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# THE INFLUENCE OF COACHING BEHAVIORS ON GEN Z COLLEGIATE ATHLETES AND TEAM MORALE

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The Influence of Coaching Behaviors on Gen Z  
Collegiate Athletes and Team Morale

Submitted to Southeastern University

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Leadership

Erik Bennett

July 30, 2024

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership  
Southeastern University

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**THE INFLUENCE OF COACHING BEHAVIORS ON GEN Z  
COLLEGIATE ATHLETES AND TEAM MORALE**

Has been approved by his committee as satisfactory completion of the dissertation  
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## Abstract

A coach's behavior significantly influences both athlete and team morale. As a generational change occurs, the behaviors exhibited by coaches may also require change. As members of Generation Z (Gen Z) begin to fill collegiate sports rosters, understanding their unique characteristics and preferences becomes critical for effective coaching strategies. Drawing upon generational studies and the interviews of six collegiate athletes within the Gen Z cohort, how coaching behavior influences collegiate athletes' athletic performance and team morale was analyzed within this cohort. Using a qualitative approach, data gathered from the six Gen Z-aged collegiate athletes were analyzed to reveal patterns of the nuanced interactions between coaching styles, athlete motivation, and team morale. The findings underscore the significance of coaching techniques that resonate with the values and expectations of Gen Z athletes that are conducive to motivation. This study also illuminates the differences between Gen Z athletes and their predecessors, highlighting the need for generation-specific coaching approaches. Whereas previous generations may have responded to authoritative coaching styles, Gen Z athletes often thrive in environments characterized by collaboration, technology-based feedback, and personal care. By recognizing and adapting to this generation's unique needs and preferences, coaches can effectively harness the morale of the athlete and team, possibly leading to successful outcomes.

*Keywords:* athletic performance, coaching behavior, collegiate athletes, Generation Z, team morale.

## Dedication

“True glory consists in doing what deserves to be written, in writing what deserves to be read, and in so living as to make the world happier and better for our living in it.”

—Pliny the Elder

My father and mother always wanted me to be a writer. Well, I have been writing for nearly 4 straight years on this academic journey. Quite easily I could end the dedication here, my fingers are tired and my laptop is worn, and I am finished. It is hard to fathom that my PhD journey has come to completion. There are so many people to thank for timely encouragement, prayers, and support during all phases of this process. I could not have finished without them. Thank you my God, who, through Christ, offered me a gift I could never have earned and created within me a stubborn streak, which as it turns out, helped tremendously in finishing a dissertation let alone coursework work. Earning a PhD is, in my now educated opinion, more willpower than brain power. “A PhD wow, you must be very smart,” they said. “No, very stubborn,” I answered.

Thank you to my family, who no doubt wondered whether I would ever stop staring at my laptop screen. No one in my family will ever have to listen to generational theory again from me. I think. I have written pages late at night, early in the morning, on vacations and in a hospital hooked up to all kinds of equipment recovering from open heart surgery (see also effects of stress and stubbornness). The writings during my hospital stay may have been some of my best while an I.V. dripped pharmaceutically rich pain management to me.

I would be remiss not to mention my younger brother, Dr. Luke Bennett (PhD), for offering this *sage* advice on repeat: “Just finish. In five years, it will be outdated research, so hurry up.” I offer the same to you, if in fact, you ever read this far.

## Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge my Chair, Dr. Debra Dean, for her support, commitment, and considerable effort in the approval process. From the start, she asked, “How fast would you like to go?”, which was motivating and challenging. Dr. Dean was the perfect chair. I wish every student could choose her as their chair.

I also want to acknowledge Dr. Joshua Henson for helping narrow this study's focus before it even started. His sprinter speed clarity was a monumental moment in my research direction. To date, I do not believe he withholds from drinking coffee because of the rate of speech and thought he exhibits.

Also, I want to acknowledge Dr. Chip Espinoza for his valuable insight as a committee member and constructive comments during the approval process. Dr. Espinoza is an expert in generational theory, and I feel honored he agreed to be on the committee.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the members of Cohort Five. I could only have finished this degree with our togetherness approach to every class, assignment, and eventual dissertations from day one. We encouraged, instructed, admonished, laughed, listened, commiserated, and *dissertated* with each other nearly every week from across the country for 4 years. Your support was, is, and will continue to be invaluable.

#CohortFive

#OnToTheNext

#OnToTheLast

#NeverWalkAlone

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

A generation is defined by its distinct traits, habits, and viewpoints from influences of the prevailing socioeconomic and cultural climate during its developmental years (Ryder, 1985). As one generation ages, a new one emerges, bringing its unique attributes and influence into society, resulting in a generational shift (Lutz, 2013). As generational shifts occur, strategies for aligning leadership behaviors evolve to influence the next generation of followers. Emerging Generation Z (Gen Z) members, born approximately between 1997 and 2012, share values with their predecessors, Generation Y (Gen Y or Millennials), but exhibit unique preferences and preferred leader behaviors (Chillakuri, 2020). One-fourth of the current U.S. population is within the Gen Z birth years; estimated to be 70 million, Gen Z might be more influential than the current largest generational cohort, Gen Y (Ricketts, 2009). If the shifts that occurred through Gen Y's influence are any marker for the next generation of leadership to take notice, then understanding effective leadership behaviors for Gen Z is crucial (Ferri-Reed, 2012).

The Gen Z cohort includes college-aged students populating classrooms and campus dormitories, with a subset securing roster positions on collegiate athletic teams throughout the United States (Vance, 2019). As Gen Z athletes continue arriving on U.S. college campuses, effective coaching behaviors are needed to engage them positively and influence team morale, a critical success factor in team sports (Draine, 2019). Individuals overseeing Gen Z members must understand Gen Z's preferences to help them establish a connection to leaders who exhibit behaviors conducive to both individual concern and positive team morale (Töröcsik et al., 2014).

Discipline, instruction, and praise are often communicated through a coach's behaviors, affecting individual performance and team morale and ultimately influencing athletic team goal accomplishment (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Determining what Gen Z athletes perceive and understand through coaching behaviors is crucial in enhancing positive morale among teams competing at the collegiate level (Parker et al., 2012). Although certain types of leader behaviors

may be required for specific situations, understanding the most effective coaching behavior for Gen Z athletes is essential in accomplishing team goals (Gould et al., 2020).

Collegiate coaches traditionally have used two behavioral methods to influence athletes: autocratic behavior, which emphasizes autonomous control, and democratic, which fosters a collaborative group dynamic (Leising, 2019). Initial findings regarding Gen Z's preferred leader traits indicate a preference for supportive and collaborative group dynamics or what may be classified as democratic coaching behavior (Ricks, 2016). A direct correlation between democratic behaviors and team morale has been linked to increased personal motivation, responsibility, self-confidence, and sustained success among collegiate team members (Leising, 2019). Gen Z may perceive autocratic coaching as behavior negatively impacting team morale and individual performance (Sorenson et al., 2014). Coaching behaviors that foster a positive coach-player relationship with Gen Z athletes have also been linked to enhanced team morale and increased team commitment (Kniffin et al., 2017). Consequently, coaches should acknowledge the influence of their leadership behaviors on Gen Z athletes and team morale.

Although research has been conducted on Gen Z characteristics, limited studies have focused on the subset of Gen Z collegiate athletes and the coaching behaviors that foster individual performance and positive team morale (A. Dolot, 2018; Iorgulescu, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Töröcsik et al., 2014). Potential explanations for the limited findings include the relatively brief period for analysis of an emerging Gen Z cohort and its potential subsets (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Gen Z, as stated previously, represents a significant and distinct generational cohort that shares attributes with its predecessor, Gen Y, yet has unique traits that will influence their world (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Gen Y tends to focus more on seeking personal experiences, whereas Gen Z is more inclined toward seeking authenticity and truth within their specific circumstances (Francis

& Hoefel, 2018). Gen Y wants to give the impression through social media platforms that they are experiencing the world, its beliefs, cultures, and societal structures (Miller & Mills, 2019). Gen Z wants to understand the world and why it believes what it believes through learning about society and culture (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). However, as Gen Z ages and more research becomes available, this generation has been shown to exhibit distinctly unique characteristics (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Gen Z's immersion in the online world has cultivated a generation skilled in gathering and cross-referencing information sources that enable their truth-gathering desire (Sriptom et al., 2019). These Gen Z trait values emphasize the importance of leaders understanding their behaviors within an ethical, authentic, and truthful framework (Djafarova & Foots, 2022).

Existing research indicates that a coach's behaviors while leading Gen Z athletes are a primary determinant of establishing a positive or negative coach-athlete relationship that influences performance and team morale (Turner & Franks, 2021). Leadership behaviors used by coaches for previous generations may frustrate Gen Z, resulting in detrimental effects on performance and team morale (Jovanovic & Zdravkovic, 2017). Gen Z athletes prefer coaches who offer an honest critique that builds confidence through care and collaboration, aligning with their generational cohort's preference for collaboration and truth (Lafferty et al., 2019).

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research was to understand the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale. Positive reinforcement is vital for Gen Z athletes when coaches provide critique (A. Dolot, 2018). Further research is needed to explore the potential association between positive-oriented coaching behaviors and individual performance and team morale (Gould et al., 2020). Studies concentrating on the values of Gen Z athletes, such as truthful communication and technique instruction, though acknowledging achievement and setbacks, may produce insights that assist current and future athletic coaches in maintaining positive team morale (Schroth, 2019).

A survey of 386 U.S. Gen Z collegiate athletes across various sports revealed that athletes who perceived their coach's leadership behavior as unfavorable were less committed and demotivated, preferring coaches with a positive mindset (Vance, 2019). Similarly, Hampson and Jowett (2014) found in their analysis of a survey involving 150 U.S. Gen Z collegiate soccer players that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship was a strong predictor of player effectiveness. The study revealed that players' perceptions of positive and negative leadership behavior significantly influenced their morale and self-confidence. The findings indicated that increased team morale is aligned with a healthy coach-athlete relationship, emanating from a coach's leadership behaviors (Hampson & Jowett, 2014). Further research into this subject matter may reinforce the view that a coach's leadership behavior is critical in cultivating a healthy coach-athlete relationship, leading to individual confidence and enhancing team morale (Lane & Lafferty, 2022).

Through ticketing, merchandise, and broadcast network revenue, college sports teams collectively generate an estimated annual revenue of \$17.1 billion in the United States (M. Kim et al., 2018). As collegiate sports grow in popularity and are seen as a potential university revenue stream, coaches may also face additional pressures to effectively lead their team toward success, making behavior perceptions by Gen Z significant (Fry et al., 2021; Iwasaki et al., 2021). Gen Z evaluates its leaders through a lens of practicality, humility, and truth (Stirling, 2013). Previous research indicates that Gen Z responds best to leader behaviors where truth and care are present, even in conflict (Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2016). Coaches who solely use intense emotional behaviors with Gen Y might find their motivational tactics less effective with Gen Z, potentially leading to diminished team morale and success (Gomes et al., 2018).

Gen Z values discussing conflicts using facts, humility, and honesty to improve a negative situation (K. Moore & Frazier, 2017). Current coaches should identify and implement effective leadership behaviors that instill team member confidence and maintain positive team morale, each an indicator of team success (Diffley, 2021). Research and subsequent findings to understand Gen Z's



preferences may assist coaches in understanding behaviors that support team members and improve team morale (Olson, 2014). By exploring the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale, my aim was to fill the knowledge gap and contribute to existing literature.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative study encompassed an exploration of the potential influence of coaching behavior on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale by analyzing a group of current collegiate Gen Z-aged athletes. Through analysis, insights into Gen Z's unique traits and preferences may be provided, resulting in improved coaching behavioral approaches, team morale, and possible team success. Three main research questions were formed and implemented, with potential follow-up questions used to gain feedback from Gen Z collegiate athletes through the semiformal interview process. The research questions were as follows:

**RQ1:** What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced your personal morale?

**RQ2:** What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced *positive* team morale on your collegiate athletic team?

**RQ3:** What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influence *negative* team morale on your collegiate athletic team?

### **Significance of the Research**

Research on Gen Z-aged collegiate athletes is limited (Schailleé et al., 2021). Because the available literature is limited, findings from this research may offer new insights to aid coaches engaged with Gen Z collegiate athletes. The study may reveal insights into the preferred coaching behaviors of Gen Z athletes, assisting coaches overseeing Gen Z in maintaining positive team morale, a critical component of a successful team. This study may also increase the understanding of Gen Z athletes' preferred leadership and coaching behaviors within collegiate athletic teams. This research holds significant potential to inform team dynamics and team performance and boost morale. The current research is also an attempt to

address the knowledge gap and contribute to the existing literature by exploring the influence of coaching behaviors experienced by Gen Z athletes.

### **Conceptual Framework**

As leadership complexities unfold, academic researchers (Dutton & Spreitzer, 2014; Fusco, 2018) and practitioners acknowledge the increasing relevance and necessity of a leadership development approach centered on service to achieve positive outcomes. The foundational premise of this dissertation was to examine the influence coaching behaviors on the current Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale.

### **Methodology**

From personal observation, coaches appear confident in their team-building abilities but often find it challenging to comprehend the modern athlete. My reading led me to understand that at the heart of this study was a deep comprehension of the student-athlete. This dissertation involved an examination of how coaching behaviors affect team morale among Gen Z collegiate athletes using a qualitative case study research approach. I conducted an analysis of semiformal interviews of current Gen Z-aged collegiate athletes. The goal was to identify coaching behaviors that influence positive team morale and understand their relationship with future success in college sports. An additional aim of this research was to understand the attitudes of Gen Z athletes regarding coaching behaviors that promote positive morale and establish common themes, if any, that can be applied to collegiate coaches leading Gen Z athletes.

### **Scope and Limitations**

Considering the case study methodology used to obtain data on Gen Z collegiate athletes, it is essential to understand the potential influencers on data. Due to the nature of data gathering on this subject matter, the scope and limitations present could have influenced the analysis. The weaknesses of a study are referred to as limitations in research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Despite considerable research into the characteristics of Gen Z, the exploration into Gen Z athletes and the

coaching behaviors that promote positive team morale is limited. The relatively brief period for studying Gen Z and its possible subsets could explain this lack of extensive research on a growing generation in maturity and age.

