary researcher. Biases associated with various demographics involved in this research such as gender, sport, level of play, and race were also explored.
2. The researcher's personal value system was outlined and explored. This was an important resource to be able to refer back to, especially during the data analysis process.

3. Areas of possible role conflict were discussed in the context of how such roles might later impact the researcher in approaching the data collection or analysis process.
4. The researcher's perceptions of the interests of the gatekeepers and participants were explored in order to hopefully avoid potential role conflicts. Gatekeepers included team coaches or others who might control the researcher's access to participants.
5. Feelings that might have indicated any bias were also included and reflected on in order to determine if and when the researcher should seek out a consultation with a peer or advisor to ensure that data collection and analyses procedures would not be biased by personal feelings.
6. Data collection and subsequent analyses were reflected on to determine saturation, which is the point where the data being collected begins to become redundant and data collection can therefore cease.
7. Opportunities for reflection could be reframed in this journal if any obstacles were encountered. This means that when obstacles arose, a more positive or productive perspective was outlined concerning this obstacle within the journal.
8. Once analysis was completed, a final reflection was included to ensure that the analysis was as neutral as possible. For example, were certain participants being quoted more than others, and if so, why? Did the researcher agree with one participant more than others? Was the account being written in the first or third person?

In summary, this bracketing process allowed the researcher to reflect on and notice any potential biases that could have influenced the data, analyses, or results. Identifying these biases raised the awareness of the researcher and helped remove, or at least lessen, the risk of researcher bias. Once any biases were identified, the researcher was able to regularly return to this journal to reflect on interviews and analyses processes to make sure the biases were not impacting any of the latter. For example, potential role conflicts were outlined in this study, and the researcher was then able to refer back to the journal during the data analyses process to assess any implications that might impact the results.

#### Study Procedures

Following IRB approval, emails were sent to the athletes being targeted for this study. A copy of the email recruitment statement is provided in Appendix A. These emails were sent in the spring, toward the end of the semester. Once participants were recruited and had received informed consent forms (see Appendix B), interview dates and times were scheduled. Informed consent forms could be signed and returned by email or in person before the start of each interview. Upon return of their informed consent forms, participants then received a second email containing interview questions about one week prior to their scheduled interview. Some participants wished to do their interviews sooner than a week after agreeing to participate, but in these instances were still able to look over the questions ahead of time, reflect on them, and receive clarification on any questions prior to starting their interview. This allowed each participant time to become familiar with the questions, as well as time to form more accurate answers prior to their interview. The scheduled face-to-face interview lasted between 27 and 90 minutes, with

an average interview time of 49 minutes. No time limit was placed on any participant as each participant's interview process was unique. Each interview was conducted in a private room chosen collaboratively by the researcher and participant based on convenience and availability. With permission from each participant, each interview was audio recorded. Any identifying information provided in these interviews, that could break the confidentiality of the participant, was then removed by the researcher during the transcription process. All recordings were then transcribed verbatim prior to the data analyses process. All interviews were transcribed as soon as possible following each completed interview. All interviews were completed prior to a single analysis in order to prevent an analysis from biasing the data collected during a subsequent interview.

#### Data Analyses

Once all interviews were conducted and transcribed, all transcribed data were analyzed using qualitative data analyses. Qualitative analytical approaches are generally similar in that the researcher first reads through the transcriptions and highlights meaningful statements, quotes, or phrases that help to better understand the experience of the participants (Creswell, 2007). This step, called horizontalization, was conducted in order to develop "clusters of meaning" to be further developed into clear themes. From these themes, a descriptive account was written of these experiences, called a textural description (Campbell, 2011). Creswell (2007) noted that following this textural description, a structural description may also be written, detailing the environment which surrounds the participants and impacts their experiences.

The following 6-step process, adapted from Creswell (2007) and Shelley (1999), was followed for each transcribed interview and analysis across each participant data set.

1. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each interview was recorded and transcribed but not analyzed prior to the next interview. All interviews were completed before analysis in order to prevent any bias from an analysis from influencing subsequent interviews.
2. The researcher read over each transcription multiple times in order to become familiar with the data.
3. Significant statements, phrases, and quotes from the transcripts were highlighted.
4. Using these significant statements, clusters of meaning were identified as they applied to the research question, and themes were identified.
5. Clusters of meaning were then combined into lower-order themes. These lower-order themes were then combined to create higher-order themes for each interview. Following this, participants were provided with a copy of their transcript and the higher-order themes pulled from their interview and asked to confirm the accuracy of each and to clarify any differences that may have arisen.
6. The higher-order themes from each participant were then compared across participants, in order to formulate overall common (final) themes. This comparison was performed after analysis of all 7 participants had been completed. These final themes provided the answers to the proposed research question.

In summary, this study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design. The purpose of this study was to explore what coaching behaviors student-athletes perceive to be most influential. Seven student-athletes were recruited from the Division I and Division III levels. These athletes participated in a semi-structured interview which contained questions regarding their perceptions of influential coaching attributes. In order to minimize researcher bias, the primary investigator kept a reflective journal to bracket biases. Following each interview, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using qualitative data analyses procedures. The themes that emerged from this process answer the research question: What coaching attributes are perceived by athletes as most influential?

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This study was designed to examine the following research question: What coaching attributes are perceived by athletes as most influential? This chapter presents the common themes identified from comparisons of each of the participants' higher-order themes. Interviews were held with seven collegiate swimmers. All names were changed, and any identifying information removed in order to protect the confidentiality of each participant. Each interview was transcribed verbatim; every word, stutter, and non-verbal cue was included. However, in the following chapter, many of the quotes have been altered by deleting some stutters, filler words, and repetitions. Similarly, grammatical errors may have been corrected. However, in order to maintain the true meaning of the quotes, no content components have been altered. After analyzing the collective higher-order themes from each of the individual interviews and comparing these high-order themes across all participants, five themes emerged across. These five common themes together comprise the answer to the original research question.

#### Common Themes

Influential coaches are:

1. Socially competent.
2. Caring role models who create a positive environment.
3. Committed.
4. Flexible, adaptive, and holistic.
5. Knowledgeable.

Each of these common themes is presented and discussed below.

### Common Theme #1: Socially Competent

The first theme outlined was that an influential coach is socially competent. Social competence in this study encompassed communication and a willingness to get to know athletes on an individual level, as well as an ability to work together collaboratively. This theme encapsulated the perception that influential coaches were skilled in communicating with their team, would put time and effort into building and maintaining a meaningful connection and bond with their swimmers, and would be willing to collaborate with their swimmers and other coaches. This theme crossed all seven participants and included a total of 304 significant statements, with no subject responding with fewer than 23 relevant statements.

When asked to describe influential coaches, the way these coaches communicated stood out to many participants. One swimmer, Tina, pointed out that in the sport of swimming, communication can be a trait that is often underrated: “with something like swimming where it’s like ‘Yeah, it’s a team sport, but it’s also individual’ it’s like you swim your own races, you forget that communication is very important.” However, as Ariana, another participant pointed out, “good open communication” is something a coach with more influence will have. She added that, “knowing why you’re doing something is awesome, and that they have a purpose behind certain things that’s not just, I’ve done this for ten years, and I think it works well.” Ariana also talked about the importance of “being able to be really honest on both sides,” and when talking about influential coaching attributes she said, “they will also communicate honestly with you, so ‘yes that’s a good goal, let’s go after it’ or ‘no, you’re being too ambitious, that’s not



gonna happen.” Damson added the importance of communication being a two-way street, saying:

The coaches might not realize how influential they might be, how important they are in [an] athlete’s life. And...I think it’s important for athletes to be able to communicate to the coaches about it. Like, to be able to go to the coach and be like, ‘Hey, you’re a big part of my life, I’m *supposed* to look up to you.

He further added that some athletes, especially when they first come to college, tend to struggle, but they never articulate this to their coaches:

They’re suffering and they’re not willing to even tell the coaches, ‘I’m suffering and I’m struggling,’ and I think it’s important for athletes to be able to just tell the coaches cuz’ the coaches usually understand it and are actually looking for what’s best for the person? But sometimes they just aren’t aware, people don’t communicate it.

Another aspect of communication that many participants discussed when talking about influential coaches was their coach’s ability to communicate a purpose and provide concrete evidence. “They explained why we were doing things,” Marshall said, “They were easy to work with because they weren’t so, ‘We’re doing this cuz’ we’re doing it.’” Another female swimmer, Emma, put it this way: “people fail to see that bigger picture of like, ‘oh, y—maybe didn’t swim on the fastest relay *here* but that’s because we need you to swim something else later.’”

Views regarding the most important aspect of communication also varied, with some participants viewing communication as content-based and some focusing more on the style. For example, Leo talked about communication as a means to better facilitate change through creating a platform of understanding:

The first step, if you wanna get the athlete to change what they’re doing, is by talking to them? I mean if they’re a Division I swimmer they’ve probably worked pretty hard— to get to this point and probably know a little bit about swimming? And then you can try to *express* your thoughts, behaviors or mindset to them, try to get them to see your point of view if you have disagreement.

Jason talked a little bit about the content of what a coach communicates, but also focused on the *way* the coach communicates overall, saying an influential coach would “have really good communication,” elaborating that, “poor communication would be like yelling at someone.” He also talked about giving constructive criticism and feedback and the importance of wording this more positively: “they call you out when you’re *not* doing it right, but calling you out in a good way.” He furthered this with an example, saying, “not doing it in a way that’s like— ‘You’re a piece of shit, you have a shit attitude.’”

Participants in this study also spoke often about the importance of their coach really knowing and understanding them, not only as athletes, but on a personal level as well. Marshall summed up the essence of this theme in his statement: “inspirational coaching attributes— it comes down a lot to being able to connect with your athletes.” Jason agreed, saying, “if you build a connection with somebody it’s a lot easier to help them out.” Marshall also emphasized this saying, “it just builds a stronger connection that makes coaching I think *easier* for the coach because [if] you have a connection with that swimmer or diver, they’re gonna wanna work with you.”

Athletes talked specifically about the effort coaches put into building relationships and how this stood out. Ariana, for example, talked about the time required to build a deeper relationship beyond the surface level, saying, “to get to know you for those two hours? Then I think they have that sort of *limited view* of you.” Leo talked about how this relationship is built, stating, “you can’t get to *know* somebody unless you start a conversation with them.” Damson also talked about the effort a coach needs to put in toward building this relationship, saying, “even if they’re not concerned, just like, taking time to make discussion,” and that “it takes time to build that relationship.” The

importance of putting effort in was encapsulated in a statement of Leo's, where he said, "the *most* influential coaches are coaches that *wanna* get to know you." Emma talked about the importance of, not only a coach putting in effort, but also putting in that effort early and to all the athletes, not just the upperclassmen.

The quality of the relationship was also a factor in significant statements relating to this theme. Jason talked about the level of closeness he experienced with coaches who were more influential, and when he described his coach he said, "we were friends." When talking about one particularly influential coach in his life he said that, "he was a really big part of my life for a very long time." Damson also talked about how it stands out to him when a coach takes the time to build a closer relationship, saying:

Without putting it to the extreme but the idea of trying to break the 'coach-athlete' barrier sometimes? And see that it's two [people] and that a coach should be able to talk to his athletes in certain way.