Generational cohorts exhibit unique characteristics that influence society and culture as they progress, either as a generation or through biological maturity. Generational theory suggests that distinct groups, or generations, are shaped by shared historical events and social trends, leading to predictable patterns of behavior and values (Howe & Strauss, 1992). Per the maturational theory, human development is determined by an innate biological timetable, with individual growth and behavior unfolding naturally according to genetic factors following a predictable path tied to age and physiological maturation (Gesell & Reed, 2008). Of note is that as individuals age, their preferences could evolve (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017). Sample size, subjectivity, self-reporting, and limited scope were considered in assessing possible limitations.

The limitations to this study concern its sample size, subjectivity, self-reporting, and scope. When scaled against the broader population of collegiate athletes from the Gen Z demographic, the relatively small sample size could compromise the extent to which the findings can be generalized. Furthermore, using a case study methodology, predicated upon examining experiences from subjective vantage points, may have introduced biases and inconsistencies during data collection and analysis. The reliance on self-reported personal experiences through semiformal interviews may have further accentuated the possibility of biases, preferences, and misinterpretations. Lastly, the study's sole focus on Gen Z collegiate athletes implies limitations in its applicability to athletes from different generational cohorts or noncollegiate athletic contexts.

A potential shortcoming of this study is that the perceptions and experiences gathered from the participants might not comprehensively represent those of all Gen Z college athletes or all coaches. Another limitation of this research is the possibility of bias in the self-reported information because this study relied on interviews, a self-reported data method, which could be influenced by the participants' tendency to give responses they believe to be socially acceptable rather

than expressing their true feelings or experiences. This bias could have skewed the data, thereby altering the study's conclusions.

### **Definition of Terms**

Generational cohorts (Dimock, 2019) referenced in this study are defined as follows:

- *Gen X*: Individuals born between 1965 through 1980.
- *Gen Y*: Individuals born between 1981 through 1996.
- *Gen Z*: Individuals born in 1996 and after.

*Morale*: Morale is an individual or group's psychological state, encompassing enthusiasm, confidence, and commitment to achieve a specific task or goal (Powell, 2016).

*Team Goals/Objectives*: A team goal is a collective objective achieved through members' interdependent actions involving mental, vocal, and behavioral activities to organize tasks effectively (Stoverink et al., 2020).

### **Summary**

Gen Z, a generation of nearly 70 million in the United States, is distinct from the Millennials but shares some similarities. Understanding Gen Z's values, such as authenticity and truth, is essential for those in the leadership of Gen Z. However, research is limited on subsets of Gen Z, such as collegiate athletes, and the coaching behaviors that foster positive team morale. A coach's leadership behavior is a primary determinant of establishing a positive or negative coach-athlete relationship, which can influence team morale. Gen Z athletes prefer coaches who offer constructive criticism and positive reinforcement, boosting team morale. Further research is needed to explore the association between positive-oriented coaching behaviors and team morale, mainly focusing on Gen Z's values of acknowledgment of achievements and setbacks through truthful and caring communication.

Coaches in collegiate settings play a significant role in leading Gen Z athletes. However, the coaching behaviors used for prior generations may need to be adapted to Gen Z's preferences, potentially negatively impacting team morale.

The quality of the coach-athlete relationship strongly predicts player effectiveness, morale, and self-confidence. Positive team morale is closely tied to the coach-athlete relationship and team unity, influenced by the coach's leadership behavior.

Further research is needed to explore positive-oriented coaching behaviors and their impact on team morale, specifically exploring Gen Z's values, such as truthful communication and acknowledging achievements and failure. Generational shifts require evolving leadership behaviors to guide the next generation effectively. Given Gen Z's significant numeric presence in the U.S. population, college campuses, and athletic teams, understanding and adapting leadership styles for Gen Z are crucial. Coaches should prioritize player well-being by seeking feedback and using leadership behavior approaches that align with Gen Z's values of teamwork and a supportive group dynamic.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

A coach's leadership behavior and influence in the coach-athlete relationship are pivotal to team morale (Jowett & Arthur, 2019). Research focusing on the interpersonal dynamics between coaches and teams due to the nature of success and team morale is relevant for coaches leading Gen Z athletes (Avcı et al., 2018). Within sports psychology, studies suggest that coaches' leadership behaviors influence athletes' satisfaction, performance, confidence, and morale (Benitez-Marquez et al., 2022; Fry et al., 2021; Staley & Moore, 2016). Morale is one of the critical indicators of team success among athletic teams (Hampson & Jowett, 2014).

As Gen Z athletes fill collegiate rosters, they bring unique traits and preferences differing from previous generations, requiring coaches to evaluate methods to maintain or improve team morale (Fransen et al., 2016). Gen Z desires, which are based on the traits of those in leadership, result in positive or negative team morale (Maloni et al., 2019). Understanding how Gen Z values intersect with a coach's approach to leadership and building team morale may prove foundational to future success in organizations, including athletic teams. The current research involved an exploration of the perceived influence of a coach's leadership behavior on team morale within collegiate sports teams composed of Gen Z athletes. An examination of existing literature resulted in four segments (and subsequent subsections pertinent to this study): Gen Z Traits, Gen Z Athletes, Coaching Behaviors, and Team Morale.

The first segment includes various studies on the traits of Gen Z as a generational cohort to understand their preferences, aspirations, and values. Subsections of parenting influences, social media usage, and technology integration were considered to comprehend their influence on Gen Z's trait preferences. The analysis then focused on how these unique traits and influences could shape the dynamics and responses within a sports team, particularly concerning the interaction between the leadership behavior of a coach and team morale in Gen Z-rostered teams.

The second segment, Gen Z Athletes, encompasses cohort traits and preferred coaching behaviors desired or used with athletic teams. The aim of this research was to identify key coaching behaviors that resonate with Gen Z athletes, considering their unique generational traits. Therefore, the research included what coaching behaviors, if any, are being used for communicating better or what methods are being used to optimize team morale, such as autocratic or democratic behaviors. The third segment, Servant Leadership and Coaching Behaviors, focuses on the perceived importance, if any, of maintaining high team morale within Gen Z athletic groups and leader behavior of servanthood.

The fourth and final segment includes an analysis of team morale and its impact on team goals and outcomes. How morale can influence the dynamics of a team, potentially shaping its overall performance, is explored. The segment further emphasizes the pivotal role of leadership behaviors in framing a positive environment and consistently maintaining team morale. Through their behaviors toward Gen Z collegiate athletes, coaches can either construct a motivated team or unintentionally contribute to a demotivated and possibly low-performing team. To understand Gen Z traits better, it is critical to comprehend them in a larger context through generational theory.

### **Generational Theory**

The human lifespan is often segmented into four stages: childhood, young adulthood, midlife, and old age. Social generations consist of individuals who share the same historical and social experiences at a similar life stage, often leading to shared beliefs, behaviors, and a collective identity (W. Strauss & Howe, 2009). Generational theory is the study of a cohort's distinct characteristics, setting them apart from others. The theory, prevalent in twentieth-century scholarly discourse, finds early articulation in Karl Mannheim's 1923 essay, "The Problem of Generations" (Loader, 2011). Mannheim suggested that a generation has a collective perspective shaped by its social and historical context, like class or cultural influences (Vinitzky-Seroussi, 2016). He contended that significant historical occurrences leave an imprint on generational consciousness (Timonen & Conlon, 2015). According to Mannheim, collective beliefs rather than family

heritage predominantly influence individuals within a generation (McCrimdell & Wolfinger, 2009). This perspective laid the groundwork for subsequent sociologists and researchers to expand on generational theories.

Sociologist Norman Ryder, in his work from 1965, treated cohorts as collections of individuals who serve as distinct variables contributing to societal transformation (Fosse, 2023). Ryder emphasized the importance of contextualizing a cohort, adding that location, education level, and ethnicity are critical factors in a cohort's framing (Ryder, 1985). Morris Massey, another sociologist, believed that behavior is predominately influenced by one's value system, which tends to be expected within a generational group, terming this value programming, which evolved to a generation's value system (Salaceanu, 2019).

Strauss and Howe introduced the idea of generational identities, theorizing that societal values in the United States ebb and flow with the prevailing traits of the dominant generation (Balda & Mora, 2011). They described a generational cycle with four recurrent phases: (a) the high, characterized by robust community ties and subdued individualism; (b) the awakening, a time of increased personal freedom and spiritual autonomy; (c) the unravelling, an era where institutions weaken and individualism grows; and (d) the crisis, a tumultuous period culminating in the institutional breakdown and subsequent reconstruction, ultimately restoring a sense of communal unity (Van Eck Duymaer van Twist & Newcombe, 2021). W. Strauss and Howe (2009) posited that the life cycle of a generation is 80 years, placing Gen Z at the center of its generational influence and change.

### **The Emergence of Gen Z**

Karl Mannheim posited in his essay, "The Problem with Generations," that those who grow up during the same historical period are molded by shared experiences that cultivate distinct identities, values, and characteristics, setting them apart from other generational cohorts (Bathmanathan & Rajadurai, 2017). W. Strauss and Howe (2009) defined generational cohorts as people born during the same period and who had similar life experiences during their formative years and stated that generations change preferences over time. Shared events assist in



molding the attitudes and beliefs of individuals within a specific generational grouping as they mature (Zehetner et al., 2022). The latest generation transitioning into adulthood, Gen Z, displays distinctive characteristics believed to be formed by factors, such as global issues, the pervasive use of technology, social media influences, and specific parenting styles. A consensus on a birth timeframe for this generation is 1995 to 2012, placing current Gen Z members in middle schools, high schools, and colleges, and, by mid-2010s, already entering the workforce (Dimock, 2019; Gaidhani et al., 2019; Lyons et al., 2017).

Gen Z individuals comprise approximately 40% of the population globally and 30% in the United States (Gomez et al., 2018). In terms of the U.S. population, Gen Z is the most ethnically diverse generation in history, eclipsing all other generations before it in embracing diversity and inclusion (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Nearly half of Gen Z (49.8%) members are non-White, trending to be the first generation in the United States to reach majority-minority saturation (Lindner, 2023). Gen Z is growing up in an era of global connectivity driven by the prevalence of ownership of devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and wearables, and their widespread use of social media platforms (Szymkowiak et al., 2021). Gen Z incorporates technology, digital communication, online communities, and virtual experiences into daily routines (Cilliers, 2017).

Considering the significant numeric presence of Gen Z, current and future leaders must comprehend their distinctive attributes and preferences (Chillakuri, 2020). According to Seemiller and Grace (2019), Gen Z is a distinct demographic cohort, sharing several qualities with Gen Y, such as being technologically adept, valuing diversity and inclusion, and desiring a balanced work-life with flexible job conditions. However, Gen Z also possesses unique traits.

### ***Gen Z Traits***

A comprehensive analysis of Gen Z revealed that a driving force shaping their traits and preferences is rooted in a foundational principle—their endless pursuit of truth (Benitez-Marquez et al., 2022). Gen Z prioritizes environments that improve self-confidence, flourishes with social media interaction, and excels in independent online education (Goh & Lee, 2017). Schawbel (2014) asserted that

Gen Z embodies a spirit of entrepreneurship, reliability, and inclusiveness. Notably, this generation can quickly alternate between different topics and tasks and, through ever-updating technological advancements, is achieving more in less time than prior generations (Giray, 2022). Gen Z can swiftly process and filter through content to determine its relevance to them and exhibit ease in assimilating newer advances having been raised with technology in settings, such as school, social, and work (Wardhono, 2018).

Gen Z highly values volunteer work, social causes, and actions that contribute to the common good, all attributes of servant leadership, contributing to a possible need to view Gen Z within a servant leadership framework (Parris & Peachey, 2013; Van Dierendonck, 2011). This generation acknowledges the inevitability of change and diversity in life and is not constrained by geographical boundaries, proximity, or time zones in their work or learning (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2017). Gen Z's aspiration to effect change globally, engage collaboratively, and demonstrate social inclusiveness is how they find meaning in their work (Ricks, 2016).

Gen Z strongly emphasizes a sense of inclusivity and individual expression (Merriman, 2015). Gen Z individuals accentuate their organizational roles and feel obligated to contribute to organizations that agree with and uphold their value system (Selingo, 2018). A critical understanding is that in all their endeavors, Gen Z members seek authenticity, increased freedom of expression, and greater openness (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Various studies and literature often depict Gen Z more negatively, characterizing them as impatient, prone to acquired attention deficit disorder, excessively reliant on technology, and possessing shorter attention spans than previous generations, averaging 8 seconds before leaving a web page to pursue other content (Giray, 2022; Rothman, 2016; Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

Although some see the ability of Gen Z to switch between topics as a strength, others interpret this as a manifestation of their acquired attention deficit disorder. However, a common consensus in the literature is that Gen Z exhibits a swift decision-making capability and the ability to learn and adjust quickly, a skill primarily facilitated by their adept use of technology (Childers & Boatwright,

2020; Cseh-Papp et al., 2017). Although some perceive Gen Z's independence as a positive trait, others interpret it as a sign of being demanding, materialistic, entitled, and self-centered (Starecek et al., 2023).

The importance of self-expression, which reflects an individualistic mindset, holds great significance for Gen Z despite appearing contradictory to their collaborative values (Bieleń & Kubiczek, 2020). Gen Z's inclination toward collaboration permits the coexistence of individuality and shared attitudes (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Their value system revolves around mutual support and active collectivist engagement (Kuron et al., 2015).

In the social reality of Gen Z, self-expression thrives while maintaining a sense of belonging to a blended experience of the natural and virtual worlds (Pavlovskaja & Kara, 2022). Gen Z comprises diverse consumers who are technologically adept, digitally connected, and inclined toward social influencers who prioritize social causes (Priporas et al., 2020). This generation's connectedness through social media allows considerable mobilization to various causes (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Gen Z's interconnectedness and active engagement in social networks facilitate collaboration, which is a cornerstone of their perceptions of the team.

### ***Trait Influences***

According to Accius and Yeh (2016), the lived experiences of Gen Z have been sculpted by ever-advancing technologies, COVID-19, and social unrest, significantly influencing outlooks, and preferences. In contrast to their millennial predecessors, who witnessed periods of financial growth, Gen Z has matured amidst fiscal instability (Meola, 2023). Such experiences have induced a monetary conservative, pragmatic approach and a forward-looking mindset within them. Gen Z's formative years are occurring during social and political activism on a global level, including social justice issues in the United States (Carter, 2018). These factors have influenced Gen Z to be open-minded, hold diverse perspectives, be socially conscious, and desire change (Vizcaya-Moreno & Pérez-Cañaveras, 2020).