Damson cited one example in particular to elaborate, saying,

[My assistant coach here] it was weird, you know, he calls me [a nickname] and we have this coach-athlete relationship, and then when I'm telling him something's going on he's like, 'Dude, come on brother,' and he starts calling me brother, and he's like on another level, you know he's like, 'Dude, you should have talked to me,' and like hugging me and you know.

The importance of self-disclosing was also discussed as part of this. Damson explained this well in his statement, "to be inspired by someone you want to create a certain empathy towards the person, and I think that comes with the relationship aspect." Emma spoke more on this by talking about a coach she perceived as influential and how it was important to her to "know more about her and how she is about all this different stuff."

Another point discussed was the importance of feeling like the coach was able to develop relationships on an individual level. Leo stated, “I really just think it’s coming down to getting to know your athletes on a personal, individual level.” Emma supported this, saying an influential coach would be “able to have a relationship with each individual person.” Ariana also agreed, saying an influential coach would “really get to *know* their athletes, both *in* and outside the pool, and just know their personality.” Tina also agreed, stating, “it’s also important to have those individual relationships with all the swimmers on the team.”

The importance of having an individual level was taken deeper with the idea that an influential coach should know their athletes as more than just who they are on deck.

Ariana stated:

Coaches that are the most influential have a stronger relationship with their athlete and know their athlete better, whether that’s from a personal standpoint or also just from a *work* ethic standpoint and their mindset when they are an athlete.

Leo agreed, saying, “[if] you can get to know them outside of the pool as well as in the pool, then it’s gonna be *better* overall,” and “that’s [the] *beginning* point of becoming influential in someone’s life, you have to have a relationship with that person before you can really move super far with them.” Emma furthered this, saying, “being able to have [a] relationship with someone and then a *coaching* capacity, but also as a friend to confide in.” Jason talked about *how* coaches actually enact this, saying, “they pull you to the side, like, ‘Hey, what’s going on today, you’re not doing great,’ it’s like, ‘Man, like I had a really bad test, I’m kinda bummed about it.’” Damson said something similar, with his statement “are they gonna want to discuss [things] during warmup, have a little discussion [about], ‘how are you doing in school? How’s your family doing?’”

While participants wanted to be known personally, they also agreed that an influential coach would need to know them as an athlete. Emma stated:

If you don't know how she's gonna swim fast and then there's some people that's like, they'll go super slow in practice, like [my other teammate] sucks in practice, but then she'll *crush* us all in a meet, and it's like...what's happening [laughs]. So, kind of having to know how different people are gonna perform.

She provided an example of this in her interview, saying:

Knowing like— after four days of doubles on training trip— no one can do another day [laughs] and just kind of recognizing— like this year we did *five days* straight of doubles, which we had never done before, which was *stupid*, but recognize on that fourth and fifth day...no one was going fast, it was just *purely* effort at that point, *times* were *out the window* two days ago.

Leo talked about how a relationship like this could actually help create influence in terms of performance, “from that relationship that they get from you they learn more about you and then they can influence you to try to achieve your goals.” Ariana backed this up further when she talked about a coach who she felt was less influential in her life, reasoning that, “I felt like she didn't really know me as well as an athlete.”

Communication was essential to collaborative relationships and was another key aspect mentioned by athletes. This collaboration was often explained as being between the coach and the athlete, however collaboration within a coaching staff was also discussed. Collaboration between the coach and the athletes was expressed in a statement by Damson, where he said that a coach who was more influential, would “not just be closed to their ideas and want to do only one way, but be willing to listen to what could be better for me?” Jason talked more about collaboration by providing examples of how he and his coach worked together to get him to his goals, saying things like, “we talked through and I think we have a plan.”

Trust was another aspect of collaboration between the coach and the athlete. This was expressed by Ariana, who stated: “the coaches that have really made the biggest impact and have helped me the most are coaches that want my feedback, take it into account.” She expanded on this further, arguing that a coach is more influential when taking an athlete’s own perspective into account in terms of training.

Collaboration was further seen in how the coaches delegated things within the team. Marshall talked about the coach’s relationship with the team and how a coach may clarify matters through the team’s captains, saying, “utilizing your people, rather than just trying to do it yourself I think is the best way for a coach to facilitate behavior, culture, by using the pieces on the board, rather than just plowing through.” Emma talked about this further in terms of how coaches could support those they delegated to when creating a team culture, saying, “I think it *comes* from the athletes, but then coaches have to help.”

Collaborative coaches were also able to collaborate with each other to support a unified coaching staff. Tina talked about this in detail, stating, “it’s important to have more than *one* coach on deck who is...like different and just approaches things differently.” She spoke too on different styles of coaching and how these different approaches worked best when combined together. She said that putting these styles together would, “bring something much greater than you could ever give by yourself.” Leo supported this, stating that coaches “should be more influential collectively.”

### Common Theme #2: Caring Role Models Who Create a Positive Environment

This theme centered on influential coaches caring about their athletes, not just in their performances, but on a personal level as well. These coaches also had the intangible ability to inspire and motivate their athletes and were often seen as being ‘good’ people

who did ‘the right’ thing. As part of this, influential coaches were also perceived as those who encouraged and worked to develop positive team cultures and environments.

Influential coaches put their athletes before themselves and aligned their actions with the best interest of their athletes. This theme was made up of 279 significant statements, across all seven participants.

Participants in this study wanted their coach to care in many ways. They expressed wanting to be cared about holistically, which included their performance outcomes. Tina expressed this in her statement: “I would never have gotten to the level that I did end up going to if it wasn’t for how much he cared.” She also stated that, “that’s also important to make everybody feel like they matter, like their performance matters.” Marshall supported the importance of caring generally, saying a coach that was less influential would display “lack of care for the people under the coach both on and off the deck, cuz I mean on deck is one thing, off deck is a *whole* other thing.”

The importance of caring about performance outcomes was prevalent. However, many participants talked in much more length about the importance of caring about the athlete as a human. Leo stated, “You have to care about more than just what this person does in the pool for four years.” Damson expanded on this, saying, “if I’m going home for two weeks, I’m coming back, I’d like the coach to tell me like, ‘Hey how’s your family’ cuz’ they know it should be a big deal,” and when he talked about two of the coaches in his life who he has seen as most influential he added that “they both got involved with my personal life when I had some personal issues and I wasn’t feeling the best.” Jason added to the importance of a coach caring about the academic success of

athletes, stating that they should, “check regularly on what your grades are to make sure you don’t need help.”

Participants also mentioned the importance of coaches not just simply caring, but also making the effort to convey that care to their athletes. Leo stated, “there’s varying degrees of those coaches who *seem* to care about you,” seeming uncertain about how genuine that care actually was at times. Marshall expanded on this, stating a coach who was less influential “[the] coach doesn’t really care. They *might*, but if they don’t kind of reach out for that? The swimmer or diver might not even know.”

The participants in this study also expressed that they wanted to feel like they mattered as individuals. They wanted the interests of everyone, not just the stars to be considered. Emma spoke on the importance of an influential coach taking an interest in all of the athletes in her statement:

Making the people that are not traveling to every meet or not racing all the time still feel like they’re important and a valuable part of the team, cuz otherwise then you lose the depth and then you lose the meet.

Tina provided an example to support Emma’s statement further, saying:

My one friend wasn’t having a good season but then at our championship meet she ended up doing well, she was in top eight in her event, she said that for the first time ever he was giving her feedback for finals and she was like ‘Oh like now that I’m fast...you all of a sudden wanna pay attention to me? And, you wanna give me advice for my race tonight? No thank you.’”

Participants especially wanted their coach to put athletes first before their own interests. Jason stated that a less influential coach would be “someone who doesn’t care, that only cares about themselves. That’s something I wouldn’t wanna follow.” Marshall agreed, saying a coach who wasn’t influential— “you don’t wanna work with them, cuz it’s just like, they’re out here to do something for them, not for us.”



Marshall introduced this theme effectively in his statement: “I think what makes a coach influential is probably their ability to persuade and inspire their swimmers and divers.” Some athletes talked about what made a coach ‘inspiring’ in their eyes. Leo, for example, put it this way:

In any movie if you watch it there’s always a scene...like a sports movie where like the coach is talking... maybe it’s halftime, they’re trying to inspire their athletes to do something. That’s what I mean by inspiring.

Marshall explained ‘inspiring’ by saying, “coming in having someone who every day is just like ‘alright this is what we’re doing, let’s get it we’re gonna swim, we’re gonna dive, we’re gonna do great today’— that really helps and that really makes them inspiring.” He also pointed out that “if you’re *following* someone by your own accord, that means you find some sort of inspiration in them.” Tina talked about inspiration in terms of role modeling. When asked to explain what an inspirational coach was to her, she replied that “swim coaches were once swimmers like any other coach once played that game, so I think if they bring themselves into it and they say what they did to be their best.” Jason explained a caveat in this which was, “they could be really inspiring, but they could be an *awful* coach.”

Aside from perceiving a coach as ‘inspiring,’ some other traits stood out that made a coach persuasive and a desirable person to follow. Marshall, for example said, “if someone cares about you, you’re so much more likely to be inspired by them and wanna follow them.” Tina talked about it in terms of, “when they really let you know that nothing’s impossible and that if you like really work hard and really truly believe in yourself, you can just do amazing things both in and out of the pool.” Ariana said a coach that was able to persuade her to do things would be someone who regularly challenged

her. She said that they, “challenged me to have that mindset and to keep getting better, better, better, even when it wasn’t *easy*.” Damson said that a coach who was able to motivate would do so by “helping his swimmers or athletes to be as motivated to reach their goals.” Jason demonstrated the importance of being able to persuade and motivate not only in easy times, but in overcoming challenging situations as well:

When a practice is really hard, they try to figure out, ‘What can I say to get these guys pumped up and not like pissed at me?’ Cuz’ we’re all pissed at him for *making* the hard set.”

This brings up another aspect, that influential coaches are able to inspire and motivate their athletes to do things they normally would not do on their own. Marshall brought up a question he often asks of his coaches, which is: “how are you gonna convince me that I can go even farther?” Jason spoke of a coach who he viewed as especially influential in this way, saying that “he pushed me to do all these accomplishments and achievements, and you know be someone that I never thought I could be,” and that he also “inspired me to work on the *small things*.”

A final aspect of inspiration that came up was that influential coaches could start a ‘chain of influence.’ Jason explained this in length, saying:

They have a piece of advice they give, and then you pass that piece of advice on to the other person, then *they* turn out to have a better life, or it’s just a different thing— like a piece of knowledge that you didn’t know before— I think [they] said something about underwaters to me, and then *I’m a coach too* so I pass it on to *my* kids, when I coach for the [club I coach for here] so, when I coach I’ll make their underwaters a lot better, so it passes down, so *hopefully* those kids are like, ‘Hey you’re doing this wrong, try doing it this way.’