The COVID-19 global pandemic has also affected learning styles, moving them from traditional classrooms to online formats (Merriman, 2015). Gen Z is the first generation to grow up with the internet, social media, and digital technology as a part of daily life. Gen Z has never known a world without Google or smartphones (Jowallah et al., 2018). These factors have shaped their communication styles, preferences, and attitudes toward work efficiency, educational process, and social interaction, enabling them to be self-directed, innovative, and adaptive, with a preference for direct, straightforward communication (Robinson, 2021).

The presence of technology at every point in their existence has instilled an understanding that connectivity is always available (Vişlar, 2019). Being constantly connected can also result in a diminished attention span and an increased expectation for immediate rewards (Salomon & Brown, 2019). Economic decline and slow recoveries have impacted the parents of this generation, creating ripple effects on Gen Z (Turner, 2015). Examining how these forces have affected their foundational years and familial surroundings is crucial to fully comprehend the influences shaping Gen Z, particularly in the context of Gen X parents to their Gen Z children.

### ***Parenting Influences***

Social learning theory suggests that the environment molds individuals through positive and negative reinforcement (Bandura & Walters, 1977). This lifelong process of experiences naturally begins in a person's formative years, with the home environment, overseen by parent(s) or guardian(s), playing a critical role in instilling fundamental values and beliefs (Hanna et al., 2013). Gen Z is being parented primarily by Gen X, individuals born between 1965 and 1980, with a higher likelihood of having a college-educated parent than previous generations (Brock, 2022). Seemiller and Grace (2017) observed a shift in Gen X's parenting style, transitioning from helicopter parents to co-pilot parents. Gen X parents chose not to follow the same parenting methods of previous generations of leaders, acting as guides, mentors, and friends (Seemiller et al., 2019). This generation of parents also greatly emphasizes their children's mental well-being due to societal influence, which they experienced at similar life stages (Muslu et al., 2021).

Like Gen Y and Z, Gen X individuals were raised during periods of economic strain, rising divorce, societal instability, and the emergence of personal technology, which, according to some research, fostered a generational inclination toward individualism (Henseler, 2011). Gen X is likely the first U.S. generation where children commonly encountered both parents working outside the home or living with a single parent due to increased divorce rates (Kraus, 2017). These societal circumstances shaped Gen X into a group known for self-reliance and swift adaptability to change (McKoy, 2018). A significant characteristic of Gen X in a professional setting is their result-oriented mindset, emphasizing the outcome over the process, which may reflect in the parenting styles Gen X parents employ with their Gen Z children (Muslu et al., 2021; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009).

Gen Z members are from smaller families with older parents who maintain careers and families (A. Williams, 2015). They are also likely to mature earlier than their Generation Y counterparts partly due to their Generation X parents, who are typically more pragmatic and promote independence in their children, according to a study published in the *International Journal of Child, Youth, and Family Studies* (Swanzen, 2018). Oerther and Oerther (2021) found that 42% of Gen Z children are inclined to follow their parents' example, 6% higher than Gen Y. Gen X's parents may have taken a few family photos and stored them in an album for viewing. In contrast, Gen X has adapted to social media and posts numerous images of their children as they grow, lending to Gen Z's acclimation to social media as a consistent chronicling of their lives from an early age (Dabija et al., 2018).

### ***Social Media Influence***

Brady et al. (2021) defined the concept of social connectedness as the ability to experience comfort, a sense of belonging, and confidence in broader social settings, which plays a significant role in Gen Z's online behavior. According to the theory of normative social influence, as outlined by Bastiaensens et al. (2016), individuals act in ways that align with what they observe in the behavior of others, especially in contexts where the individual desires to be part of the group through acceptance (Beaupre et al., 2020).

Gen Z actively uses social media platforms to establish a sense of acceptance and connectivity, placing a high value on their online interactions and feedback from social media posts (PrakashYadav & Rai, 2017). A notable characteristic of Gen Z members is their substantial engagement with social media, spending approximately 9 hours daily consuming digital content, encompassing screen time and device usage (Chassiakos & Stager, 2020). Approximately 95% of Gen Z individuals own a smartphone, with 45% reporting that they are online almost constantly and another 44% stating they are online several times a day (Zimmermann, 2021). Considering additional online activities, such as educational tasks and gaming, their average daily media exposure exceeds 13 hours (Zimmermann, 2021).

Social media profoundly sways Gen Z through influencers who exhibit credibility, such as expertise in an area of interest (Nugroho et al., 2022). As Gen Z members mature, they are increasingly aware of the importance of personal branding, viewing their online reputation as a crucial tool for standing out in a competitive environment (Childers & Boatwright, 2020). They do not see the internet as inherently negative but acknowledge its harmful aspects related to safety, cancel culture, and harmful websites (Brodsky et al., 2021). Currently, the most used platforms by Gen Z include Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram, with TikTok potentially surpassing Instagram and Snapchat in Gen Z usage (Viştelar, 2019).

Gen Z values quality content but consumes it in vast quantities, frequently accessing social media platforms. In a study, 65% of Gen Z participants were found to access YouTube before beginning their daily activities and 67% visited the platform at bedtime (Fromm & Read, 2018). Gen Z views internet-enabled devices as tools for accessing and storing information, socializing through social media, and communicating (Suwana et al., 2020). However, it is also essential to note the negative implications of social media consumption on Gen Z. Gen Z confronts unrealistic expectations and standards on social media platforms, negatively impacting their self-perception and body image and causing feelings of isolation (Oktarini et al., 2022).

### ***Social Media Isolation***

With increased social media usage during the global pandemic lockdown in 2020, concerns arose over its potential impact on Gen Z's psychological well-being (Villarreal, 2021). An unfavorable outcome of extensive social media usage by Gen Z is a phenomenon referred to as social isolation, which occurs when online use is high, combined with the toxicity that can exist online among social networks (Calati et al., 2019). Social isolation is linked to poor mental health, low self-esteem, negative self-image, and, in some occurrences, depression and suicidal tendencies (Bowler, 2020; Nobles et al., 2018). Gen Z teens, including some college students, may experience increased psychological issues with prolonged social isolation, including difficulties focusing on a task for prolonged timeframes (Lyngdoh et al., 2023; S. E. Williams & Braun, 2019).

Educators largely agree that Gen Z has a more constrained attention span than previous generations from social media and online usage (Cilliers, 2017). A typical Gen Z student's attention span ranges from 7 to 10 minutes in a classroom setting, whereas online, it drops to 8 seconds (Rothman, 2016). Gen Z's attention span is attributed mainly to their constant exposure to a rapid, sensory-rich multimedia environment, which cultivates a shorter attention span (Gaidhani et al., 2019).

In existing research, the widespread use of social media by Gen Z is acknowledged. However, there is a call for deeper investigation into their online behaviors and the subsequent effects on their behavior. Among Gen Z members, being deeply ingrained in social media and relying heavily on smartphones for social engagement, validation, and feedback have been shown to correlate with increased feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Twenge, 2017). This generation, characterized by its high online content consumption, the innovative merging of media streams, and propensity for perpetual connectivity through ever-evolving technology, comprises a distinctive demographic warranting further study as most of this cohort transitions into adulthood.

### ***Technological Influences***

Commonly referred to as digital natives, Gen Z almost instinctively excels in technology use, making technology an inseparable component of their self-identity (Cseh-Papp et al., 2017). This generation is unique as the first to be born into a world with the internet, smartphones, and readily available digital media and online networks (Chillakuri, 2020). Gen Z routinely uses the convenience of immediate access to information through smartphones, with 95% of American teens owning one, beginning at a median age of 12 (Saxena & Mishra, 2021). As digital natives, Gen Z constantly encounters new technologies, necessitating a balanced approach incorporating these tools while preserving effective teaching methodologies (Jowallah et al., 2018).

The influence of new technology is driving Gen Z to move away from traditional television and cable programming to social media platforms and streaming services as sources of information and entertainment (Vițelar, 2019). As a result, Gen Z uses these platforms to showcase career aspirations by meticulously managing their social media presence to establish a positive online brand (Wolf, 2020). They are not only extensive users of digital technology but also efficient at discovering information and communicating online. Fact-checking in real-time and finding a step-by-step tutorial on virtually any topic, their advanced savviness allows them to access information across various digital platforms.

Technology has also influenced Gen Z learners' preferences for internet-based learning, gravitating toward colorful images but reading less than 20% of a web page verbiage by scanning only for needed information (Dumitrita, 2019). Being a highly technology-savvy generation, Gen Z prefers leaders comfortable integrating technology into their instruction (Maurtin-Cairncross, 2014). Coaches who incorporate technology into their coaching behaviors, such as using apps or other digital platforms to provide feedback, analyze performance, and communicate with athletes, are perceived as more satisfactory than those who do not (Villanueva, 2023). Those less technologically proficient collegiate entities might disenchant Gen Z athletes, who anticipate up-to-date technology within a college campus (Maurtin-Cairncross, 2014).



Gen Z learners thrive when they can solve problems and discover solutions through trial and error (Saxena & Mishra, 2021). Their gaming experiences often revolve around problem-solving, a prerequisite to advancing to the next level (Ahmad et al., 2021). They are willing to persistently engage at a game level, understanding that every failure gives them another strategy to investigate (Düzenli, 2021). This persistence in problem-solving extends beyond gaming and into their learning habits (Damsa & Fromann, 2016).

Gen Z has had extensive exposure to emerging technological advances, increasingly through visual content through gaming, online interaction, and learning platforms (Dewi et al., 2021). Traditional auditory learning methods, such as lectures and discussions, are not favored by this demographic; they prefer visual elements, teamwork-based tasks, structured frameworks, and experiential learning opportunities (Nesterowicz et al., 2022). Technology is allowing an ever-increasing preferred method of communication among Gen Z—texting.

The surge in texting among Gen Z has sparked new communication practices, with each young adult in this grouping sending over 100 messages daily, reshaping interpersonal interactions among the college-aged population in the United States (Suwinyattichaiorn & Turner, 2020). Most Gen Z Americans with smartphones prefer texting to speaking on their phones (Datta & Ghosh, 2020). Texting and technological advances all flow through smartphones as the epicenter for all activities, from self-expression to investigation and entertainment, causing some concern for addiction levels due to constant smartphone connectivity and future outcomes regarding how to connect with Gen Z, including Gen Z athletes (Abeele & Van Rooij, 2016; Gould et al., 2020). A summary of Gen Z traits is shown in Table 1 (Pa et al., 2021).

**Table 1**

*Gen Z Trait Summary*

Characteristics	Description
Instant Gratification	Gen Z is impatient, requires immediate gratification, introverted, and

Characteristics	Description
Hypertext Mindset	disconnected from external interactions because of extensive internet exposure. Gen Z prefers learning by watching online videos to reading hardcopy materials, such as books or manuals.
Overprotected	Protective parenting is common among Gen Z. Gen Z prefers institutions that create a similar environment to their upbringing.
Ineffective Interpersonal Communicators	Generation Z is individualistic, self-concerned, and collaborative more than prior generations.

### **Gen Z Athletes**

Gen Z college athletes display similar preferences as their generational cohort. Their enrollment in higher education brings new expectations, needs, and capabilities to overseeing coaches (Almeida, 2018). Although a coach structuring their methods to the specific traits of athletes is not a new concept, it may be more crucial now than ever as they build connections with a new generation of athletes with unique preferences (Tan et al., 2016). Collegiate coaching behaviors influence the strength of athletes-coach bond, directly affecting their individual and team success (Parker et al., 2012). Collegiate athletes from Gen Z were more inclined to remain in a team if they maintained a positive relationship with a respected coach (Kniffin et al., 2017).

### ***Coaching Behavior Preferences***

Gen Z places significant value on leaders who promote mentoring, provide systematic instruction, and demonstrate care for personal development within the organization (Bridges, 2015). A survey of Gen Z collegiate learners revealed that 78% favored good listening skills and 66% valued empathetic qualities in those leading them (Miller & Mills, 2019). Similarly, 64% desired teachers who

demonstrated enthusiasm and 31% of the respondents preferred leaders who acted as a mentor (Wang & Tahir, 2020). Considering these preferences of Gen Z learners, it is worth noting how these traits might align, or conflict, with different athletic coaching behaviors. Autocratic coaching, for example, is a style where the coach maintains total control over team decisions, usually with little player contribution (S. Kim et al., 2019).

### ***Autocratic Coaching Behaviors***

As stated, autocratic coaching in sports refers to a coach maintaining control over all aspects of a team, making all decisions with minimal input from the players. This type of coach behavior does not typically invite feedback or facilitate dialogue but instead involves instructing athletes on what to do and expecting their compliance (Bartholomaeus, 2012). An autocratic coaching style can contribute to stress among Gen Z athletes and reduce team morale (M. Kim et al., 2018). In keeping with their larger cohort, Gen Z athletes prefer a leadership style utilizing consensus rather than command, displaying flexibility over purely structured models associated with autocratic methods (McCrinkle & Fell, 2019). Autocratic coaching behavior negatively affects the relationship between coaches and athletes (Rasyid et al., 2020).

Gen Z athletes value coaching that acknowledges failure while offering opportunities to learn new strategies and explore alternative skills to discover solutions within a democratic value system (Khan et al., 2022). Autocratic coaching, identified as an unpopular approach by surveyed athletes, was linked to negative coaching behavior and poor bonds between coaches and athletes because it allows limited autonomy and freedom desired by the athlete (Tabao, 2022).

### ***Democratic Coaching Behavior***

Democratic coaches excel at nurturing a participatory and engaged training environment, promoting collaborative efforts, open communication, and a concerted drive toward achieving team goals (Jones, 2020). By implementing democratic coaching techniques, athletes' self-confidence, performance, and overall team morale can be significantly enhanced (Marcone, 2017). Coaches who design a supportive atmosphere increase learning and foster open conversation between

themselves and athletes, strengthening team morale (Giardina, 2020). The communal nature of the democratic coaching approach cultivates a motivational environment that delivers individualized, constructive feedback, a preference of Gen Z (Ragogna, 2017).

The democratic leadership approach involves participants at all tiers of leadership in shaping the team's goals and making decisions (Bloemker, 2019). The democratic coaching method was uniquely identified to correlate significantly with team cohesion (Warner, 2017). This coaching behavior could result in a better understanding of team decisions, increased acceptance, and more effective implementation of strategic steps toward goal accomplishment by both the coach and the team members, consistent with Gen Z's desire for a collaborative role in organizations (Cranmer & Myers, 2015). Trait preference among Gen Z for coaches is consistent with their cohort's desire for leadership that exhibits democratic behaviors, such as being collaborative, caring, and communicative.