He stated that his coach, “made me the role model he wanted me to be, and all the younger kids looked up to me.” When asked about his leadership experiences, this came

up in terms of his experience coaching younger kids and his mirroring of his previous coaches in doing so. He summed this up by saying:

To be here you have to be really good at swimming, and so you have to know what you're doing, and so I guess we're all mini coaches in our own way.

Athletes talked in length as well about influential coaches being the 'moral guidance' for the team. Marshall said that even in their oversight of their athletes' decisions, and pathways influential coaches would be "making sure that what they define is morally right." Ariana supported this, stating that "their personal values and morals play into that as well." She provided an example to elaborate on this idea further, saying:

If it's high school and for instance like 'oh okay they have a senior' and instead of allowing them to go to a top meet or whatever that they qualified for, you pick a freshman, you bring up a freshman so the senior doesn't have a chance to compete in a big meet for their last year, and bring up a freshman instead—yeah they have a faster time but let's say you're gonna win the meet by 200 points and instead you [do that]— because you wanna win by 210 points.

Damson also thought that an influential coach would take charge of setting standards and "communicate with the athletes about what's good, what's not good."

Marshall made this concept a bit clearer, stating that it wasn't about always being right, but also about how the coach responded to mistakes. He said that it is:

Fine to contradict yourself. It's part of the human condition, we're never gonna be 100% sure of ourselves. And, I mean, doing it on purpose— I would [doubt] they're necessarily doing it on purpose, but never holding a regard for what you've said before? Whereas if you contradict yourself at one point and someone brings it up you're like 'oh, crap you're right' like, 'that's a good point' rather than just being like, 'I never said that' or just like, 'who cares, this is what I'm saying now.'

Part of this 'doing the right thing' included keeping the athletes safe. Marshall discussed this, saying that "Pushing an athlete— [a coach] should always do that, but never to the point where you're putting them in danger." Leo demonstrated the negative

impact a coach could have who did not hold to this priority, saying “you start to care less about the program, it’s taking away from *your actual life*, like your health.”

Influential coaches were also perceived to be ‘good people.’ Damson described this as someone who “I can look up to you, feel good about it, not feel guilty.” Leo explained the positive consequences that could follow from having a coach like this, saying, “you can get a team that actually cares about its coach, and then they’ll be able to recruit better athletes...and they’ll actually wanna swim fast, for their coach, cuz’ they care about him or her.” Tina also remembered a coach who she had seen as being less than influential in her life, and she talked about how when she sees him now, “he’ll like *look* at me and not say a word, and I’m like ‘Okay like I really...don’t care, you’re not a *good person*.’”

Influential coaches were seen as being role models, whose actions could be the standards of expectation for their athletes. Damson spoke about an influential coach who he had observed and had consequently caused him to reflect on his actions. He thought, “Hm. Am I actually doing the right thing? Like, it seems like he’s putting in so much more work than I do.” Marshall supported this, saying influential coaches would know “not only the right thing to do but also [be] inspirational. And it helps to remind me that *I* should be doing that as well.” Tina talked about the trickle-down effect from this, saying “if they themselves have the attitude that they want the team to have then that’ll also help as well.” Leo supported this in his statement that “It’s easier if your athletes can look up to you and wanna impress you...I dunno if that’s so much of a problem in college swimming.” He further added that one “can be a good coach and a bad role model, but I think it’s a lot harder to be a good coach that way.” Jason supported this further, saying

that, “a coach is a really good mentor [in] both life and in athletics.” He also took this a step further, talking about how an influential coach could be almost a father figure in the athlete’s life. “I saw my club coach more than my dad. He was kinda like my dad for me, like another dad for me I guess, yeah. Cuz’ I’d known him since I was like eight.”

Environment and culture were considered to be things that a coach created in conjunction with his or her team, and then maintained and reinforced. Athletes talked about how various coaches created a positive culture and environment. Marshall stated that, “Presence on deck is huge.” Jason supported this, stating that an influential coach would “figure in how to do things in a more fun way, you know everybody loves having fun.” He continued that a coach might think, “So, what can I do to kinda lighten the mood a little bit? Whether it’s tell a joke or just pump ‘em up some more, or something.”

Marshall additionally pointed out that:

A good culture entirely depends on the people involved in it, because the *people* define the culture. It doesn’t matter like who’s in charge they can set what they *want* the culture to be, but that doesn’t mean that’s how it’s *going* to be.

He continued that a “good culture depends on both intrinsic and external factors” as well.

Once a culture is developed, it must be maintained. As Emma stated, “it’s up to the athletes to create the culture and the coaches have to reinforce it. The coaches have to like— *go* with it, and not be contradictory about it.” She gave an example, saying:

You can develop a great culture in practice and in a workout, but if the coach gets out and was like, ‘that was— like horrible’ then... maybe you didn’t meet all the time goals but if everyone got there and you worked really well together to do it, but the coach is like, ‘but you still didn’t make your times, that still sucked’ then no one’s gonna *try* next time.

Marshall agreed, saying, “finding a way to manipulate culture so everyone’s a part of it is kind of the way to go about it.” He gave the example that if someone is “just there to

cause problems, they don't really care? That's not something you want in your culture.”

In this case, he pointed out, a coach might have to remove someone from the team in an extreme case in order to maintain the culture of the team, which is no light task. Marshall further highlighted the importance of building a good team culture when he stated that, “ultimately, when it comes to motivation, it's down to the team, which of course the coach *can* motivate through by helping influence that team into the right culture.”

When asked to describe what a ‘good culture’ or ‘good environment’ looked like, participants had a lot to say. Marshall again, summed up the importance of a good environment, saying:

Environment's a *huge*, I think if not probably the most— if you don't feel comfortable or safe in that environment, not only are you gonna be literally holding back energy in *reserves* for safety, but, you're just not gonna be mentally invested.

He added that “a ‘good coach’ is someone who is a leader and helps facilitate a good culture.” Emma talked about the importance of unity, stating that “if it's a very individualized team culture and everyone just gets in and swims at practice, and then it's over they're gonna hate it, and it's gonna be terrible.” Tina supported this, saying an influential coach would “truly *inspire people* to generally want to be there and to want to be a good teammate and to support their other teammates and go the extra mile so they can be better *for* their teammates.” Ariana agreed, saying that:

*Facilitating* that, wanting your athletes to compete with each other— compete against each other, there's a line of healthy competition and then there's unhealthy level of inter-competition where it continues *beyond* the pool deck, where those relationships between your teammates are stressed— sort of a climate of...not understanding or caring.

Ariana continued on to make a point about feeling safe in the training environment, stating that “from a *negative* standpoint? Insulting me and my teammates, making it like, when you’re scared to go to practice.” Tina also discussed this, saying “you shouldn’t show up to practice and be *scared* to go to practice.” Damson also noted that a coach could have a negative impact on the level of comfort, saying, “I think with an influential coach that’s pretty negative, you might skip practice, you might start not going.” He reasoned that with such a coach, “you might be angry at practice, not in a good mood.”

A positive environment was something that participants could describe in great detail. Damson stated that it involved athletes “really working on the pool deck and being happy to be there, and your coach is like, ‘Hey, what’s up,’ like being cool with like throwing the football.” He continued that influential coaches would be:

Just making you *want* to be there, it doesn’t feel like you have to be there, but you’re actually happy to be in this environment with the same group of people and that coach, it feels right, you know it feels almost harmonious.

Ariana added to this, saying that a positive environment was:

One where people are continually encouraging each other, especially when things are tough, whether that’s a swim set or outside of the pool, one where there’s accountability and there’s positive communication, there’s *fun*.

Jason agreed that a positive environment included ‘fun.’ He even took this one step further, giving an example of how coaches could create ‘fun.’

One of the funniest things that could ever happen is when a coach just— faces you in something, you know? Something like that? Uh, like they’re like, ‘Alright, if I beat you in the 50 free right now, you guys have to [do] a set. But if you beat me, you guys can be done for the day.’

Damson also did a great job of detailing clearly what a negative environment looked like, saying:

[In a] negative environment, you're working on the pool deck and you feel a certain tension, you feel like people are all cringy, don't want to get in the water, don't want to start doing anything or talk to each other, and I think that really impacts practices as well, you can easily tell the difference when people are happy and when they're a little anxious.

### Common Theme #3: Committed

This theme was centered around the concept that an influential coach would be committed, which was described by these participants as being passionate and willing to do extra. This theme consisted of 97 significant statements across six participants.

Passionate coaches were seen as those who were invested in what they were doing and had a love for their job, which they conveyed through their willingness to put in more time and effort than the minimum required by their job descriptions.

As Leo put it, influential coaches, "they have to be passionate about what they're doing." Tina agreed, saying an influential coach "is passionate about what you're doing." Damson made the clarification that "a good coach is driven by his passion." Leo elaborated on this further, saying that "if you're passionate about something usually you're committed to it," and "a committed coach is willing to put in the extra time." He further pointed out that "it's hard to develop being passionate. But if you get into coaching you probably are passionate." Damson additionally pointed out that a passionate coach would prove to me "that he's gonna do everything on his side to help me reach my goals." He noted, when speaking about a specific former coach about "how much he was bought in [to] his project was what impressed me the most."

Leo was not alone in his mention of a passionate coach putting in extra time. Ariana said that based on her past experiences, influential coaches, "they're willing to put in the time for you? Whether that's *extra training sessions or talking about life.*" She



talked about coaches who had helped her with technique, as well as the importance of a coach who would “*stay up late* to find the newest whatever and drill.” Marshall also mentioned that an influential coach who displayed passion would at least be “*sometimes* taking a couple extra minutes at a practice” to help the swimmers. Damson had a personal example to share from an experience he had encountered:

Okay. So, I think being again more present, taking that extra step. For a specific example, I’m gonna think about [my assistant coach]. I complained to him about a 50 freestyle, I would tell him like, ‘Everything feels great but the start,’ and he came back on Monday after the meet and he told me, ‘Hey you complained about the start, let’s fix that, let’s never complain about it.’ And we did probably 50 dives with like a counter— like the video, you know? And reviewing after each one, ‘oh you did this, this, let’s change’ and he was being very... *careful* and he was paying attention to everything. He was doing his free time, we weren’t supposed to be at practice at this time. And I was, ‘Hm, so this guy has 30 swimmers, and I complained because I was in a bad mood, I was unhappy on a Saturday, and then Monday the first thing he does, he could’ve been mad and just forgot about it, [instead] he’s like, ‘Alright, let’s fix it,’ he took some of his time to make me better, to make me happier.

Doing extra was seen as more than just time involved, however. Marshall explained this, “I mean what makes him so inspirational, influential is that, and the *key* I think is just going that extra step no matter how you do it.” He talked about how doing extra helped to support the earlier theme of developing a relationship by saying, “if your coach is checking in on how you’re swimming? That’s kind of their *job*— but checking in outside of that? If they do that, that warrants a much stronger connection.” Tina agreed that it was about more than just doing the bare minimum, saying, “the coach who’s just a good coach won’t do anything else beyond that; the person who’s really influential will.” She provided an example from one of her past coaches of what going the extra step looked like: “someone on my team was *sick* and we had a meet that day and he was like

‘Oh, I’m buying you soup’ and he went and bought her soup.” She talked more about how this coach behaved in more of a day-to-day capacity, stating he:

Could’ve just shown up and been there and not really talked to people outside of practice itself and just thrown something on the board and been like, ‘Okay, go do it’ and not paid attention to them... but yeah, he did a really good job.

Ariana agreed with the observation Tina had made, stating that:

The coaches that I’ve had where they just sit on the side and are very passive and don’t really take an active role in communicating with their athlete during practice as well as pre or post practice are *less* influential?

Another aspect of passion that stood out to many participants was that coaches who displayed this attribute *wanted* to be there; coaching was more than just a job to them. Tina explained that these coaches “were really into what they were doing.” She added that “I’ve seen coaches where I’m like, ‘Why are you a coach, what are you doing?’” Damson pointed out that an influential coach would be intrinsically motivated to put in extra time and effort because, “his salary’s not gonna get increased, he’s not gonna make more money, that’s just extra work he does, and that’s for us.” Leo agreed with this sentiment, stating “it’s not just a job.” Jason elaborated further on this; when asked to detail the *most* influential coaching attributes, he replied:

They’re doing it cuz’ they still enjoy it, you know? There’s some coaches that are just like, ‘I’m just waiting till I can get my retirement route’— whatever— but they’re doing it cuz’ they enjoy it, and I think that makes it a lot more fun for athletes to do.

These passionate coaches were thought to have a sort of trickle-down effect on their athletes as well through their interactions. Marshall discussed this, saying that “if *they’re* going out of *their* way, it could warrant that person to go out of their way as well.” Tina supported this idea through how this could show in performance, stating, “you can tell from the results that they get from their swimmers that they’re really good

at what they do, that they're really into it." Jason summed all of this up by saying, "if they love their *job* then we'll love doing it for them, swimming for them."

#### Common Theme #4: Flexible, Adaptive, and Holistic

This theme was based around the idea that an influential coach was willing to change to meet the needs of his or her team and the individual athletes. Coaches who were willing to listen to their athletes and incorporate their ideas were seen as being easier to work with, and therefore more likely to obtain better performance results. Holistic coaches were those who approached training in a well-rounded manner and could see their athletes as "whole" people. This theme consisted of 87 significant statements spanning across six participants.

Participants defined flexibility as a willingness to improve or to try something that differed from their original plan. Ariana stated this as, "I've had some older coaches too that are very much stuck in their ways and don't really want to improve or try something different?" Marshall agreed with this in his statement, "the coach that I didn't connect with at all was like, "This is what we're doing, that's it, I don't wanna hear anything else." Tina explained that coaches who are less influential "are very...*single-minded* and it's *their way* or the highway." Jason agreed, stating "they always want things to be done their way."

Part of the willingness to improve included the need to be able to recognize when they are wrong, as voiced by Tina in her statement, "what you think is right might not necessarily always *be* what's right." The willingness to improve was mentioned most when talking about flexibility. Damson stated that his perception of a non-influential coach included someone where:

There is no look for the better? You know there is a certain consistency, it's more like, 'I know how to do something. I'm gonna do it, repeat it, and it's gonna work the same and I'm not gonna try to get any better.'

He contrasted this by mentioning that a particularly influential coach had made him think, "Okay, that's the first time I'm seeing a coach trying that hard to find new ideas, to *expand* new ideas" and this was something that stood out to him and made him want to follow that coach more. Leo clarified that the effort behind the improvement was what mattered most to him, saying "they'll also come in with new ideas every day and maybe they're stupid ideas, but maybe they'll have something right every once in a while." Emma talked about improvements in terms of the sport, saying, they should, "be adaptable to what is going on in the swimming world." Leo added that, "as part of being willing to improve, coaches should be working together to improve and change for the better by challenging each other when they think they're wrong, then they *should be* more influential."

Participants also mentioned the importance of being able to adapt based on the situation at hand or the person being coached. For example, Jason stated:

A lot of coaches, you know, they're different, some people are outgoing, some people are not, which is fine, some people are quiet, some people are loud, it's different, but if a quiet coach has to be loud at times, work [on] being like, 'Alright let's go guys, come on!' 'stead of just standing there with your stopwatch saying times all the time.

Emma furthered this, saying, "a good influential coach is gonna be able to kind of sense that, and have to adapt their coaching styles to the team itself in order to be effective."

Leo stated the importance of them being open to feedback in his statement, "you could talk to them about flexibility if you think it's hurting the team."

The final aspect of flexibility can be seen in Jason's interview when he talked about coaches meeting athletes where they are. He spoke about coaches being able to work with athletes, especially college athletes who have extremely busy schedules in order to make training work as efficiently as possible in conjunction with their other life obligations. He said an athlete may have something come up and have to go to the coach saying, "I gotta work but I can come in another time," or something like that— and someone who's like, "Yeah that works."

Influential coaches often focused on training "outside the pool" and would not limit the development and growth of their athletes to simply the athletic realm. Holistic coaches were seen as those who would focus on multidimensional growth, not just winning. Marshall introduced this, "I know our coach, he doesn't care if we win or lose, he cares if we are being the best that we can be." He continued, "caring about how we do over just caring about our goals I think really creates such a difference." Damson supported the importance of a focus on growth as part of being influential, stating, "I didn't grow as much [compared to] some of the coaches [who are] more influential."

Another aspect of holistic coaching involved a focus on training outside the pool. Tina, for example, talked about a coach who would include mental training regularly, saying:

What I liked about this coach is that she put a *very* big emphasis on goal setting and also the mental aspect of swimming so we had a lot of team meetings where we wrote down goals and then we wrote down things that we *couldn't control* and things that we *could control* so you can focus on what you *can control* as opposed to what you can't control.

She continued, "coaches that really take goal setting and the mental part of swimming into consideration [was] something I appreciated." The mental aspect of training was also

mentioned by Jason, who talked about how a coach could address certain mindsets in training as well. He pointed out, “you know there’s the swimmers that are always negative, which is fine, but you sit down with them and be like, ‘Hey, you’re being really negative right now.’” He added that they might decide “to change something about how you’re behaving in practice, cuz’ it’s not okay and everyone else around you is getting down because of it.” Ariana also spoke about how a coach could be influential from a different aspect than just simply the physical, stating, “I didn’t get a ton better when I was under that coach from a training perspective and a results perspective, but I think *they* helped me so much more with my *mindset*.”

This idea that a coach should be impacting multiple domains was summed up by Leo when he said, “if you wanna be influential you *have* to impact more than just the swimming.” To Damson this meant, “being happy— if I’m doing well at school, well socially, I’m happy in my life— that’s gonna impact how well I swim, and I feel like an influential coach knows that.” To him, a coach who was involved and took the time to influence more than just his athletic self was a display of influential coaching. He summed this up with his statement: “I’m super happy that I’m able to text my coach from [back home] once a month and, he’s checking on me being like, ‘Hey, how are you doing?’ Every time I’m so happy.” Leo agreed that an influential coach would “try to help you grow personally,” but he took this idea in a slightly different direction than Damson had, saying, “they don’t *have* to just be swimming related, so you might wanna do something extracurricular that a coach could help you with— like they could write a recommendation letter.” Jason supported this, talking about coaches who “really pride themselves on having swimmers with really, really good academics.” He elaborated

further on this, stating that, “they want you to swim so in order to swim you have to have good academics, so they want you to swim, so they force you to have good academics.” He further clarified that “they want you to be in the pool as much as you can be, but they’re not gonna make you miss a class.” Ariana agreed that “they’re more influential if they’re able to impact you in more than one area of your life.” However, to her, this did not automatically mean influence was a positive thing. She pointed out that one “coach made me almost transfer,” which was still a form of influence, but not necessarily a positive one. She also pointed out that “I’ve definitely had coaches that have been *very* influential and changed me but in a *good* way— is definitely questionable?” She gave an example of this, saying:

My high school coach— they definitely changed the way that I viewed the sport? And they definitely changed my personality in a way and my approach to training and swimming? I feel like I left high school thinking that all coaches were insane and would yell at you for anything and throw chairs and it definitely influenced my perspective on the sport, but also created that super *driven*, hard-working individual I think that some people refer to me as.

Jason also pointed out that influential coaches would help a swimmer to develop certain life skills. In his perspective, an influential coach would “put you on the right path, and to the person that you wanna be.” He talked about this in terms of job skills, saying:

That’s why sports are so great cuz’ you work with team— you work with being on a team, you work with leading others, you work with helping others, and so— you get *all* of this experience out of them that a lot of people don’t get until they get into the job force.

He tied in his previous example of how a coach could impact a negative mindset, saying “giving someone *a piece of reality*, you know you can’t be negative your whole life.” He

added that “you’re gonna go to work, in work, nobody’s gonna wanna work with you cuz’ you’re just negative all the time.”

#### Common Theme #5: Knowledgeable

This theme was based on the concept that an influential coach would be knowledgeable and competent. This theme consisted of 64 significant statements, spanning all seven participants. Knowledge was generally cited as being competent in coaching the sport of swimming, which was seen as especially important due to the frequent changes in the sport.

Knowledge and experience were seen as different attributes a coach could have, but they overlapped at times. Between the two, knowledge was cited as being more important. Marshall best demonstrated this overlap in his statement, “if you have a lot of knowledge about a subject but not a lot of experience, you can still do just as good as someone with experience.” The importance of experience in building a coach’s knowledge base was also shown in a statement from Jason where he said, “you know they understand what they’re doing, they’ve been doing it for a long time.” A coach’s knowledge was also connected to another theme in that it could be something that made the coach seem more inspirational to his or her athletes. Marshall also discussed this, saying:

Having knowledge of what we’re doing like I was *so* inspired by our assistant coach, the grad student this year because he had *so* much knowledge and he created such *amazing* workouts, to me, that was *so* inspirational, so that goes off of knowledge.

Leo clarified that this did not necessarily mean a formal education. He said that it was:

Definitely *possible* to not have a formal education and be a coach. I mean I think it’s a lot easier if you do get a formal education, to have a little bit of a clue about what you’re talking about but I kind of mean more training.



Knowledge about the sport specifically was seen as important for any influential coach. Emma summed this up well, stating that, “the knowledge about swimming, *for me* that’s one of the most important things.” She elaborated further, stating that this meant “a broad base of knowledge about the sport— and the actual nitty-gritty technique.” Ariana supported this further, saying that a coach will be more influential “if they’re really knowledgeable about the sport.” Marshall also discussed this, saying influential coaches are “smart, or at least *knowledge* of the subject— with swimming, with diving of course.”

Knowledge was also important in demonstrating a coach’s credibility and gaining trust in his or her abilities. As Marshall put it, “you show people your ability through your knowledge.” Jason agreed, stating that, “if they know what they’re doing, I’ll trust them.” Ariana summed this up well when she said that “someone that I would wanna follow ...is extremely knowledgeable and knows what they’re doing.” Leo saw this as a given, stating, “most coaches, especially at *this level*— don’t necessarily influence you in a negative way, and if they do it’s not on purpose, it’s just they don’t understand.” Jason provided an example of how this can also go the opposite way:

There’s another club coach— he’s still there, but I guess he got better, he was telling someone to do a streamline, but he used to do his streamlines with enough room to move your head around— which isn’t right [laughs].