**Collaborative.** Gen Z values collaboration and teamwork. A leadership style that encourages feedback, cooperative learning, and team building resonates with Gen Z (Line & Pyle, 2017). Leaders using collaborative modalities increased team member buy-in (Laudert, 2018).

**Caring.** Research consistently shows that Gen Z desires caring leaders (Chory & Offstein, 2017). Gen Z college students described personality traits that reflect wanting leaders to be caring and humane, which includes social awareness and, specifically, being responsive to the rising mental health needs of Gen Z (Walker & Gleaves, 2016). Gen Z understands the role a caring leader plays in their mental health more than previous generations, and as such, desire personalized care and value recognition from their leaders (Smith & Strand, 2014).

**Communicative.** Gen Z appreciates coaches communicating decisions and providing clear expectations and constructive feedback (Jowett & Arthur, 2019). Active communication and engagement are crucial for maximizing Gen Z's retention of information (Saxena & Mishra, 2021). The emergence of Gen Z has highlighted the significance of comprehending effective communication styles

because of their unique communication preferences compared to prior generational cohorts (Dimock, 2019).

Gen Z athletes anticipate positive feedback and verbal encouragement from their coaches, including critique (Kaplan et al., 2013); conversely, only providing negative feedback and verbal reprimands can lead to frustration. In learning environments, only providing negative feedback has yet to be shown as an effective practical measure with Gen Z (Keatlholetswe & Malete, 2019). Gen Z prefers a coach who refrains from shouting, is encouraging and motivating, has a strong knowledge of the sport, and includes the team in decision-making (Parker et al., 2012). Understanding these preferred methodologies can provide insights that may allow coaches to augment what is currently perceived as the normative coaching approach, which predominantly consists of an autocratic style, even though Gen Z prefers democratic methods.

### ***Social Media and Gen Z Athletes***

Athletes' interactions with social media can lead to a combination of advantages and challenges. Recent research implies that social media use may diminish an athlete's performance (Hayes et al., 2019). However, a comprehensive study of the outcomes of social media use and decreased performance is in its early stages (Hayes et al., 2020). With constant availability, these platforms serve as mediums for athletes to receive feedback before, during, and after competitions (Sanderson, 2018). Athletes often employ social media platforms, such as Twitter or Instagram for recruitment, personal branding, and potential endorsement opportunities, specifically under the new Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) National Collegiate Athletic Association guidelines permitting a collegiate amateur athlete to earn endorsement monies (Kunkel et al., 2021). When considering Gen Z athletes and their use of social media, it is critical to understand personal brand management, their ability to attract endorsements, and the necessity to meet any established team standards related to social media use.

**Personal Branding.** Social media platforms have recently emerged as the preferred tools for athletes to create and cultivate their brands. For college athletes,

the significance of branding has grown due to the changes in NIL regulations and the structure of sponsorships in collegiate sports (Park et al., 2020).

**Endorsements.** The NIL guidelines now allow collegiate amateur athletes to be compensated for gaining a NIL contract. As the value associated with an athlete's brand has expanded, there has been a growing necessity to manage their social media presence (Kunkel et al., 2021). The college athletics sponsorship approach could transition into a format resembling professional sports sponsorships, creating uncertain views regarding what future or current entities will manage NIL regulations and control the boundaries of athletes and teams (Magnusen, 2021).

K. Moore and Frazier (2017) noted that due to the prevalence of social media and the instant feedback it provides, Gen Z athletes are accustomed to and expect continuous praise. Coaches who resort to negative communication as their sole motivator may be less effective in communicating goals, expectations, discipline, and rewards to Gen Z athletes than previous generations (Wadey et al., 2019). Gen Z athletes respond more favorably to critique when combined with technical instruction rather than purely emotional messaging from coaches (Barney & Tauiliili, 2017). Effective communication is crucial for Gen Z athletes, who prefer positive feedback alongside critique from their coaches (T. Dolot, 2018).

### ***Coaching Behavior Influences***

Fundamentally, a coach serves as a leader and an educator to collegiate athletes. Most scholarly research about leadership and athletic teams has focused on examining the impact of coach leadership styles on athlete and team outcomes (Cotterill & Fransen, 2016). Instructing Gen Z athletes on the sports field brings fresh challenges, as these students have unique and possibly disruptive expectations (Ferrari, 2018). Gen Z favors leadership with high expertise and knowledge and prefers leaders who can build connections between theoretical models and practical scenarios (Martin et al., 2019).

Studies suggest that the leadership style of a coach significantly shapes team morale (Draine, 2019). The approach adopted by a coach when leading an athletic team can play a decisive role in shaping the team's morale, athletic

performance, and ability to achieve set objectives (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). Gen Z athletes, characterized by their inclination for positivity and inclusivity, favor coaches who communicate positively and constructively (Graham & Fleming, 2016). Although research on Gen Z is less comprehensive due to the relatively short study period, previous studies have shown that Gen Z's perception of leadership behaviors, including harmful communication practices, adversely affects outcomes (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

A study involving 386 Division I athletes from various sports revealed that athletes with an unfavorable perception of their coach were less committed and motivated and favored coaches with a positive mindset (Schroth, 2019). Coaches who maintained a positive mindset were seen to communicate with impartiality, provide informative feedback, acknowledge triumphs and failures, and embrace a democratic coaching style (Graham & Fleming, 2016; Schroth, 2019). In a related study, Hampson and Jowett (2014) found through an analysis of 150 soccer players that the relationship quality between the coach and athlete was a more vital determinant of player-perceived collective efficacy than the coach's leadership. Their research data revealed that players' perceptions of positive and negative communication significantly influenced their motivation, mood, learning, and self-confidence about their athletic abilities. Hampson and Jowett concluded that a strong correlation existed between the coach-athlete relationship, team unity, and a coach's leadership behaviors.

### ***Preferred Communication Style***

Barney and Tauiliili (2017) found that athletes who experienced negative verbal communication behaviors from their coaches reported higher anxiety levels, lower self-esteem, and decreased satisfaction with their athletic performance. Coaches who cultivate a positive and supportive environment that aligns with the values and preferences of athletes, including positivity and inclusivity, enhance athletic performance and foster strong relationships (J. L. Moore et al., 2017). Gen Z athletes value coaches who exhibit caring and encouraging behaviors, possess knowledge in instruction, and foster team-oriented environments (Chillakuri, 2020). These traits counter negative communication, which is viewed

as undesirable by Gen Z athletes. Effective communication strategies can help build trust between coaches and athletes, particularly given Gen Z's need for trusted communicators who use positivity alongside discipline as needed (J. L. Moore et al., 2017).

### ***Coaches Perceptions of Gen Z***

Gen Z athletes desire to comprehend the link between their assigned training activities and improvements in their athletic performance. In separate studies, coaches overseeing Gen Z athletes noted that Gen Z is goal-driven and outcome-based in objectives, often overlooking the innate value of the training process (Hayes et al., 2021). Coaches have also stated that Gen Z athletes must be equipped to handle adversities, potentially due to their limited exposure to challenging situations (Sackett & Gano-Overway, 2017). Gould et al. (2020) found that coaches of Gen Z collegiate athletes had four main challenges in leading: (a) brief attention spans requiring coaches to find ways to ensure sustained focus; (b) perceived deficits in self-reliance; (c) a sense of entitlement and ungratefulness; and (d) social media usage, a substantial hindrance to effective coaching.

The coaches also stated that Gen Z athletes exhibited subpar in-person communication skills, noting that they struggled to express emotions and needed basic conversational abilities such as maintaining eye contact (Gould et al., 2020). The athletes preferred impersonal communication methods such as texting and even contact through social media messaging to face-to-face conversations and phone calls (Cilliers, 2017). Gen Z's preference for digital modes of communication, highlighted by Cilliers (2017), presents a unique challenge to research within the field of coaching and leadership behavior that may help bridge the gap, if any, between players and coaches.

### **Team Morale**

Recognizing that a coach's behavior significantly impacts athletes and the team's overall morale makes it necessary to investigate the potential positive effects of coaching behaviors within a team setting. Research into coaching behaviors has been focused on understanding how such behaviors impact individuals, especially in inter-collegiate sports. In prior studies, Staurowsky (2014) and Sagas and Wigley



(2014) demonstrated the importance of leadership behaviors that showcase support and personal concern, particularly concerning Gen Z. Mull-Brooks (2019) postulated that team morale is likely to be influenced by a coach's behaviors, perceived as positive or negative by team members.

Research into coaching behaviors has been focused on understanding how behaviors influence team members, especially inter-collegiate athletes (Dahlin & Schroeder, 2021). Staurowsky (2014) and Sagas and Wigley (2014) emphasized the importance of coaching behaviors that exhibit support and personal concern to team morale. Mull-Brooks (2019) suggested that team morale is likely influenced by a coach's behaviors, either positive or negative, by team members.

Morale is a complex, context-dependent state rather than a singular trait that involves various facets that can have various effects on an individual depending on the circumstances (Sabu, 2017). External variables such as coaching behaviors, team performance, and even in-game outcomes can influence individual and team morale. A standard definition of morale is not uniformly agreed upon in the academic literature, although morale is generally associated with feelings or characteristics of happiness, peace, resolve, and social bonding (Walinga et al., 2021).

Components of team morale can be complex to foster, and the state of morale can vary over time. Notably, although often linked to motivation and perseverance, morale needs to be sufficiently researched regarding its outcomes (Peterson et al., 2008). Morale's components can coexist with challenges; morale can demonstrate value, particularly during challenging situations. Expectedly, success within a game or match often uplifts the morale of a team. Although teamwork and skills are intrinsic characteristics of teams, constantly focused on by coaches, morale is dynamic and varies over time. Despite team morale's effect on outcomes, it is only sometimes considered a strategic component (Min et al., 2008). Team morale is pivotal in efficiently achieving team goals because it can be strengthened and influences a game's results, allowing players to compete through difficult moments (Kaplan et al., 2013).

Teams exhibiting positive morale characteristics such as enthusiasm, optimism, satisfaction, and stability tend to be more resilient (Demas, 2021). Team morale is almost universally recognized as a critical factor contributing to positive or negative team outcomes. The shared experience of emotions within the team can enhance or detract from individual morale and a team's confidence in overcoming hurdles (Leggat et al., 2020). Teams with positive morale cultivate a team bond to lean on during challenging competitive moments (Steege et al., 2021).

### **Gaps in Research**

The research gaps are not due to a lack of academic literature but rather from the limited timeframe required to examine a generation's growth stages from adolescence to adulthood (Kuron et al., 2015). Further investigation into the different subsets of Gen Z based on their individualistic tendencies, perspectives, and preferences is needed because those born at the beginning of a generation might differ from those born toward its conclusion, potentially reflecting significantly diverse values (Lean & Main, 2018). As they mature, members of a generational cohort might reassess their existing values, reconsidering their attitudes toward leadership when they assume such roles (Ng & Johnson, 2015).

### **Summary**

This research focused on the influence of a coach's leadership behavior on Gen Z athletes and team morale in collegiate athletic teams. Chapter 2 included a discussion structured around four segments: Gen Z traits, Gen Z athletes, coaching behavior, and team morale. In the first segment, I explored Gen Z's unique traits and preferences as a generational cohort and their influence on sports teams. The second segment was dedicated to investigating the coaching behaviors that resonate with Gen Z athletes. I examined whether coaches use autocratic or democratic approaches and how they communicate with the athletes. The third segment involved exploring the concept of coaching behaviors and its influence on team morale in Gen Z athletic groups. Finally, in the fourth segment, I analyzed the significance of team morale and its influence on team goals and outcomes. The last

segment highlights the crucial role of leadership behaviors in creating a positive environment and maintaining high team morale.

### **Chapter 3 – Methodology**

The focal point of this research was to understand better the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale. This qualitative research focused on understanding the subjective experiences of the current collegiate athletes within the Gen Z cohort by examining how their coaches' behaviors influenced them and, consequently, the overall team morale. Chapter 3 encompasses the research methodology, research methods, design, and questions, instrumentation, participants, data collection and analysis, and considerations of validity, reliability, and limitations.

Chapter 3 includes the researcher-formulated questions used to investigate the study's purpose. These research questions informed the design, the research population, and the sampling technique. Chapter 3 also includes information on the instruments used, data gathering, analysis, procedures, and ethical considerations maintained during the study, including details of the study, methodology, research design, and rationale. Also in Chapter 3, the data collection process is outlined, highlighting the qualitative methods used in selecting Gen Z collegiate athletes as the main subject of the research, and the data analysis method leading to the findings is elaborated.

#### **Rationale for Selected Methodology**

The rationale for selecting the research method of a qualitative case study to explore the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale was to understand the lived experiences of the participants. A qualitative study allows researchers to explore and describe the lived experiences of participants (Creswell et al., 2007). Factors, such as the participants' profile, the study's duration, and the need to investigate human emotions and feelings, influenced the choice of this method. A research method provides distinct advantages in gathering data relevant to the research topic; therefore, I evaluated qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research approaches for this study.

### ***Qualitative Research***

Qualitative researchers employ a methodological approach to understand how individuals or groups attribute meaning to social or human issues, as Gibbs (2007) outlined. This type of research involves collecting and analyzing nonnumerical, descriptive data through methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations. Golafshani (2003) elucidated the fundamental components of qualitative research, which include data collection, an exploratory nature, subjective interpretation, and inductive reasoning.

In qualitative research, data are acquired through interviews, focus groups, and observations, focusing on capturing rich, narrative insights. This research methodology is exploratory in nature, aiming to uncover underlying motives, opinions, and rationales behind the studied phenomena. Qualitative research emphasizes the subjective interpretation of the human experience, recognizing that individuals' perspectives are central. When analyzing qualitative data, researchers employ inductive reasoning to formulate theories and identify recurring themes grounded in their collected data. Whereas qualitative research entails assessing the human element, quantitative research emphasizes the quantification of data and relies heavily on statistical analysis. In contrast, qualitative research encompasses the study of human behavior.

### ***Quantitative Research***

Quantitative research is a structured approach that entails using statistical data to analyze various phenomena (Khaldi, 2017). This research methodology is characterized by accumulating and analyzing numerical data to establish patterns, correlations, and cause-and-effect interactions among variables (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Core characteristics of quantitative analysis are data collection, objective measurement, deductive reasoning, generalizability, and statistical analysis (Rashid et al., 2021).

### ***Mixed-Method Research***

Mixed-method is a research approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This research methodology draws on the strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand a research problem

comprehensively (Kettles et al., 2011). The core characteristics of mixed method research are integration of methods, complementarity, complex research questions, iterative process, and multiple perspectives (Clark et al., 2008).

After considering qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method, I decided to employ a qualitative research method for various factors such as the duration of the study, feedback from participants, and comprehension of coaching influences. I chose a qualitative method because it was a flexible approach to understanding the participants' emotions, feelings, and experiences. Adopting this approach allowed me to gain deeper insights into the subjects' perspectives and lived experiences.

### **Research Methods**

Research methods are critical in establishing a structured approach for gaining insight into a particular subject. No matter the technique, the research method chosen is done to aid in formulating and maintaining consistency while reducing bias (Newhart & Patten, 2023). The objective for investigators when selecting a suitable method is to render findings that reflect the true nature of reality as accurately as possible (Connaway & Radford, 2021). Multiple types of methods are available to the researcher.

#### ***Ethnography***

A qualitative research method focuses on studying cultures and societies by immersing oneself in the everyday lives of the studied people, often through prolonged observation (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). An ethnography used in a qualitative research method allows the researchers to study and interpret a group's values, behaviors, beliefs, and language (Creswell et al., 2007). Ethnographic writing refers to documenting the findings from such a study, often presenting them in a narrative, descriptive form (Wolcott, 1999). Ethnography is strongly associated with anthropology, but it is also used in sociology, education, and other social sciences.

#### ***Grounded Theory***

A systematic qualitative research methodology is used to generate theory from data, emphasizing inductive analysis and the process of coding and categorizing (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In grounded theory, data collection and

analysis co-occur as the researcher collects and analyzes data to understand the emerging themes and patterns. Per grounded theory, available in literature since the 1960s, theory is grounded in the data collected from the field rather than testing existing theories (A. Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### ***Narrative***

A qualitative research method involves collecting and studying individuals' personal stories or life histories to gain insights into their experiences, identities, and how they make sense of their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Central to narrative research is storytelling, where participants are encouraged to share their experiences, which are usually chronologically or thematically categorized. Narrative research stresses individual subjective experiences and the meanings participants attribute to them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

### ***Phenomenology***

Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach used to explore and understand human experiences and perspectives. The aim of phenomenology is to understand the lived experiences and the meanings individuals attribute to them (Van Manen, 2016). Phenomenology focuses on understanding the phenomenon from the participants' viewpoint, considering their feelings, perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

### ***Case Study***

Although a universally accepted definition for case study research is lacking, in its simplest form, a case study can be described as a comprehensive examination focused on an individual, a group of people, or a specific entity to draw broader conclusions that can be applied to several similar entities (Yin, 2009a). A case study allows a systematic exploration of an individual, group, or community, where the researcher deeply investigates data associated with multiple variables (Heale & Twycross, 2018). I chose a case study methodology because it allows an in-depth, detailed investigation of a specific individual, event, or occurrence, often using various data sources, to gain a comprehensive understanding and draw out broader implications or generalizations (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Case study research is beneficial when researchers aim to

understand a real-world phenomenon where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not evident (Yin, 2009a). This approach allows researchers to explore the phenomena and contribute to theory development.

Ultimately, because of the study's specific nature, I used a case study approach. A case study approach allows a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of groups and individuals. Because of these factors, understanding the unique perspectives of Gen Z collegiate athletes who have experienced coaching behaviors could be best achieved through a case study.

### **Research Design**

In research design, the chosen methodologies can significantly affect a study's outcomes and interpretations (Worthington, 2013). I considered three research designs to understand better the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes: nonexperimental, experimental, and quasi-experimental. In considering these design concepts, I evaluated their utility in interpreting the conclusions and implications of the study accurately, as Richters and Melis (2017) suggested.

#### ***Nonexperimental Design***

In a nonexperimental design, the researcher observes and measures variables as they occur without manipulation (Khaldi, 2017). There is no control or manipulation of independent variables or random assignment of participants to groups (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). Nonexperimental design is best used with surveys, case studies, and correlational studies. This research design allows description of relationships, such as correlations, but it is not used to understand causation better (Khaldi, 2017).

#### ***Experimental Design***

Experimental design involves using one or more independent variables to observe the effect on a dependent variable through groups. These group effects may be random assignment to conditions or manipulation of independent variables (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). Experimental design is used where conditions can be tightly controlled to determine causation between variables.



### ***Quasi-experimental Design***

Quasi-experimental design resembles experimental research but lacks the critical component of random assignment and is more often associated with quantitative studies than qualitative research (Guest et al., 2020). An independent variable might be manipulated, but groups are not created using random assignment (Nami et al., 2020). A quasi-experimental design is best used in studies where existing conditions determine groups. Experimental designs offer the most substantial evidence for causation, whereas nonexperimental designs are more about observing and describing relationships. Quasi-experimental designs sit in between, with some control elements, but are less rigorous than experimental designs (Guest et al., 2020).

Ultimately, I selected a nonexperimental design for this study. Nonexperimental designs are formulated to observe and describe relationships without influencing variables. A nonexperimental design was ideal for understanding how a coach's behavior influences Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale.

### **Research Questions**

I formulated three research questions to gain deeper insights into how coaching behaviors influence Gen Z collegiate athletes. RQ1 focused on the specific coaching behaviors that affected the morale of individual Gen Z collegiate athletes. For RQ1, the aim was to explore Gen Z athletes' firsthand experiences to grasp how coaching tactics impacted their motivation and morale. Given that Gen Z and equally Gen Z collegiate athletes exhibit distinct traits different from prior generations, insights from the participants could shed light on strategies coaches use to maintain or increase individual morale (Fransen et al., 2016).

RQ2 focused on coaching behaviors experienced that influenced the positive team morale of the Gen Z collegiate athletes. For RQ2, the intention was to delve into firsthand experiences to comprehend how specific coaching behaviors perceived as positive (such as encouragement, constructive feedback, and motivation) affected the team and individual team members' morale. Such insights into coaching behavior can lead to a more precise grasp of team decisions,

heightened acceptance, and a more effective pathway to achieving goals, considering Gen Z's preference for a participative role within organizations (Bloemker, 2019; Cranmer & Myers, 2015).

RQ3 addressed the adverse coaching behaviors that diminished team morale and motivation among Gen Z collegiate athletes. Gen Z athletes react negatively to criticism when offered without technical direction. Purely emotional feedback from coaches is less effective for Gen Z (Barney & Tauiliili, 2017; Carless & Douglas, 2013).

I analyzed the impact of coaching behaviors on the morale of Gen Z collegiate athletes and their teams. Valuable themes surfaced from the semiformal interviews, benefiting both athletes and coaches. The research questions were as follows:

**RQ1:** What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced your personal morale?

**RQ2:** What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced *positive* team morale on your collegiate athletic team?

**RQ3:** What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influence *negative* team morale on your collegiate athletic team?

### **Instrumentation**

In qualitative research, the researcher often serves as the primary data collection instrument (Patton, 2014). The researcher directly engages in examining transcripts, observing behaviors, or conducting interviews with participants (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). Although the researcher may use a protocol as a structured tool for gathering data, they collect the information. In qualitative research, the researcher often does not rely on questionnaires or tools developed by others, instead they opt to engage with the subject matter and participants involved to derive more nuanced and in-depth insights (Patton, 2014). Interviews allow qualitative researchers to delve deeper into the intricacies of a particular phenomenon, observe nonverbal cues, and pose relevant follow-up inquiries (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Creswell and Creswell (2017) described various instruments for data collection in qualitative research, such as observation, interviews, and focus groups, to obtain insights into the research topic. Observations allow researchers to observe and analyze participants' behaviors and interactions in their natural settings, providing firsthand and authentic information, which is critical in understanding the contextual implications and unspoken elements within the research context (Dodgson, 2017). Interviews enable qualitative data collection and are often used to gather information from a limited population, offering insights into patterns and trends within the researched data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Focus groups provide a forum for collective discussions, allowing researchers to explore participants' perceptions, feelings, and thoughts on a specific topic (Flinn & Stube, 2010). Each instrument has unique advantages and is selected based on the research questions, the study's purpose, and the investigation's nature.

The approach to data collection was through two-on-one semistructured interviews. Interviewing took place online via the Zoom platform chosen for its flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore specific areas of interest and the participants to express their views and experiences. Despite being a remote communication tool, Zoom allows the observation of nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language, which can provide additional insights into the participant's emotions and reactions, enriching the data collected. Conducting interviews via Zoom can provide comfort and convenience for participants, as they can be engaged from an environment of their choice, which may lead to more open and authentic sharing of experiences, a crucial aspect for qualitative research.

Semistructured interviews are ideal for case studies as they allow the researcher to delve deeply into the participants' experiences. In semistructured interviews, the researcher has a set of guiding questions (see Appendix A), but there is also the flexibility to follow up on emerging points of view from participants. Semistructured interviews can lead to an increased comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon as they allow the exploration of areas that may not have been anticipated initially.

Semistructured interviews balance structure and freedom, ensuring the collection of data while enabling possible unanticipated insights (Alshenqeeti, 2014). With this approach, the researcher can maintain flexibility through a conversational flow that encourages participants to share more detailed and nuanced perspectives, thereby enriching the quality and depth of the data obtained (Ahlin, 2019). The interactive nature of semistructured interviews facilitates an environment for understanding the participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings to examine the research topic comprehensively (Creswell et al., 2007).

### **Participants**

This research involved a qualitative case study of Gen Z collegiate athletes. Determining the adequate number of participants for credible results is achieved upon reaching saturation. Saturation is a standard for ascertaining purposive sample sizes in investigations (Tran et al., 2017). Although not dependent on a predetermined number of participants, saturation is reached when no new data emerge during successive participant interviews (Guest et al., 2006). In qualitative research, there is no unanimously accepted guideline specifying the minimum participant count to achieve saturation. In this qualitative study, interviews began with six participants and continued until an acceptable saturation level was attained.

To participate in this research, participants had to be current full-time college students participating as official members of an intercollegiate sport. Eligible participants were between 18 and 22 years of age, within the current age range for a Gen Z cohort member. I advised the participants through the consent form and verbally not to use or mention individual names, team names, and school identifiers in this study.

I sent an email to each institution's gatekeeper to identify athletes who met the following requirements for the study:

- Enrolled full-time;
- Currently between the ages of 18 and 23; and
- A current collegiate athlete participating on a university or college team.

Once potential participants were identified from each institution, I sent an email invitation to participate in the study to all of them. I contacted those interested in answering general preinterview questions, receiving the consent form, and establishing a time for the interviews.

Before the interview, all participants were required to sign a consent form (see Appendix B), which they verified before beginning the interviews. The interview agenda included a summary of why the study was being conducted and prior access to the questions asked. I also informed each participant that their names, college or university affiliation, and team sport would not be used to identify them as a participant. Because of the nature of the legalities and ethical practices involved in gaining participant interviews, I asked the participants for informed consent before participating in the research study, as Saldaña (2021) advised. As participants responded as being interested in participating, they were provided with informed consent and confidentiality guidelines for participation via email and electronically signed them. No participant participated in the survey without confirmed consent.

### **Data Collection**

Through participant interviews, I intended to identify trends to responses to understand better the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z college athletes and team morale. To obtain answers by analyzing data for a population's trends, attitudes, or opinions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I conducted semistructured personal interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes to obtain responses to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 with subsequent follow-up questions (see Appendix A). The interviews occurred via Zoom and were transcribed through the Otter AI platform for later coding. The Zoom format is used for the convenience of both interviewer and participant because it allows interaction irrespective of geographical distance. I collected data through the interview process and later processed them through a five-step process outlined by Yin (2009a): (a) collecting the data, (b) separating the data into groups, (c) regrouping the data into themes, (d) assessing the information, and (e) developing conclusions.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was sequential and systematic, so the initial phase was informatory on the next phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I began data analysis by compiling interview responses and data mining for response trends, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) outlined. To analyze the interview transcript, I selected three practical coding methods to capture the significance of a single word, a whole paragraph, and other forms of multimedia engagement for qualitative researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña & Omasta, 2021). Data analysis began by compiling interviews, transcribing those responses, and data mining trends.

### ***Coding the Interviews***

Coding is a qualitative research process implemented from data collection and analysis in three passes by the question and responses, using a system of notations and phrases (Elliott, 2018). The three passes used to ensure coding accuracy were in vivo, value, and emotional coding to analyze word patterns reflecting significance in attention, focus, and engagement with the interviewer's questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña & Omasta, 2021). The first complete pass of the transcript used in this research was in vivo coding. I used in vivo coding to analyze only the actual recorded words of the participant(s), per Saldaña and Omasta (2021).

After reviewing the interview transcript a second time, I attempted to identify words that reveal the interviewee's values, beliefs, or attitudes, referred to as value coding (Saldaña & Omasta, 2021). The analysis of values codes entails examining the relationships of value, attitude, and belief codes separately and then investigating their interdependence through memoing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña & Omasta, 2021). After reviewing the interview transcript a third time, I attempted to identify words expressing emotion to reveal life's details (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection of emotion coding for this qualitative study was intended to gain insights into a participant's relationships, reasoning, and decision-making (Saldaña & Omasta, 2021).

**Qualitative Research Validity**

There is a shared understanding that qualitative researchers need to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of their studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Miller (2000) introduced two perspectives on establishing validity within a qualitative context. First, qualitative research offers a distinct perspective beyond the scope of quantitative studies. Although quantitative research is rooted in data outcomes and the internal and external validity of experimental and quasi-experimental setups, qualitative research is focused on understanding based not on numerical scoring but on the genuine experiences of those who conduct, participate in, or evaluate a study (Clark et al., 2008; Creswell et al., 2007). The second perspective on validity is from the participant's standpoint. In the qualitative approach, reality is believed to be a social construct shaped by how the participants perceive and interpret it through their unique lens (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

**Table 2***Qualitative Validity Lens*

Paradigm Lens	Postpositivist	Constructivist	Critical
Researcher Lens	Triangulation	Disconfirming evidence	Researcher reflexivity
Participant(s) Lens	Member checking	Engagement in the field	Collaboration
External Lens (Reviewers, Readers)	The audit trail	Rich description	Peer debriefing

As shown in Table 2, the lens and paradigm assumptions create a two-dimensional framework for validity procedures. Multiple procedures lend to the validity of qualitative research. Although not exhaustive, this list includes procedures commonly used to validate qualitative research. I used triangulation, member checking, description, clarifying bias, and presenting negative information to investigate the influence of a coach's behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes. Creswell and Miller (2000) described nine validation points, including those used in this study to determine validity in qualitative inquiry.