Knowledge about the sport alone wasn’t enough. Keeping up to date with the most recent knowledge available was something that came up as well. Ariana talked about a coach she considered to be influential, and she pointed out that “he’s always up to date and wanting to know.” Emma pointed out the importance of being up to date in swimming, saying that “with swimming the rules change so much, so kind of...having an uptake on what’s going on, and how rules are developing.” Emma also provided an

example to support this, saying “I think the biggest thing that comes to mind is...I think it was 2000...I wanna say ‘15 or ‘16- there was this *huge* rule change in FINA for breaststroke pull-outs, and so, just kinda knowing.”

A final point that was made about knowledge was that influential coaches often provided knowledge that was new to the athletes, which was what made it meaningful.

Damson encapsulated this well:

If there is a coach, no matter how he is interacting [with] me if it’s positive, negative— if he tells me something [that is] textbook knowledge, it’s actually a fact? I’m gonna be like, ‘oh, yeah, I’m learning, you’re teaching me something.’ What they experienced might be different.

He elaborated on this further, saying, “when I say knowledge, I mean an actual textbook knowledge, I know that my coach got a degree in exercise physiology, so I know he knows more than me about this subject.” He gave the example:

He talked to us— [the assistant coach]— as an example talked to us about studies he’s seen about people moving water and the angle of the arm and how impactful it was in swimming— that’s a lot of information that I don’t possess.

Ariana further pointed out that this was a benefit to having a coaching staff that was influential, because, “every coach has a different *toolbox*, and they’ve been different places and so they know different things.” Jason supported this, saying:

[The head coach] has been through different life things, and then my club coach which now I’ve learned from too— but at the same time you gotta know your sport in order to *lead* people— or, you have to know— not even in just athletics, but in life you have to know what you’re doing in order for people to follow you.

In conclusion, five common themes emerged following the comparisons of each of the participant’s higher-order themes, across all seven participants. These themes were: 1) An influential coach is socially competent, 2) An influential coach is a caring role model who creates a positive environment, 3) An influential coach is committed, 4)

An influential coach is flexible, adaptive, and holistic, and 5) An influential coach is knowledgeable. Themes one and two contained the highest numbers of significant statements, with 304 significant statements relevant to theme #1 and 279 significant statements relevant to theme #2. Theme #4 had the fewest relevant statements with a total of 64 relevant statements.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The research question for this study was: What coaching attributes are perceived by athletes as most influential? The primary researcher used qualitative research methods and semi-structured interview techniques to gather data regarding how athletes perceived influential coaching attributes. Five themes emerged from the data. These themes were: 1) An influential coach is socially competent, 2) An influential coach is a caring role model who creates a positive environment, 3) An influential coach is committed, 4) An influential coach is flexible, adaptive, and holistic, and 5) An influential coach is knowledgeable.

These findings were compiled from seven collegiate swimmers. Of the seven swimmers, four swam at the Division III level and three swam at the Division I level. Participants included four males and three females, aged 20 to 21. The qualitative and semi-structured interview design allowed for an in-depth look at these athlete's perceptions of the most influential coaching attributes.

As demonstrated in this study, athletes perceived that influential coaches communicate efficiently and take the needed time to explain things. As previously indicated in several studies, athletes need their coaches to be effective communicators (Becker, 2009; Giacobbi, et al., 2002; Hoffman, 2008; LaVoi, 2007; Philippe & Seiler, 2006). This idea was also supported by Julius and colleagues (1999), who found that influential leaders did not need to be the head of the organization in which they led, but they usually were well-connected and frequent communicators with other individuals in the organization. Stammers (2016) and Fasting and Pfister (2000) additionally supported

this finding stating that athletes have a need for the explanation of actions from their coaches. Stammers (2016) initially found that this was a need for primarily female athletes, but in this study it was observed that both female and male athletes perceived this to be an influential quality. In the current study, this can be seen in Marshall's statement that an influential coach "explained why we were doing things," or in Ariana's interview as she talked about the importance of a coach providing "concrete evidence" for how training would improve athletes' performances.

Previous research has also tied communication to knowing the individual athlete. Jowett and Cockerill (2003) found that athletes saw the relationship between these two influential attributes to be synergistic because effective communication helped to strengthen the relationship between the coach and athlete, but stronger relationships also made communication more comfortable and frequent. This idea was supported by Leo in the current study. Leo laid out this relationship in his statement: "Yeah, I mean you can't get [to] *know* somebody unless you start a conversation with them, try to *see* where they're coming from."

Previously, LaVoi (2007) found that Division III female athletes reported communication as one of the most important qualities a coach could hold. Interestingly, the two other qualities named by Division III females as most important in LaVoi's study were not themes found in the current study. The additional qualities found by LaVoi, levels of comfort and mutuality, were both mentioned by participants in the current study, however they were never sufficiently emphasized across participants to become a common theme.

LaVoi (2007) also found communication to be an essential component across all levels of athletes, including Division I and III athletes. All of the participants in this study were from the same generation, but it is still worth noting that previous literature supported the notion that Generation Z athletes greatly emphasize the importance of coach-athlete communication (Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al, 2012). Jowett and Cockerill (2003) also found elite athletes have a need for coaches to properly articulate their care and concern; this was also supported in this current study.

Previous research has indicated that athletes want a coach who will communicate effectively about performance feedback, technical information, and goals (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). This was supported in Emma's statement that an influential coach should be "constantly giving *feedback*, and technique stuff." Emma also supported the previous finding that athletes value a coach who is approachable and accessible (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; LaVoi, 2007) when she talked about the importance of being able to walk into the coach's office and strike up a conversation, while also feeling comfortable in doing so.

The way coaches communicate was also noted in previous research by Fasting and Pfister (2000) and Parker and colleagues (2012). These authors noted that athletes, and female athletes in particular, wanted a coach who refrains from aggressive communication, especially yelling. This was supported by almost every athlete participating in this study. Jason summed up this communication style when he pointed out that an influential coach should be able to "call you out when you're *not* doing it right, but calling you out in a good way."

Swimmers in this study also voiced that coaches who worked collaboratively stood out as more influential. This finding is less prevalent in previous research, but it is still present. For example, Julius and colleagues (1999), found that more influential leaders seek out individuals to collaborate with who are goal-minded and able to keep them accountable. This goes along with a statement from Tina, who said that when working together, coaches should bring something much greater than what they would be able to provide alone.

Hackman and Wageman (2004) stated that effective leaders tend to focus on factors they have control over, such as helping team members work together in ways that best highlight their strengths, as well as avoiding performance pitfalls such as social loafing or preventing an individual's skills from being utilized. This need to focus on collaboration can be seen in an excerpt from Emma's interview, where she discussed the importance of a coach reinforcing team cohesion. She talked about the importance of a team-oriented culture over a more individualized one, and how a coach might help facilitate this through encouragement and reinforcement of certain behaviors. In further support of this, Gearity and Murray (2010) talked about how ineffective coaches tend to divide, rather than unite their teams.

Another influential coaching attribute noted by the current study participants was a coach's ability to get to know his or her athletes. This involved building and maintaining a genuine and meaningful coach-athlete relationship. Social interaction is an important characteristic of this process (Komives et al., 2005). Julius and colleagues (1999) found that not only is social interaction important, but that influential leaders also tend to have stronger social and political skills, enabling them to navigate these social

interactions more efficiently. To further this, Jowett and Chaundy (2004) found that the level of influence a leader held was closely related to the strength of the coach-athlete relationship. An athlete's perception of his or her coach's behaviors was also found to be related to how compatible they were with their coach to begin with (Kenow & Williams, 1999). Philippe and Seiler (2006) found that male athletes prefer someone who is socially skilled, prioritizing a coach's social competence as the most important trait a coach could hold. The current study showed that both male and female athletes see social skill as an influential coaching attribute, as supported in Marshall's quote: "inspirational coaching attributes— comes down a lot to being able to connect with your athletes" or in Ariana's statement that "coaches that are the most influential have a stronger relationship with their athlete." Yukl and Chavez (2002) found that leaders can influence others using one of two approaches: by creating a positive image of themselves and fostering strong relationships or by using tactics such as manipulation, deception, and trickery. Ariana talked about this in her interview, stating that some coaches had been positive influences in her life, such as those who had taken the time to help her and get to know her, and others had used more manipulative tactics such as pitting athletes against each other or capitalizing on an athlete's fear of not letting his or her teammates down, all to facilitate change. Ariana felt that both approaches were influential in that they had a lasting impact on her performance and identity, for better or for worse.

According to Zhang and Chelladuri (2013) an effective leader must develop a trusting relationship with his or her athletes, which depends on the athletes' perceptions of certain coaching attributes, such as fairness, acting in the athlete's best interest, adhering to agreed-upon standards, and the coach's level of competency. Many athletes



in this study talked about the trust they felt in their relationships with their coaches. When speaking of what makes a coach trustworthy, Ariana stated that it often came down to seeing how they treated athletes and made decisions, and if this treatment seemed fair. Damson also stated that the more influential coaches “are actually looking for what’s best for the person.” He also touched on the idea of adhering to agreed-upon standards, saying an influential coach would “communicate with the athletes about what’s good, what’s not good.” Marshall furthered this, speaking of the importance of consistency and a coach preaching the morals he or she instilled within the team. Similarly, coach competency was discussed by Jason, who mentioned that he previously had a coach who would teach incorrect form to his athletes, which negatively impacted his perceptions of his coach’s competencies.

Research also suggests that athletes express a desire for their coaches to be able to juggle several roles, including supporting them personally and being emotionally close, while still remaining professional and goal-minded during training (Becker, 2009; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Philippe & Seiler, 2006). This was supported in the current study. For example, Damson talked about the importance of a coach being able to differentiate between “when we need him more as a friend or someone to look up to.” Jason also talked about this in terms of “the professional line.” He gave the example of a coach who he was very close to and considered a friend and father figure, but who he also trusted and respected because that coach never crossed the “professional line.” Other relational factors in the literature center on the importance of making athletes feel valued, taking interest in them and their personal issues, showing them respect as experts in their sport, and tuning in to their fears (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Stammers, 2016). Tina talked about

the importance of a coach who refrained from playing favorites and valued all the swimmers, not just the fastest ones. Leo also spoke about this, saying “I think it’s *better* that they would treat their athletes more like people than athletes, if they want their program to succeed long term.” Damson talked about the importance of a coach taking an interest in him and things going on in his life, saying for instance, if a coach knew an athlete was going home, upon his return the coach could convey interest by asking how his family was doing. Leo and Ariana both talked about a coach respecting them as experts in their sport. Leo talked about the knowledge base of a collegiate swimmer, and the need for a coach to be understanding of that, as well as why the athlete may be doing the things they are doing. Although “tuning in to fears” can be a component of forming relationships, this concept was only minimally discussed by the current study participants. Only Ariana noted that a past coach had tuned into her fear of letting her teammates down, and consequently used this fear to manipulate her into pushing herself harder than she normally would have, which she did not see as a positive influence. This relationship was not perceived as a positive coach-athlete relationship.

According to Jowett and Cockerill (2003) elite athletes cite the importance of a strong bond and mutual commitment between athlete and coach. This was supported by one national level swimmer in this study, who spoke about the coaches he saw as influential. He spoke of the close relationship between himself and these coaches, and of their commitment to his wellbeing and success as an athlete. He even noted that seeing the involvement of one of his former coaches, made him feel like he should be more committed and exerting more effort, and to him this was a positive influence. Previous literature also shows that Millennial generation athletes speak of the importance of a

high-quality coach-athlete relationship (Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al, 2012). While all of the participants within this study were from the same generation, Generation Z, this finding was still supported, showing that this previous finding may be applied across generations, not just to Millennials.

The second common theme emphasized an influential coach as caring. This is supported by Phillippe and Seiler (2006) who found that male athletes prefer a coach who makes them feel heard, understood, and cared for. Jason talked about this in his interview, saying that a coach he would want to follow would demonstrate understanding of personal differences. Fasting and Pfister (2000) found that female athletes also wanted a coach who could demonstrate empathy toward his or her athletes. This too was supported when Tina talked about coaches who demonstrated empathy in getting soup for a sick athlete, or a lack of empathy when failing to acknowledge athletes who weren't the fastest swimmers on the team.

Jowett and Cockerill (2003) previously found that elite athletes often voice a need for mutual caring. This was demonstrated by Damson when he talked about his relationships with his coaches and the importance of stepping outside the typical 'coach-athlete' bond. He reinforced the need for caring by talking about how his coaches "both got involved with my personal life when I had some personal issues and I wasn't feeling at the best." He also talked about the importance of his coach taking the time to ask about personal things like his family, or checking in when he had not had the chance to see them for a while, as well as the impact this had on his perception of and level of respect for his coach. This may be closely tied to social support, which was defined as displaying

concern and care for the welfare of others (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al., 2012; Stammers, 2016; Stewart & Owens, 2011).

Inspiration was another influential coaching attribute included in this second common theme. Inspiration and motivation were terms that athletes used interchangeably when talking about influential coaches. Previous literature has focused on the relationship of influence to motivation (Barber, et al., 1999), but generally in a very specified manner. This study took a much broader approach to motivation, not necessarily assessing the motivation of a certain task, but instead how a coach might influence his or her athletes through motivation and inspiration. Komives and colleagues (2005) have stated that inspiration is closely tied to influential leaders and is a crucial part of coaching development. Jason brought this up in his interview, where he discussed the ‘chain of influence.’ He talked about how past coaches had inspired him, and he now used these inspirational moments to inspire the younger athletes he coached, who might become coaches themselves.

Another important attribute that emerged was a coach’s ability to develop and maintain an effective culture and positive environment. As found in previous studies, “good coaches” were seen as those who created positive environments where athletes felt comfortable being themselves and making mistakes as they developed their skills (Becker, 2009; Parker et al, 2012). While many athletes in this study expressed the importance of a positive environment, the ways in which they defined this environment varied. The participants defined a good culture and environment as one where athletes *wanted* to show up and train, where they did not feel stressed, and the team was happy and loose. This is supported by previous studies that point to social support contributing

to the creation of a positive environment (Becker, 2009; Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al., 2012; Stammers, 2016; Stewart & Owens, 2011). A negative environment was seen as one where things were uncertain, a coach was overly aggressive or even abusive at times, negative attitudes abounded, and individual focus was the norm. This is supported by Gearity and Murray (2010) who found that these same traits equated to poor coaching and were signs of an ineffective team environment.

Bartone (2006) found that leaders also influence through the rules they choose to implement. This finding was supported in the current study as well, as noted by Marshall and Damson. For instance, Marshall talked about the coach's role in maintaining culture by removing anyone who threatened that culture. Damson talked about the coach's role in setting standards and maintaining it, which can also play a role in the culture of the team and what is and is not acceptable within that culture.

According to the findings in this study, influential coaches are role models and moral figures. According to Balyi and colleagues (2013) this is an inherent part of being a collegiate coach to begin with. Tunick and colleagues (2009) pointed out that college coaches can take on a parental role for college athletes who are away from home for the first time. This is supported in the current study, as well as previous studies (Becker, 2009; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Philippe & Seiler, 2006). In this study, for instance, Jason spoke of an influential coach who would travel with him and who had coached him from a young age, who he said took on the role of a second father.

Several authors have used the term "role model" in describing desirable coaching attributes (Hoffman, 2008; Stewart & Owens, 2011). Coaches not only impact the behaviors of their athletes on the field, but also in their personal development and life

choices (Mastroleo et al., 2012). Damson spoke in his interview of an influential coach being able to set standards of what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’ and their ability to lead by example by embodying these values. This is further supported by Bartone (2006), who found that leaders influence through role modeling and by way of the rules they choose to implement. In contrast to positive role models, Tina brought up a former coach who she did not see as influential, stating that he was “not a good person.” Burton and Peachey (2014) discussed ethical modeling and the decisions that leaders in intercollegiate athletics are often faced with *doing things* right versus *doing the right thing*. Influential coaches are often seen as those who choose *doing the right thing*. The literature also supports the idea that influential leaders display high moral integrity, a vision consistent with the organizational values, and good judgement (Julius, et al., 1999). Role modeling *is* important to developing future coaches (Komives et al., 2005), and was an important aspect discussed by Jason in his concept of the ‘chain of influence.’ This ‘chain of influence’ was also supported in the research when trying to explain the lack of female role models, as one possible reason for the small number of current female coaches at the collegiate level (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Moran-Miller & Flores, 2011).

A coach who is flexible, adaptive, and holistic was another common theme found in this study. Wathner and Trudel (2006) found that these attributes are a part of coaching development, and something that is a continual process. These authors found that curiosity was an important part of this development, and this was supported in this current study. For example, Damson noted that the coaches he perceived to be influential were looking for “the better” and trying to “find new ideas, to *expand* new ideas.” Vella and colleagues (2010) supported this in stating coaching to be a dynamic process that

requires both adaptation and improvisation. Influential leaders hold this attribute even in domains outside of coaching (Baldrige & Pfeffer, 1999). Turman (2001) also found that perceptions of coaching support differed depending on the level of sport participation. This reinforces the idea that a coach should be flexible in his or her approach to coaching various individual athletes and age levels, each with differing needs.

Participants in this study also agreed that influential coaches are knowledgeable. This too was supported by Julius and colleagues (1999) who found influential leaders demonstrated a certain level of expertise relevant to the objectives of the group. This was also shown in studies of “good coaches,” in which athletes stated that good coaches were both knowledgeable and experienced (Becker, 2009; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Parker et al., 2012; Philippe & Seiler, 2006; Stammers, 2016; Stewart, 2016), as well as good teachers (Becker, 2009; Stewart, 2016). In terms of knowledge, many athletes often reported expectations for a coach to be able to aid in skill-development (Hoffman, 2008; Stewart & Owens, 2011). Emma expressed this in her interview, saying an influential coach should have a good knowledge of technique.

Knowledge is something that many college coaches already possess. In previous studies, over half of the coaches surveyed reported having a bachelor’s degree in some type of exercise science field, and nearly 70% of coaches reported having earned a master’s degree, as well as other coaching certifications (Harris, 2005; Waryasz et al., 2015). Athletes in this study mentioned that a coach who has the concrete, factual knowledge obtained from such an educational background are influential in their coaching. Damson summed this up, stating: “if there is a coach, no matter how he is interacting [with] me if it’s positive, negative— if he tells me something textbook

knowledge, it's actually a fact? I'm gonna be like, 'oh, yeah, I'm learning, you're teaching me something.' What they experienced might be different." Leo furthered this distinction when stating that it is "definitely *possible* to not have a formal education and [still] be a coach. I mean, I think it's a lot easier if you do get a formal education, to have a little bit of a clue about what you're talking about, but I mean more training."

Research on gender differences, in relationship to valuing knowledge, are inconsistent. For instance, female athletes seem to prioritize coaches who are knowledgeable and skilled in teaching physical technique (Stammers, 2016; Stewart, 2016). These reports are consistent with the current study in which both male and female athletes named knowledge as an influential attribute, with female athletes talking about the importance of teaching physical technique more than their male counterparts. However, this contrasts with the Philippe and Seiler (2006) findings where male athletes listed the teaching of physical skills as the second most important coaching trait after social competence.



## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to examine the following research question: What coaching attributes are perceived by athletes as most influential? The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of collegiate swimmers regarding influential coaching attributes. From seven participant interviews, five common themes emerged. The following chapter presents a summary of these themes, the author's conclusions, and future recommendations for continued research in this area of study.

#### Summary

Seven collegiate swimmers were purposively selected and interviewed following a qualitative, phenomenological research design. A semi-structured interview guide was implemented to allow participants the opportunity to explain their perceptions surrounding influential coaching. The semi-structured interview format allowed each participant time to fully explore their experiences, emotions, and thoughts regarding previous coaches' positive and negative influences. Following a stepwise analytical process, five common themes emerged that answered the research question. These five themes were: 1) An influential coach is socially competent, 2) An influential coach is a caring role model who creates a positive environment, 3) An influential coach is committed, 4) An influential coach is flexible, adaptive, and holistic, and 5) An influential coach is knowledgeable.

#### Conclusions

This study was exploratory, meaning there were no definitive outcomes (Yin, 2003). While this study was one of the first to explore perceptions of influential coaching,

the results paralleled the existing literature on influence in academic leadership (Julius, et al., 1999). Many of the influential coaching attributes detailed in this study, match previous research findings on “good coaching” practices (Becker, 2009; Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; LaVoi, 2007; Parker et al., 2012; Philippe & Seiler, 2006; Stammers, 2016; Stewart, 2016). In the end, the perceptions surrounding influential coaching attributes were found to be dynamic and complex. Still, these results (five common themes) provide a means to begin answering the question of what defines influential coaching at the collegiate level.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

There is an abundance of existing research on athlete perceptions of “good coaching.” However, as Leo pointed out at the conclusion of his interview: “you can look at somebody and say they’re a *good coach*, but maybe they’re not super influential and they’re not a great leader, but they’re a good coach, they get you to swim fast, but that person might not be able to amass a group of followers that’s super committed to them, because they’re not super influential.” This demonstrates the complexity of influential coaching, as well as the need for further research on what makes a coach “good,” what makes a coach “influential,” and how both are intertwined. Thus, the first recommendation would be to replicate this current study to verify and expand upon the current findings. It is recommended that future studies include a larger number of participants, across sports, age groups, levels of sporting experience, and geographic regions. These recommendations would help diversify the data and move toward a better understanding and impact of specific demographic factors, such as the generational impact on perception. Several authors (Hoffman, 2008; Parker et al., 2012) have found

generational differences when it comes to perceptions of good coaching, so it would be logical to explore these differences in terms of influence as well.

As stated, additional recommendations include replicating this study with different sporting populations. Sport can influence identity formation and expression (Cogan & Machin, 2009). Therefore, perceptions might be shaped by the sport itself and could change depending on each unique sporting environment. As such, future research on open-skilled sports where competition involves teammate interaction and strategizing with the aid of a coach, could be of benefit.