Triangulation involves seeking consistency across various data sources to validate the findings and develop themes or categories in a study. Member checking shifts the responsibility for validity assessment from the researcher to the study participants, relying on the consistency of information obtained to verify validity. Description enhances a study's validity by providing a comprehensive account of the research setting, its participants, and central themes in meticulous detail. Addressing potential biases transparently, researchers share their personal beliefs, values, and potential biases that may or may not influence outcomes, enabling readers to understand the researcher's perspective and, if necessary, set aside those biases. Similarly, presenting negative information, akin to triangulation, begins with outlining the primary study themes or categories, followed by an analysis of data to identify evidence supporting or contradicting these themes.



In qualitative research, validity represents the degree to which data are defensible, believable, and trustworthy. Reliability and validity are critical to qualitative studies. Researchers using qualitative methods must maintain responsibility for reliability and validity by incorporating integral and self-corrective techniques throughout the research process (Golafshani, 2003).

### **Qualitative Research Reliability**

Validity cannot exist without reliability, and ensuring validity confirms reliability. Stenbacka (2001) viewed reliability as explaining in a quantitative methodology and generating understanding in a qualitative methodology. Patton (2001) asserted that reliability in qualitative research signifies that the methodology employed by the researcher is consistent, even when applied by different researchers or to different projects (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Gibbs (2007) suggested three steps to ensure reliability in qualitative research:

- Review transcripts to ensure they are free from errors that could have occurred during the transcription process.
- Confirm that there is no deviation in the definitions or meaning of codes by comparing data with the established codes and maintaining detailed memos on the codes and their definitions.
- Validate codes conceived by different researchers by contrasting results derived independently.

Salkind (1997) delineated reliability as the trait of performing consistently in the future as it has been previously. A reliable test or behavioral measure can assess the same attribute multiple times and produce the same result each time. Reliability and uniformity of analytical methods, including considering biases that may influence results, are essential. Evaluating the dependability of the findings from the study necessitates making determinations regarding the reliability of the research and the relevance of the methods used to obtain findings (Noble & Smith, 2015).

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

In qualitative research, there are intrinsic limitations. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative interviews limit the researcher's perspective because they cannot observe the participant in their natural setting and must rely only on indirect information provided by the participant. The researcher's presence may also elicit bias responses and not all participants will necessarily be equal in their perceptibility and articulation (Creswell, 2014). For this study, six participants who met the guidelines of an active Gen Z-aged collegiate athlete participated in the interviews.

A possible limitation of qualitative research is the small number of participants, which could affect the transferability of the findings. Identifying the number of participants sufficient for valid findings occurs when saturation is reached, which is based not necessarily on a preset number of participants but on when no new information is present as the interviews proceed (Guest et al., 2006). For this study, six participants took part in interviews to reach satisfactory saturation. Saturation is the benchmark for determining purposive sample sizes in research (Tran et al., 2017). For qualitative studies, a consensus guideline for a minimum number of participants has yet to be a fully agreed upon to establish a guideline for saturation.

### **Case Study Methodology Syntheses**

Case study methodology involves an examination of a single or a few cases, which can lead to subjective interpretations by researchers. Case study subjectivity can impact the reliability of the findings, as different researchers may arrive at different conclusions based on unique perspectives (Yin, 2009b). The reliability of case study findings can also be influenced by the sources of data and the methods used in data collection. Researchers should ensure that data sources are credible and data collection methods are consistent to minimize potential bias and enhance reliability (Aguboshim, 2021). To validate case study findings with reliability, researchers can use triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources, methods, or researchers to cross-validate their findings. This approach helps

mitigate the impact of individual biases and enhances the overall reliability of the case study results (Yin, 2009b).

I opted for a case study approach to delve into the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale. My choice of the case study methodology was driven by the desire to gain a deep understanding of the real-life experiences of Gen Z collegiate athletes who participated in interviews and assess the team morale within this context with possible application to a larger context. Using a qualitative case study methodology, I engaged in the participants' narratives, a measurement that quantitative data collection may not have helped capture fully. A case study design enabled me to investigate a current and relevant phenomenon in the field of study.

As I considered gathering information on the participants' experiences, I also considered their emotions, body language, and expressions in a group. I understood that I was examining data and seeking to understand the essence of the participants' daily lives within their team, struggles, and triumphs regarding the coaching behaviors received. My decision to use a qualitative approach, particularly a case study, was intentional. I intended to grasp the human element, including emotions and experiences. By choosing this method, I aligned with the prior thought leaders who advocated for a qualitative case study design to capture the subtleties of the experiences of individuals or groups to obtain findings that may applied to a larger group, such as Gen Z collegiate athletes.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and the morale of their teams. Using a qualitative approach and semistructured interviews in a case study format proved to be the most fitting method for collecting data and pinpointing key themes. The primary techniques for data interpretation were coding and thematic analysis. I used several measures, including cross-referencing and member checking, to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the results. Recognizing and addressing the relational expectations of Gen Z was critical, causing a need to

emphasize ethical sensitivity and diligence to anonymity to the participants in this study. Findings from this investigation are presented in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4 – Results

This research involved an examination of the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale. I adopted a methodological framework incorporating three primary research questions with a subsequent set of additional interview questions modifiable to participants' responses to achieve saturation. Before beginning, I secured ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Boards of Southeastern University and the college from which the participants were selected for interviewing.

This qualitative study involved a group of current collegiate athletes within Gen Z to explore the potential impact of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale. The analysis of coaching behaviors from the participants' perspective helped gain further insights into Gen Z's unique traits and preferences, leading to an informed perspective on team morale. Three primary research questions guided this study, supplemented by follow-up questions to gather feedback from Gen Z collegiate athletes through semiformal interviews:

**RQ1:** What coaching behaviors did you experience that influenced your personal morale?

**RQ2:** What coaching behaviors did you experience that influenced *positive* team morale on your collegiate athletic team?

**RQ3:** What coaching behaviors did you experience that influenced *negative* team morale on your collegiate athletic team?

Through the interview process, the participants described their lived experiences of coaching behaviors concerning the personal impact of these actions on collegiate Gen Z athletes, including individual and team morale, and their responses to those coaching behaviors. After the interviews concluded, the coding passes focused on identifying key themes and patterns in the responses. While analyzing the interview data, a recurring response emerged among all participants concerning coaches who, for lack of a more fitting academic word, yell within a perceived scope of negativity. In some instances, the participants' responses to the interview questions were unexpected, adding a layer of complexity to the findings, as their responses were disconnected from the original interview question. The

participants described yelling as raising the volume and intensity of a coach's voice to convey dissatisfaction, anger, and possible irritation.

Within the framework of this research, coaches do not construe or articulate yelling as merely amplifying one's voice to ensure clarity of instruction, as might be the case with a coach addressing a team. Instead, the participants uniformly perceived yelling without corrective instruction as exerting a predominantly negative influence on morale across all instances. These perspectives on types of yelling were consistent among participants, providing valuable insights that are further discussed and reported in this study's data analysis section.

### **Data Analysis**

The research methodology employed in this study comprised qualitative approach and data analysis. Examining the data from participant interview responses allowed a better understanding of the intricacies of the participants' perspectives to reveal themes and insights. Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined that this methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. I used a multifaceted approach to facilitate this analysis, incorporating document review and interviews. Using this methodological combination ensured a complete examination of the data, allowing an exploration of the research questions and the participants' viewpoints and personal experiences. Through this process, the study captured the depth and complexity of coaching behaviors and their influence on Gen Z collegiate athletes, possibly contributing to a better understanding of the research area.

### ***Interviews***

The interviews occurred through the online Zoom platform, ensuring suitable and efficient communication for the participants' ease of use and accommodating their schedule and residence location. Each session adhered to a time limit of 60 minutes, allowing focused discussions while maintaining participant engagement. Using the transcription service provided by Otter.ai, audio recordings were transcribed in real-time, guaranteeing accuracy and immediacy in the data processing. Following transcription, all transcripts underwent a review process to note any potential errors and ensure the fidelity of the data.

Subsequently, the transcripts were exported from Otter.ai to a Microsoft Word document and securely stored on the researcher's password-protected computer and personal Dropbox account within the dissertation folder, safeguarding the confidentiality and integrity of the data. The coding procedure began with open coding to discern themes within the unprocessed data. Each interview transcript underwent coding, initially focusing on rectifying transcription errors and ensuring data precision.

The coding process progressed to *in vivo* coding, involving an analysis of transcripts to identify elements of participants' language and comments as potential codes, categories, and themes. Similar categories were systematically grouped to illuminate emergent themes, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the data. Through the coding process, three prominent themes emerged, connected to RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3. The three themes are Coaching Communication Approaches, Morale and Communication, and the Influence of Negative Coaching Behaviors. These three themes provided valuable insights into the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes, shedding light on the multifaceted interactions between coaches and athletes and the influence those interactions have on personal and team morale.

### **Data Collection**

Participant recruitment commenced after receiving approval from the relevant Institutional Review Boards, with the gatekeeper at the participating college playing a pivotal role in recruiting participants who met the research qualifications of belonging to the Gen Z cohort and participating as a full-time student on a collegiate athletic team. Acting as a liaison, the gatekeeper at the participating college identified and initially contacted 15 potential participants, anticipating that six would suffice for saturation, which was reached. Of the 15, eight individuals expressed willingness to participate in the study, but only six participated in the interviews due to schedule conflicts involving participant sports and class load.

Each participant confirmed their commitment through email or text correspondence with the researcher. Each participant provided a duly signed

consent form, formalizing their research involvement—the invitation to selected participants in the interview process ensured variety in the demographic representation within the study. The six participants, 33% female and 66% male collegiate athletes from various athletic teams, met the researcher's predetermined eligibility criteria. The random selection process of participants was necessary for capturing a comprehensive range of perspectives on experiences across genders, teams, and coaching behaviors within the collegiate athlete population with as little bias as possible.

Upon initiation of the interview process, I invited the participants to verbally provide relevant demographic information, including details regarding their affiliations with their respective collegiate teams. To maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, I assigned each a unique identifier, denoted by Participant or P, followed by a number ranging from one to six (e.g., P1, P2, P3, etc.). Although I was aware of participants' age and academic year status (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), this information was deliberately omitted from the data collection process to avoid any potential breach of anonymity. The reasoning for obscuring the demographic detail was that the teams the athletes are members of do not have large rosters, and further demographics, such as age, gender, and year enrolled, may reveal the likely interview participants and possibly compromise their anonymity.

The study's focus on investigating the influence of coaching behaviors within a distinct generational framework, targeting individuals from Gen Z, warranted this approach, thereby ensuring a more focused data analysis. Of note is that Table 3, illustrating some participant demographics, does not adhere to alphabetical name order but shows a random arrangement. The researcher discussed avoiding potential biases or preconceptions during the data analysis phase. For further insights into participant characteristics, general descriptions are provided in Table 3, offering an overview of the participant cohort to facilitate a better understanding of the participants' team orientation.



**Table 3***Participant Demographics*

Identifier	Gender	Sport
Participant 1	F	Volleyball
Participant 2	M	Baseball
Participant 3	F	Soccer
Participant 4	M	Basketball
Participant 5	M	Basketball/Baseball
Participant 6	M	Basketball

***Participant 1***

Participant 1 (P1), identified as a female student, was enrolled full-time and resided on the college campus in the United States' Midwest region. Currently, she is an integral member of the college volleyball team. Her athletic journey has been extensive, as she actively participated in multiple sports during high school before specializing in volleyball at the collegiate level. Notably, she had previously attended another university where she was part of their volleyball team before transferring to her current college.

***Participant 2***

Participant 2 (P2), a male student, maintained full-time enrollment and resided on the college campus in the U.S. Midwest region. Presently, he is an active member of the college baseball team. Throughout his athletic journey, he engaged in various sports during high school, ultimately focusing on baseball at the collegiate level.

***Participant 3***

Participant 3 (P3), identified as a female student, was enrolled full-time and resided on the college campus in the U.S. Midwest region. She currently contributes as a member of the college soccer team. Throughout her athletic journey, she participated in various sports during high school, eventually transitioning to focus exclusively on soccer at the collegiate level. Like P1, she had previous collegiate-level experience before transferring to her current college.

***Participant 4***

Participant 4 (P4), a male with a full-time enrollment status, lived on a college campus in the U.S. Midwest region, and a current member of the college basketball team. He has been active in various sports through high school and solely on basketball in college. Like P1 and P3, he had previous collegiate-level experience before transferring to his current college to continue his athletic participation. However, P4 is attending his third college in as many years, participating in collegiate basketball.

***Participant 5***

Participant 5 (P5), identified as a male student, maintains a full-time enrollment status at the college campus in the U.S. Midwest region. Throughout high school, he actively participated in various sports, eventually transitioning to the collegiate level. Notably, he is the sole member of the interview cohort who contributed insights from participating in two athletic teams for the same college: basketball and baseball.

***Participant 6***

Participant 6 (P6), a male with a full-time enrollment status, lived on a college campus in the U.S. Midwest region. He is a current member of the college basketball team. P6 has been active in various sports through high school and solely on basketball in college.

**Research and Interview Questions**

No preestablished interview prompts were given to the participants, ensuring that the interviews unfolded naturally and spontaneously, fostering a conversational atmosphere conducive to delving into their individual experiences. Before commencing the interviews, I briefed the participants on the general nature of the questions and topics to be discussed and assured them of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The participants were also informed about the study's potential impact on future research endeavors, if any.

It is noteworthy that even though the invitation for participation was random and voluntary, P4, P5, and P6 were coincidentally members of the same collegiate athletic team that achieved a national championship, which they revealed

during the interview process. P4, P5, and P6's perspectives on coaching behaviors and experiences remained unique. The three participants were interviewed separately, adding to their discussion's validity. Despite their affiliation with a championship-level team, which may lead to positive morale, overlooking negative coaching behaviors, their responses remained consistent with those of the other participants, shedding light on the perceived needs of Gen Z collegiate athletes regarding coaching behaviors and morale.