Despite extensive literature on the athlete preferences of coaching behaviors, little is known in terms of what behaviors obtain results. It is important to explore this topic further to expand the knowledge of coaches, as well as those working with athletes and coaches, and those tasked with teaching this next generation of performers.

## REFERENCES

- Acosta, R. V., & Carpenter, L. J. (2014). Woman in intercollegiate sport: A longitudinal, national study. Thirty-seven year update, 1977-2014. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED570882.pdf>
- Ahern, K. J. (1999). Ten tips for reflexive bracketing. *Qualitative Health Research, 9*, 407-411.
- Ahlgren-Bedics, R., & Monda, S. (2009). Life skills for collegiate student-athletes: Defining the need and model practices. In E. Etzel (Ed.). *Counseling and psychological services for college student-athletes* (pp. 113-142). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Anderson, J. (2019, August 8). Swimming, diving receive 'F's again in study of female NCAA head coaches. *SwimSwam*. Retrieved from [https://swimswam.com/swimming-diving-receive-fs-again-in-study-of-female-ncaa-head-coaches/?utm\\_campaign=twitter&utm\\_medium=twitter&utm\\_source=twitter](https://swimswam.com/swimming-diving-receive-fs-again-in-study-of-female-ncaa-head-coaches/?utm_campaign=twitter&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=twitter)
- Avolio, B. J., & Gardner, W. L. (2005). Authentic leadership development: Getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly, 16* 315-338. DOI: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.001
- Balyi, I., Way, R., & Higgs, C. (2013). *Long-term athlete development*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics
- Barber, H., Sukhi, H., & White, S. A. (1999). The influence of parent-coaches on participant motivation and competitive anxiety in youth sport participants. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 22*(2), 162-180.

- Bartone, P. T. (2006). Resilience under military operational stress: Can leaders influence hardiness? *Military Psychology, 18*, 131-148.
- Becker, A. J. (2009). It's not what they do, it's how they do it: Athlete experiences of great coaching. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 4*(1), 93-119. DOI:10.1260/1747-9541.4.1.93
- Burke, C. S., Stagl, K. C., Klein, C., Goodwin, G. F., Salas, E., & Halpin, S. M. (2006). What type of leadership behaviors are functional in teams? A meta-analysis. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*(3), 288-307. DOI: 10.1016/j.leaqua.200602.007
- Burns, J.M. (1998). "Transactional and transforming leadership". In Hickman, G.R. (Ed.), *Leading Organizations*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 133-134.
- Burton, L., & Peachey, J. W. (2014). Ethical leadership in intercollegiate sport: Challenges, opportunities, future directions. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport, 7*, 1-10. DOI: 10.1123/jis.2014-0100
- Campbell, J. J. (2011). Introduction to Methods of Qualitative Research Outline. Unpublished outline. Nova Southeastern University.
- Carron, A. V., Hausenblas, H. A., & Mack, D. (1996). Social influence and exercise: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 18*, 1-16. DOI:10.1017/S1368980099000567
- Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: Compliance and conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology, 55*, 591-621. DOI:10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.142015

- Cogan, K. D., & Machin, A. S. (2009). Counseling women college student-athletes. In E. F. Etzel (Ed.), *Counseling and psychological services for college student-athletes* (144-175). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Crust, L., & Azadi, K. (2009). Leadership preferences of mentally tough athletes. *Personality and Individual Differences, 47*(4), 326-330. DOI: 10.1016/j.pain.2009.03.022
- Erickson, K., Côté, J., & Fraser, T. J. (2007). Sport experiences, milestones, and educational activities associated with high-performance coaches' development. *The Sport Psychologist, 21*(3), 302-316. DOI: 10.1123/tsp.21.3.302
- Fasting, K., & Pfister, G. (2000). Female and male coaches in the eyes of female elite soccer players. *European Physical Education Review, 6*(1), 91-108. DOI: 10.1177/1356336X000061001
- Ferrante, A. P., & Etzel, E. F. (2009). College student-athletes and counseling services in the new millennium. In E. Etzel (Ed.). *Counseling and psychological services for college student-athletes* (pp. 1-49). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Gearity, B. T., & Murray, M. A. (2010). Athletes' experiences of the psychological effects of poor coaching. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 12*, 213-221. DOI:10.1016/j.psychsport.2010.11.004
- Giacobbi, P. R., Whitney, J., Roper, E., & Butryn, T. (2002). College coaches' views about the development of successful athletes: A descriptive exploratory

- investigation. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 25(2), 164-181.
- Gilbert, W., & Trudel, P. (2001). Learning to coach through experience: Reflection in model youth sport coaches. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 21, 16-34. DOI: 10.1123/jtpe.21.1.16
- Gillet, N., Valerand, R. J., Amoura, S., & Baldes B. (2010). Influence of coaches' autonomy support on athletes' motivation and sport performance: A test of the hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 11(2), 155-161. DOI: 10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.10.004
- Hackman, J. R., & Wageman, R. (2004). When and how team leaders matter. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 26, 37-74. DOI: 10.1.1.452.8295
- Hampson, R., & Jowett, S. (2012). Effects of coach leadership and coach-athlete relationship on collective efficacy. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, 1-7. DOI: 10.1111/j.1600-0838.2012.01527
- Harris, B. S. (2005). *Coach and athlete burnout: The role of coaches' decision-making style*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). West Virginia University: Morgantown, WV.
- Harrison, C. K., Lapchick, R. E., & Janson, N. K. (2009). Decision making in hiring: Intercollegiate athletics coaches and staff. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 144, 93-101. DOI: 10.1002/ir.316
- Hart, T. (2018, August 24). NCAA swimming lands 'F' grade for lack of women coaching female teams. *Swim Swam*. Retrieved from <https://swimswam.com/ncaa-swimming-lands-f-grade-for-lack-of-women-coaching-female-teams/>

- Hoffman, E. C. (2008). Preferred coaching qualities in NCAA division I college athletes: A qualitative analysis of basketball players from the millennial generation. *Electronic Theses & Dissertations, 70*. 1-75. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/etd/70>
- Hogg, M. A. (2010). Influence and leadership. *Handbook of social psychology*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Jowett, S., & Chaundy, V. (2004). An investigation into the impact of coach leadership and coach-athlete relationship on group cohesion. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 8*(4) 302-311. DOI:10.1037/1089-2699.4.302
- Jowett, S. (2003). When the “honeymoon” is over: A case study of a coach athlete dyad in crisis. *The Sport Psychologist, 17*, 444-460. DOI: 10.1123/tsp.17.4.444
- Jowett, S., & Cockerill, I. M. (2003). Olympic medallists’ perspective of the athlete-coach relationship. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 4*, 313-331. DOI: 10.1016/S1469-0292
- Julius, D. J., Baldrige, J. V., & Pfeffer, J. (1999). Determinants of administrative effectiveness: Why some academic leaders are more influential and effective than others. *CSSHE Professional File, 19*, 1-12.
- Kamphoff, C. S. (2010). Bargaining with patriarchy: Former female coaches’ experiences and their decision to leave collegiate coaching. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 81*(3) 360-372.



- Keegan, R. J., Harwood, C. G., Spray, C. M., & Lavalley, D. E. (2009). A qualitative investigation exploring motivational climate in early career sports participants: Coach, parent and peer influences on sport motivation. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 10*(3), 361-372. DOI: 10.1016/j.psychsport.2008.12.003
- Kenow, L. J., & Williams, J. M. (1992). Relationship between anxiety, self-confidence, and evaluation of coaching behaviors. *The Sport Psychologist, 6*, 344-357.
- Kenow, L., & Williams, J. M. (1999). Coach-athlete compatibility and athlete's perception of coaching behaviors. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 22*(2), 251-260.
- Komives, S. R., Owen, J. E., Longerbeam, S. D., Mainella, F. C., & Osteen, L. (2005). Developing a leadership identity: A grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(6), 593-611. DOI: 10.1353/csd.2005.0061
- LaVoi, N. M., Boucher, C., & Silbert, S. (2019). Head coaches of women's collegiate teams: A comprehensive report on NCAA Division I institutions 2018-19. *Minneapolis: Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport*. Retrieved from [https://cdn.swimswam.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/WCCRC-Head-Coaches\\_All-NCAA-DI-Head-Coaches\\_2018-19.pdf](https://cdn.swimswam.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/WCCRC-Head-Coaches_All-NCAA-DI-Head-Coaches_2018-19.pdf)
- LaVoi, N. M. (2007). Expanding the interpersonal dimension: Closeness in the coach-athlete relationship. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 2*(4), 497-512. DOI:10.1260/174795407783359696
- Lemyre, P. N., Treasure, D. C., & Roberts, G. C. (2006). Influence of variability in motivation and affect on elite athlete burnout susceptibility. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 28*(1), 32-48. DOI: 10.1123/jsep.28.1.32

- Marsden, P. V., & Friedkin, N. E. (1993). Network studies of social influence. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 22(1), 127-151.
- Mastroleo, N. R., Marzell, M., Turrisi, R., & Borsari, B. (2012). Do coaches make a difference off the field? The examination of athletic coach influence on early college student drinking. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 20(1), 64-71.  
DOI:10.3109/16066359.2011.562621
- Moran-Miller, K., & Flores, L. Y. (2011). Where are the women in women's sports? Predictors of female athletes' interest in a coaching career. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 82(1), 109-117.
- Oc, B., & Bانشur, M. R. (2013). Followership, leadership and social influence. *Leadership Quarterly*, 24(6), 919-934.
- Parker, K., Czech, D., Burdette, T., Stewart, J., Biber, D., Easton, L., Pecinovsky, C., Carson, S., & McDaniel, T. (2012). The preferred coaching styles of generation Z athletes: A qualitative study. *Journal of Coaching Education*, 5(2), 5-23. DOI: 10.1123/jce.5.2.5
- Philippe, R. A., & Seiler, R. (2006). Closeness, co-orientation and complementarity in coach-athlete relationships: What male swimmers say about their male coaches. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 7, 159-171. DOI: 10.1016/j.psychsport.2005.08.004
- Price, M. S., & Weiss, M. R. (2011). Relationships among coach leadership, peer leadership, and adolescent athletes' psychosocial and team outcomes: A test of transformational leadership theory. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 25(2), 265-279. DOI: 10.1080/10413200.2012.725703

- Raven, B. H. (1964). *Social influence and power*. Los Angeles, CA: California University.
- Shelley, G. A. (1999). Using qualitative analysis in the study of athletic injury: A model for implementation. In D. Pargman (Ed.), *Psychological bases of sport injuries* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 305-319). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Stammers, J. M. (2016). Coach gender and coaching style preferences of NAIA female student-athletes (Doctoral Dissertation). DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2472.7924
- Stevens, M. A., & Scholefield, R. (2009). Counseling male college student-athletes. In E. F. Etzel (Ed.), *Counseling and psychological services for college student-athletes* (pp.177-214). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology
- Stewart, C. (2016). Female athletes' rankings of coaching behavior: A longitudinal report. *The Physical Educator*, 73, 417-432. DOI: 10.18666/TPE-2016-V73-I3-6426
- Stewart, C., & Owens, L. (2011). Behavioral characteristics of 'favorite' coaches: Implications for coach education. *Physical Educator*, 68(2), 90-97.
- Tanford, S., & Penrod, S. (1984). Social Influence Model: A formal integration of research on majority and minority influence processes. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95(2), 189-225. DOI: 10.1037/0033-2909.95.2.189
- The Institute of Diversity and Ethics in Sport. (2017). *The 2016 racial and gender report card: College sport*. Orlando, FL: Richard Lapchick.