### ***Research Question 1***

For this study, RQ1 was, "What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced your personal morale?" All six participants responded to RQ1, offering their insights and perspectives. As the interview progressed, the participants provided additional feedback, elaborating on their initial responses. This collaborative exchange added to the depth of the research findings, allowing a comprehensive investigation of the subject.

**Interview Question 1.** The first interview question was, "What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced your personal morale?" Interview Question 1 was intended to initiate a discussion on coaching behaviors the athlete experienced that influenced their morale and possibly affected their performance due to increased or decreased morale. All six participants answered that they had personally experienced specific coaching behaviors that directly influenced their morale as collegiate athletes.

**Interview Question 2.** The second interview question was, "Could you share an example of a coaching behavior that you feel had a noticeable effect on your personal morale, either positively or negatively?" Interview Question 2 was intended to initiate a discussion on specific coaching behaviors the athlete experienced that positively or negatively influenced their morale and possibly affected their performance. All six participants indicated they had experienced specific coaching behaviors that positively and negatively influenced their morale. They preferred positive coaching behaviors conducive to maintaining a positive relationship with their coach.

**RQ1 Coaching Behaviors.** During the interview, participants spoke of specific behaviors that either increased or decreased their morale. Analysis of the interview text revealed consistent patterns across multiple participant responses. The coaching behaviors associated with responses to RQ1 and the interview questions are as follows and are under the subheading of coaching behaviors and athlete perception (see Table 4): encouragement of a participant, positive reinforcement of participant performance, and expressing belief in a participant's abilities. The following list of coaching behaviors is derived from the participants' responses to RQ1, Interview Questions 1 and 2, revealing coaching behaviors that increased positive morale among the participants:

- **Encouragement:** Coaches emphasized positive reinforcement and encouragement, building players' confidence and positive morale.
- **Belief:** An assistant coach expressed unwavering belief in a player's potential, helping the player break out of a slump improving morale.
- **Support:** Coaches provided consistent support, ensuring players felt valued and motivated, improving their morale.
- **Feedback:** Constructive feedback was given to help players improve and understand their mistakes, boosting their morale.
- **Trust:** The coaches' unwavering trust in players' abilities has influenced a sense of confidence in the team's potential, making the team feel trust in their coaches' methods, increasing positive morale.
- **Motivation:** Coaches used motivating language to inspire players to perform at their best.
- **Recognition:** The coaches' consistent acknowledgment of the players' efforts has reinforced their value to the team and served as a powerful motivator for them to perform at their best.
- **Confidence:** Coaches' belief and support instilled confidence in the players, enhancing their performance.

**RQ1 Code Development.** Codes emerging through passes of the interview text demonstrated consistent patterns from one participant's interview to the next. The participants' responses revealed codes relating to values, beliefs, or attitudes

concerning coaching behaviors they experienced. The codes connected to RQ1 and related interview questions were preference for coaching communication, exhibiting care, yelling with instruction, and yelling without instruction.

***Preference for Coaching Communication.*** A prevalent preference among the participants was their inclination toward coaches who demonstrated supportive communication behaviors, which they perceived as an indicator of positive morale. The participants perceived the preference for supportive communication, positive recognition, and adept technical instruction coupled with constructive correction as a positive coaching behavior. Gen Z athletes seek more than guidance in their athletic goals; they desire mentors who influence a supportive and care-based environment where their efforts are acknowledged and their skills are enhanced through constructive feedback.

For the Gen Z participants, the role of a coach extended beyond guidance; it encompasses being a source of encouragement and understanding. The coach influences the team's sense of belonging and trust and creates positive morale through positive coaching communication approaches. P6 stated, "I don't mind if they yell. But, I [prefer] a coach that focuses on providing constructive feedback rather than yelling and who shows they value me." P6 added that outside of the practice and game environment, they desired to connect relationally with their coach with positive coaching communication approaches, seeing them as a mentor. P6 added, "Also, like just being able to have conversations with them [coach] and being open and honest with them. I think it has really boosted my morale." Gen Z participants emphasized the significance of coaches who exhibit care by recognizing the complexities of life for players both on and off the field. Gen Z athletes seek coaches who not only excel in technical instruction but also possess the ability to connect relationally.

***Exhibiting Care.*** P2 spoke about his need for coaches to be teachers and disciplinarians yet positively focused in their coaching communication approaches. This participant communicated that in his personal experience of having been coached by multiple coaches, he had been told, "If my coach was not yelling at me after I did something wrong ... then I felt he did not care about me." P2's sentiment

stems from their stated belief that if a coach no longer corrects them, that coach has lost interest in them as a contributor to team success. Therefore, in their experience, discipline that includes supportive communication is a type of perceived care from the coach or coaching staff.

P5 stated, "I've been able to go into the [coaches] office, and we talk about life like we talk about [sport] strategy, but also just what's going on in my life." P3 prefers a laid-back approach where a coach uses assertive tones to discipline or instruct rather than yelling. For P3, this approach "makes them feel like the coach cares about them and is trying to help them improve."

P6 gave an example of a coach allowing not only morning practice times that were meant to build specific skills but also a time to bond in a relaxed atmosphere, stating:

An assistant coach implemented morning workouts, morning shooting. And I think that's been a huge morale boost to the team because it's a good opportunity for [us]. We all have a really great relationship with our assistant coach. And it's just been a time where we can get in the gym, not worried about practice.

The participants stated experiencing assertive communication from the coach to the team members. In the interview process, the participants stated they felt that coaches who used assertive communication were most effective when they conveyed the need for improvement while encouraging athletes. Assertive communication with positive instruction fostered respect for the coach and was perceived as a type of care exhibited by the coach.

***Yelling With Instruction.*** During the interview discussion, the participants shared various perspectives regarding the different coaching communication approaches prevalent in college athletics and their influence on team morale. Some participants highlighted the positive outcomes associated with coaches who use positive communication approaches as a type of care and support toward their players, which they felt was conducive to positive morale. P1 had been coached at the collegiate level, stating that assertive communication was an expected part of practice or games. However, in keeping with the Gen Z's value of truth in

communication, P1 desired a coach who spoke with corrective intention, which they also considered a type of care. She added, "I appreciate coaches who are stern but specific in their feedback, avoiding confusion and improving performance."

P4 had attended a prior university and received coaching, which they described as adverse to morale. He transferred this experience to his current college primarily because he sought a coach who showed care and discipline through positive coaching communication approaches. The values of care were high at the transfer college. Based on the values desired by P4, specifically a coach who communicated assertively and with a clear sense of purpose and genuine concern, he added,

[My prior] coaches didn't communicate, and he was also a yeller. And when coming to [a new] college I knew whatever staff I was to pick next or what school, like I knew what type of coaching I didn't want and that was it. Coach and the staff I mean [at my current college], it's the complete opposite. Yes, he's loud and will yell at you sometimes, but he's a teacher. He's gonna tell you what you did wrong. You know, come talk to you on the side and it honestly boosted my confidence a lot.

P5 discussed his feelings about the coaching styles he had encountered. He discussed his coach's laid-back persona as a practical approach to morale and indicated that their coach's communication behaviors were assertive and showed care. P5 added:

My coach ... they are kind of laid-back ... the way that they discipline us isn't yelling, it's more like talking in an assertive tone. I still feel like the point gets across to me. And I still feel I'm being like coached and it motivates me still.

P6 added that he was used to being yelled at in high school but his collegiate coach took a different approach, saying:

I was always like, Coach, I need you to get on me. I need you to let me know when I'm doing something wrong because if not, I feel like this building up is great for me because it's like, yes, you I know you believe in

me. But when I do something wrong, I need you to let me know how to do it better and what I did wrong, and how to improve on that next time.

In addition to recognizing the effectiveness of coaches employing laid-back yet assertive communication styles, the participants also vocalized their disconnect with coaches who use rigid approaches.

***Yelling Without Instruction.*** The participants perceived yelling without instruction as a coaching communication approach as a lack of care, leading to negative morale. They shared instances where yelling without instruction was perceived as a rigid coaching communication style and demotivating by team members. Discipline without regard for individual athlete needs or emotions may create a negative environment, hindering personal growth and team morale. In contrast to coaches who foster open communication and mutual respect, those who use assertive language without instruction risk distancing athletes and diminishing team morale, which may affect performance.

Instead, the participants desired coaching communication approaches that involve technical feedback and encouragement. The participants also felt that it was essential for a coach to foster motivation, resilience, and a sense of positive morale among athletes. P1 stated the following:

I feel like when it came to coaches that did like, you know, get angry at however someone is playing and I mean, obviously, I've been yelled at. It's kind of like okay, you're yelling at me, but I'm not understanding exactly what I'm doing wrong and how exactly want me to fix it.

The relationship between a coach and an athlete is fundamental to achieving success. Coaches serve as mentors, motivators, and educators, guiding athletes through the intricacies of their chosen sport. However, athletes, such as P2, may encounter challenges with a coach's feedback. P2 described frustration with a coach's assertive communication style delivered without instruction so they could correct performance. He added that effective communication and constructive feedback within the coach-athlete relationship are paramount for positive morale, saying, "Sometimes [my coach] yells without providing clear instructions or technique so I don't know how [to correct] what I did wrong."



P3 commented similarly to P2, reflecting on their experience with a coach who offered little explanation for her perceived anger, as P2 felt. P3 gave a specific example she encountered throughout her season: the coach would pull her from a game whenever she made a mistake, making the players perform poorly and with unnecessary nervousness. She described the coach as a disciplinarian, but because there was no instruction, it was demotivating and detracted from morale. P3 added as follows:

My coach was very much like a yeller, pulled you [out of the game] after a mistake and like that was his way of teaching. And we had a very talented team, like, talented individuals, but the way he coached us [yelling without instruction], made it to where, like, all of us played probably a couple levels below what we could have.

The participants in this study voiced their apprehensions regarding the damaging influences of assertive communication or yelling without instruction, particularly emphasizing the toll it takes on their personal morale, confidence, and team morale. Their concern was particularly voiced by highlighting the importance of their need for coaching strategies centered on technical guidance and positive reinforcement. Through the interviews, the participants underscored the need for coaches to employ positive coaching communication approaches, emphasizing a balanced approach incorporating constructive feedback and encouragement to influence a supportive and morale-boosting environment. The participants articulated that effective coaching extends beyond merely communicating critique or correction, necessitating a blend of motivation and technical instruction to maximize engagement and team morale, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Research Question 1*

Codes	Categories	Theme
Yelling without instruction (9)	Coaching behaviors & athlete perception	Coaching communication approaches
	Active feedback &	

Codes	Categories	Theme
Yelling with instruction (9)	improvement	
	Belief & confidence	
Preference for coaching communication (8)	Consistent support	
	Positive reinforcement	
Exhibiting care (5)	Trust & reliability	

**Summary of Categories For Research Question 1.** The central theme emerging from analyzing participant responses to RQ1 through codes and categories focuses on coaching communication approaches and their influence on athlete morale within Gen Z collegiate athletic teams. The categories identified highlighted the crucial role of positive, supportive, and constructive coaching behaviors in cultivating positive team morale. These analyzed categories, which emerged from participant testimonies, underscore the influence of coaching behaviors, resulting in the theme of coaching communication approaches. The importance of coaching communication in influencing athletes' morale highlights aspects such as active feedback for improvement, belief in athletes' abilities, consistent support, positive reinforcement, and the establishment of trust and reliability. Understanding these dynamics is essential for implementing effective coaching strategies that resonate with Gen Z-rostered collegiate athletic teams. The categories and brief descriptions are as follows:

- **Active Feedback and Improvement:** The participants seek constructive feedback to understand their mistakes and improve their performance and morale.
- **Belief and Confidence:** Expressing belief in the participants' abilities is crucial in boosting their self-confidence and morale.
- **Consistent Support:** Ongoing support from coaches is essential in making participants feel valued and motivated.

- **Positive Reinforcement:** Positive reinforcement, including recognizing participants' efforts, significantly enhances their morale and performance.
- **Trust and Reliability:** Coaches demonstrating trust in players influences positive morale and a sense of reliability and trust.

These categories highlight the importance of positive, supportive, and constructive coaching behaviors in influencing positive morale among Gen Z collegiate athletes. The RQ1 theme highlighted the significant role of coaching communication behaviors in influencing positive morale among Gen Z collegiate athletes. Coaching communication approaches also emphasize the importance of understanding how athletes interpret their care, which may affect athletes and team morale. The insights gained from the RQ1 categories offer valuable insight for designing effective coaching communication approaches within Gen Z-rostered collegiate athletic teams.

### ***Research Question 2***

For this study, RQ2 was, “What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced *positive* team morale on your collegiate athletic team?” All six participants initially answered this research question with additional feedback to the subsequent interview questions.

**Interview Question 3.** The third interview question was, “Could you describe an instance where your current coach exhibited behavior that positively influenced your team's morale?” Interview Question 3 was intended to initiate discussion regarding coaching behaviors the athlete experienced that influenced positive team morale. All six participants answered that they had experienced specific coaching behaviors that directly influenced positive team morale.

**RQ2 Coaching Behaviors.** During the interviews, the participants identified specific behaviors that either increased or decreased personal or team morale. Analysis of the interview text revealed consistent patterns across multiple participant responses. The coaching behaviors associated with reactions to RQ2 and the interview questions are as follows, and are presented under the subheading of coaching behaviors and athlete perception (see Table 5): personal conversations

between coach and athlete, mentoring for personal development, and positive communication. The following list of coaching behaviors is derived from the participants' responses to RQ2 and Interview Questions 1 and 2, highlighting behaviors that increased positive morale among participants:

- **Rest:** Coaches implemented rest and recovery days for experienced players, showing care for their well-being and increasing positive participant morale.
- **Recognition:** Coaches used acknowledgment and celebrated participant efforts and successes, significantly boosting team morale and motivation.
- **Relationships:** The early morning shootarounds, which were casual and led by an assistant coach, played a crucial role in fostering strong relationships and camaraderie among participants, making them feel a part of a unified team and boosting morale.
- **Positivity:** The head coach's shift to a more positive and encouraging approach significantly improved team morale.
- **Communication:** Clear and supportive communication from coaches helped players feel understood and valued, improving morale.
- **Understanding:** Coaches demonstrated understanding by acknowledging players' challenges and adapting technique instruction to aid participants.