- Tunick, R., Clement, D., & Etzel, E. (2009). Counseling injured and disabled student-athletes: A guide for understanding and intervention. In E. Etzel (Ed.). *Counseling and psychological services for college student-athletes* (pp. 403-450). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Turman, P. D. (2001). Situational coaching styles: The impact of success and athlete maturity level on coaches' leadership styles over time. *Small Group Research*, 35(5), 576-594.
- Vealey, R. S., Armstrong, L., Comar, W., & Greenleaf, C. A. (1998). Influence of perceived coaching behaviors on burnout and competitive anxiety in female college athletes. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 10(2), 297-318.
- Vecchio, R. P. (Ed.). (2007). *Leadership: Understanding the dynamics of power and influence in organizations*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Vella, S. A., Oades, L. G., & Crowe, T. P. (2013). The relationship between coach leadership, the coach-athlete relationship, team success, and the positive developmental experiences of adolescent soccer players. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 18(5), 549-561.
- Vella, S. A., Oades, L. G., & Crowe, T. P. (2010). The application of coach leadership models to coaching practice: Current state and future directions. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 5(3) 425-534. DOI: 10.1260/1747-9541.5.3.425

- Waryasz, G. R., Daniels, A. H., Gil, J. A., Suric, V., & Ebersson, C. P. (2015). NCAA strength and conditioning coach demographics, current practice trends and common injuries of athletes during strength and conditioning sessions. *The Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness*, 56(10), 1188-1197. DOI: PMID:26473446
- Weiss, M. R., & Friedrichs, W. D. (1986). The influence of leader behaviors, coach attributes, and institutional variables on performance and satisfaction of collegiate basketball teams. *Human Kinetics Journal*, 8(4), 332-346. DOI: 10.1123/jsp.8.4.332
- Werthner, P., & Trudel, P. (2006). A new theoretical perspective for understanding how coaches learn to coach. *The Sport Psychologist*, 20(2) 198-212. DOI: 10.1123/tsp.20.2.198
- Williams, J. M., Jerome, G. J., Kenow, L. J., Rogers, T., & Sartain, T. A. (2003). Factor structure of the coaching behavior questionnaire and its relationship to athlete variables. *The Sport Psychologist*, 17, 16-34.
- Wolf-Wendel, L. E., Toma, J. D., & Mophew, C. C. (2001). How much difference is too much difference? Perceptions of gay men and lesbians in intercollegiate athletics. *Journal of College Student Development*, 42(5), 456-479.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Yukl, G., & Chavez, C. (2002). Influence tactics and leader effectiveness. In L. Neider & C. Schriesheim (Eds.), *Leadership: Research in management* (Vol. 2, pp. 139-165). Charlotte: Information Age Publishing

Zhang, Z., & Chelladurai, P. (2013). Antecedents and consequences of athlete's trust in the coach. *Journal of Sport and Health Science*, 2, 115-121. DOI: 10.1016/j.jshs.2012.03.002

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### Recruitment Statement

**Phone Script:**

Hi, this is Jasmine Haas, I am a graduate student at Ithaca College in the Exercise and Sport Sciences department. I am recruiting college athletes to be in a study looking at the perceptions of athletes on what makes a coach influential. We are looking for college swimmers and divers who are between the ages of 18 and 24. Would you be interested?

**If no:** Thank you so much for your time, have a great day!

**If yes:** Great! Let me tell you more about the study. It involves a sit-down interview which should take between 45 minutes to an hour. We will audiotape this interview so that we can compare your answers to other participants and highlight common phrases and answers to find common themes that might point to what athletes think makes a coach influential. You can schedule this interview at a time that is convenient for you and we will decide on a private location somewhere on campus together on room availability. Once the interview has been transcribed you will have the opportunity to review it and clarify or correct anything you feel is necessary to make sure it best represents your views. There are very few risks to you in this study, only the same sort of risks you might encounter from thinking about or talking about your previous experiences with various coaches you have worked with. Do you have any questions or concerns I can address? If you are still willing to participate, I will email you the informed consent form.

**Email posting:**

Hi everyone,

I am recruiting athletes to be in a study looking at the perceptions of athletes about what makes a coach influential. We are looking for college swimmers and divers who are between the ages of 18 and 24.

This study involves a sit-down interview which should take between 45 minutes to an hour. We will audiotape this interview so that we can compare your answers to other participants and highlight common phrases and answers to find common themes that might point to what athletes think makes a coach influential. You can schedule this interview at a time that is convenient for you and we will decide on a private location somewhere on campus together based on room availability. Once the interview has been transcribed you will have the opportunity to review it and clarify or correct anything you feel is necessary to make sure it best represents your views. There are very few risks to you in this study, only the same sort of risks you might encounter from thinking about or talking about your previous experiences with various coaches you have worked with. If you want more information, or if you have any questions or concerns, you may direct these to:

Principal Investigator: Jasmine Haas, B.S., Ithaca College  
Faculty Advisor: Greg Shelley, PhD, Ithaca College

## APPENDIX B

### Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: Influential coaching: What do student-athletes perceive as most important?

Principal Investigator: Jasmine Haas, B.S., Ithaca College  
Faculty Advisor: Greg Shelley, PhD, Ithaca College

#### Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a collegiate swimmer or diver between the ages of 18 and 24. Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You are not required to participate in this study. You may stop or withdraw your participation from this study at any time.

#### Important Information about this Research Study

Purpose of the study: to learn more about what traits athletes think make a coach better able to produce desired results in their athletes.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to meet at a private location somewhere on campus (agreed upon by you and the researcher) to take part in an interview which should take between 45 minutes to an hour.

The total time commitment for participation will be no more than an hour.

Risks and discomforts associated with this research: possible discomfort may occur depending on previous experience with coaches. For instance, if an athlete had an abusive coach and they are asked to think about their former experience with various coaches, this could trigger feelings of distress.

Direct benefits to the participants: increased knowledge of peer perceptions of which coaching traits produce positive results and how these results lines up with own perceptions

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether you would like to participate in this research study.

#### 1. Purpose of the Study

This study is being conducted to learn about the perceptions of athletes on what traits make a coach most influential.

#### 2. Benefits of the Study

This project is the thesis component of the primary researcher's graduate studies, and will enable her to advance into the community of scholars through publication/presentation of



this research. Gaining knowledge through this research may help her better network with coaches and athletes in the future. Participants may receive the benefit of learning more about their peers.

- Learn about perceptions of influential coaches and how their perceptions line up with others.
- Coaches of these participants may learn more about what traits produce better results for their athletes, which can help the coaches improve in their coaching and enhance their abilities to help athletes perform in their respective sports.

### 3. What You Will Be Asked to Do

- You are being asked to participate in an interview about your views on what makes a coach influential based on your previous experiences. These questions will ask about things like what traits influential coaches you have had hold or what stands out to you about coaches you have not wanted to follow.
- The interview should take between 45 minutes to an hour.
- You must be between 18 and 24 years old, and be a current collegiate swimmer or diver.

### 4. Withdrawal from the Study

- You are free to withdraw at any time and will be given a chance to alter or omit any answers once your interview has been transcribed.
- Data will be destroyed and not included in final research manuscripts if you choose to withdraw from the study

### 5. Risks

- In any study, there is the possibility of minimal risk. Risk is considered minimal when the likelihood of harm or discomfort is not greater than that encountered in daily life. The risk to you in this study could include increased awareness of your thoughts toward your coaches, breach of confidentiality which could result in data falling into the wrong hands (i.e. a coach) or distress arising from discussing any previous negative coaching experiences.
- These risks will be minimized through several ways. You are free to guide the conversation away from topics you find distressing, and if you experience any distress following this study resources can be provided through the counseling center or referral to your sport psychology consultant. Ithaca College students can contact CAPS to set up an appointment at 607-274-3136. West Virginia University students can call 304-293-3705 to set up an appointment with a counselor at the Carruth center. Confidentiality will also be maintained in several ways: through taking your name and any identifying information off all documents, through all documents being kept on password protected devices, and through all recordings and paper documents being destroyed immediately following data analysis.

### 6. How the Data will be Maintained in Confidence

The researcher will ensure measures are in place to protect your confidentiality,

meaning that the researchers will know the identity of each research participant, but will takes steps to protect that identity from being discovered by others.

Informed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of 3 years upon completion of study in a password-protected forum. Recordings will be stored on a password-protected device until data analysis is completed, after which recordings will be permanently destroyed. The researcher will be the only individual with access to this device in the meantime.

7. Use of information beyond this study  
Identifying information may be removed and this de-identified information used for future research without additional informed consent from the participant.
8. Compensation for Injury  
If you suffer an injury that requires any treatment or hospitalization as a direct result of this study, the cost for such care will be charged to you. If you have insurance, you may bill your insurance company. You will be responsible to pay all costs not covered by your insurance. Ithaca College will not pay for any care, lost wages, or provide other financial compensation.
9. If You Would Like More Information about the Study  
Any questions or concerns can be directed to one of the following:

Primary Investigator:  
Jasmine Haas, Graduate Student  
[jhaas@ithaca.edu](mailto:jhaas@ithaca.edu)  
(304) 685-3124

Faculty Advisor:  
Greg Shelley  
[gshelley@ithaca.edu](mailto:gshelley@ithaca.edu)  
(607) 274-1275

Ithaca College IRB  
Peggy Ryan Williams Center  
953 Danby Road  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
[irb@ithaca.edu](mailto:irb@ithaca.edu)  
(607) 274-3113

I have read the above and I understand its contents. I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

---

Print or Type Name

---

Signature

---

Date

I give my permission to be audiotaped.

---

Signature

---

Date

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

1. Based on your experiences, what qualities make a coach someone you want to follow?
2. In your experience, what makes a coach influential?
3. How are some coaches more influential than others?
4. Why are some coaches more influential than others?
5. What are some behaviors you might experience with an influential coach you want to follow and one you don't particularly want to follow?
6. What stands out to you about coaches you haven't wanted to follow?
7. How can coach leaders be more influential? Can you give a specific example?
8. How do you define a "good coach." How about an influential coach leader?
9. How can coaches most influence athlete change?
10. Do all coaches influence teams toward growth in the same ways? Yes/No? Explain.
11. As you think about your past and present coaches, what are the key differences and similarities between coaches you want to follow and coaches who most influence your performance and personal growth?
12. What coaching attributes do you see as most influential?

13. How would you define a positive influential coach? How about a negative influential coach?

14. Is there anything about coaching attributes or any aspect of influential coaching that you would like to add that you did not already discuss?

15. Could you briefly summarize your overall views about influential coaching attributes?

Thank you for your time and responses!