**RQ2 Code Development.** With further analysis of the interview texts through passes, consistent patterns emerged across the responses of different Gen Z collegiate athlete participants. Their responses highlighted codes related to values, beliefs, or attitudes concerning the coaching behaviors they had experienced that influenced positive morale. The codes connected to RQ2 and related interview questions were personal conversations between coach and athlete, mentoring and player development, and positive communication.

***Personal Conversations Between Coach and Athlete.*** Personal communication between coaches and athletes, especially within the context of the participants, is desired by Gen Z participants. Gen Z athletes, such as P3, stated that

they desire personalized communication that provides clear guidance and builds rapport with their coach(s). P3 added that, "But the reason we've had such a good relationship is because we've had conversations like outside of basketball or outside of [sport played]." P1 continued this line of thought, adding:

Um, there's, it's like a wide variety of things I want to do [in the future]. I'd love to coach volleyball eventually. I want to be able to talk to my coaches about [my future] and becoming a coach or athletic director one day.

**Positive Communication.** A coach's positive emotional and psychological influence on the participants can impact morale through communication. A coach who communicates positive constructive feedback and encouragement influences a supportive environment, bolstering the self-esteem and morale of the athletes. Coaches who use positive communication with the athletes may cultivate a sense of positive morale among team members. In contrast, a coach who uses overly negative communication may undermine the morale of Gen Z athletes, leading to feelings of a lack of confidence, anxiety, or disengagement. P6 added, "Because we had no confidence because he was just yelling at us and almost I mean, it was you can never felt like you could do anything right with him."

P2 conveyed similar thoughts regarding the tone and the subject matter of a coaches' conversations with players, saying:

When coaches up the stakes and up the ante and up the volume. I think that does get results out of me to buy in, it gets results in the right way. Like I do it at that point. I do it like out of spite though because I feel like I have to do it at that moment. Whereas, like, if it's one on one, it's personal. I feel like I'm doing it because we're just doing it for the right way.

All participants stated that their coaches influenced their attitudes and behaviors through communication. The participants also stated that a coach can shape morale positively or negatively. Coaches who exhibited negative behaviors risked normalizing those behaviors and perpetuating a culture of mistrust and discouragement among participants. P5 stated:

My coach probably used words he shouldn't have at us. People [fans and player parents] overheard [him] yelling at us, and we actually won the

game. [He] thought we should have won by more and didn't play to our potential. The whole ride back [on the team bus] to campus was quiet because we didn't want to say anything after that.

The participants felt that a coach who communicates positive reinforcement and recognizes their efforts boosted team morale and enhanced a culture where team members feel valued. Conversely, the opposite was true when there was no recognition based on the participants' consistent testimonies. Gen Z participants provided answers by discussing positive communication methods that gave them a sense of validation and a deeper connection to the team and increased their morale. The participants felt that when positive communication is provided, they are more likely to have a positive morale. Positive reinforcement boosts morale and strengthens team cohesion, based on the participants' responses. P6 added, "So, like just being able to have those conversations with them and being open and honest with them. I think has really boosted my morale."

Gen Z athletes contribute to team morale and influence a culture where fellow team members experience a sense of appreciation. Participant insights, shared during discussions on positive communication strategies, emphasized the importance of feeling validated and fostering deeper connections within the team through a coach's communication, possibly leading to increased player development. The influence of a coach, however, extends beyond the practice field to that of a mentor and role model.

***Mentoring and Player Development.*** Coaches may act as mentors to Gen Z athletes in personal and athletic development through effective communication behaviors, which were perceived as positive morale boosters by the participants. Mentoring and player development within the team environment strengthens positive morale. The participants felt that the role of a coach extends to that of mentor. Perceived coaching communication methods emphasize the significant influence of a coach in cultivating personal growth. P4 added that his current coach takes a mentor teaching approach, different from their previous coach. He added:

He's a teacher. He's gonna tell you what you did wrong. You know, talk to you on the side, and it honestly boosted my confidence a lot because I knew

he had confidence in me from the beginning. Then when you know, a coach has confidence in you, and lets you play through mistakes it allows you to be more receptive to maybe the yelling when it does happen, understanding that it's coming from a good place.

P2 added:

Now we have a coach that's like, she's stern. And she, you know, she means business. But she can kind of certainly tell you like, this is how I want you to fix what you're doing without having to get in your face or kind swear at you and be very angry towards you. I feel like it's [coaching behavior] less confusing that way, in my opinion.

P6 expressed similar sentiments regarding a coach using a mentoring style to develop them as a person and athlete, stating, “[My] Head Coach's positive mannerisms [to me personally] and coaching behaviors shifted the direction [positive morale] after a close game. He gave [me] self-confidence.” This participant added, “I think what boosts me is a lot of like one on one, but also just like being relational, I guess teaching me too so, I've been able to have good relationships with a lot of my coaches.”

The participants expressed their feelings that supportive and personalized coaching involves quality communication between the coach and the athlete, focusing on their personal and athletic growth. Participant responses emphasize the importance of coaching behavior that uses communication and technical instruction to improve team morale. Table 5 highlights the themes derived from the codes relevant to RQ2.

**Table 5**

*Research Question 2*

Codes	Categories	Theme
Personal conversations between coach and athlete (12)	Communication style of coaches Strong relationships	Supportive & personalized coaching
Mentoring for personal development (12)	Supportive environment Empathy & understanding	

Codes	Categories	Theme
Positive Communication (8)	Recognition & appreciation Positive coaching	

**Summary of Categories for Research Question 2.** The categories identified from the participants' interview responses to the RQ2 included creating a supportive environment that respects participants' needs, such as providing adequate rest, regular recognition of athletes' efforts, the importance of building mentoring-type relationships with the coaching staff, positive coaching approaches, promoting effective communication to resolve conflicts, and demonstrating empathy and understanding toward players' challenges outside of their respective sport. The categories and brief descriptors are as follows:

- **Supportive Environment:** Creating a supportive environment through rest periods and understanding the participants' needs improves team morale.
- **Recognition and Appreciation:** Regular recognition and appreciation of the participants' efforts contribute positively to team morale.
- **Strong Relationships:** Building relationships with all staff coaches influences the positive morale of the participants.
- **Positive Coaching:** Encouraging and positive coaching approaches play a significant role in boosting team morale.
- **Effective Communication:** Clear and open communication helps resolve conflicts and maintain team morale.
- **Empathy and Understanding:** Coaches demonstrating empathy and understanding of players' challenges positively influence team morale.

These categories identified from RQ2 provide valuable insights into effectively implementing supportive and personalized coaching behaviors within Gen Z collegiate athletic teams to enhance positive team morale. Coaches can significantly influence team dynamics and morale by creating supportive environments, fostering healthy relationships, and employing positive



communication aligned with their respective coaching strategies. Understanding and incorporating these RQ2 insights into coaching practices strengthens team cohesion and enhances overall athlete morale and performance, contributing to a positive and productive collegiate team environment. The theme emerging from these categories of supportive and personalized coaching underscores the significant influence of coaching behaviors on team morale, emphasizing the importance of using tailored, supportive, and personal approaches for Gen Z-rostered collegiate athletic teams.

### ***Research Question 3***

For this study, RQ3 was, “What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced negative team morale on your collegiate athletic team?” All six participants initially answered this question, providing additional feedback to the subsequent interview questions.

**Interview Question 4.** The fourth interview question was, “Could you share an example of a negative coaching behavior that you feel had a noticeable effect on team morale?” This question was designed to elicit specific coaching behaviors that the athletes experienced that negatively influenced team morale and potentially affected performance. All six participants provided personal examples illustrating the impact of such behaviors on team morale. They also preferred positive coaching behaviors, highlighting their importance in maintaining a positive relationship with their coach.

**Interview Question 5.** The fifth interview question was, “Could you elaborate on the behaviors (verbal or nonverbal) by your current coach that influence a positive atmosphere within the team?” Interview Question 5 was intended to initiate a discussion on specific coaching behaviors the athlete experienced through the team that negatively influenced team morale and possibly affected performance. All six participants explained they had experienced specific coaching behaviors that negatively influenced morale. They preferred positive coaching behaviors conducive to maintaining a positive relationship with their coach.

**Interview Question 6.** The sixth interview question was, “What coaching styles or approaches have you encountered while working with your coach that you find preferable or resonate with you?” Interview Question 6 was intended to initiate a discussion on specific coaching behaviors the athlete experienced through the team that were preferable as they influenced team morale. All six participants described their experiences with specific preferred coaching behaviors. They preferred positive coaching behaviors conducive to maintaining positive team morale.

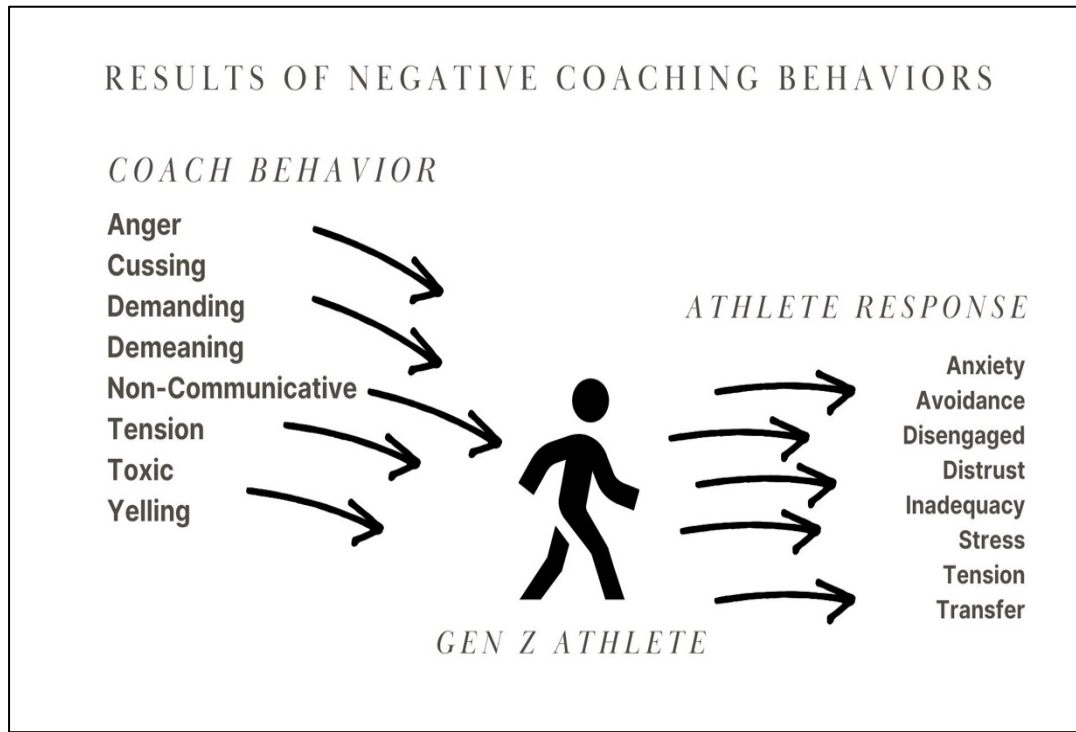
**RQ3 Coaching Behaviors.** During the interview, the participants spoke of specific behaviors that either increased or decreased morale and participant response. The analysis of the interview text, which served as the primary source of the findings, demonstrated consistent patterns across multiple participants' responses. The coaching behaviors associated with reactions to RQ3 and related interview questions are as follows and are under the subheading of team morale and negativity (see Table 6): negative reinforcement, ineffective instruction, a lack of positive acknowledgment, and public criticism by a coach. The following list of coaching behaviors was derived from the participants' responses to RQ3, Interview Questions 4, 5, and 6, revealing coaching behaviors that decreased positive morale among the participants:

- **Yelling:** Coaches often yelled without constructive feedback, leading to confusion and frustration among players, increasing negative morale.
- **Criticism:** Publicly criticizing top players created confusion and negatively influenced team dynamics and morale.
- **Negativity:** Negative comments, such as predicting poor participant performance, severely impacted players' confidence and overall team morale.
- **Miscommunication:** Misunderstandings and poor coach communication led to unnecessary conflicts and lowered team morale.
- **Disrespect:** Coaches sometimes disrespected players by not considering their feelings or perspectives, which resulted in division and lower morale.

- **Blame:** Blaming players for mistakes without providing corrective technique solutions or support undermined participant confidence and trust in the coach, lowering their morale.
- **Pressure:** Excessive pressure from coaches, with yelling, and without positive reinforcement, led to stress, decreased performance, and poor morale.
- **Tension:** Negative interactions and inconsistent coaching behaviors disrupted team morale and focus.

**RQ3 Code Development.** Codes further emerging through passes of the interview text revealed consistent responses by the participants to prior questions. The codes connected to RQ3 and the interview questions related to negative coaching behaviors influencing morale. They include negative reinforcement, ineffective instruction, a lack of positive acknowledgment, and public criticism by a coach. Participant comments related to RQ3 and negative coaching behaviors indicated a decrease in their motivation, confidence, and self-assessed performance levels.

Constant criticism, yelling, or belittling from coaches demoralizes Gen Z athletes, hindering positive morale. Negative coaching behaviors can create a toxic team environment characterized by anxiety and tension, which can further erode team morale. Athletes may experience decreased positive morale and become disengaged, lose interest in their sport, quit altogether, or transfer to a different college or university due to negative experiences, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1***Negative Behaviors and Athlete Response*

P3 experienced negative coaching behavior, causing him to transfer, stating: I transferred from my former [collegiate] program to this one because of my other coach. We had no confidence because he was just yelling at us and I mean, you never felt like you could do anything right with him. And then when you did, it wasn't noticed. So that was tough, and it kind of killed my confidence.

The participants stated that negative coaching behaviors have repercussions beyond the team environment, possibly influencing their overall well-being. They described their reactions to negativity as an elevation of stress levels, anxiety, and lowered confidence and morale. Coaching behaviors affect coach-to-athlete dynamics both within and outside the team. P6 spoke of the coach's negative influence by making comments affecting morale regarding the teams three-point shooters and their inability to shoot well, saying:

Coach had a tendency to point out our rough nights more than point out when we're shooting well. Before a game he said this team is capable of going 1 for 20 or something like that from the three point line. Like you can't say that to [us]. Because that just kills [our] confidence. We addressed it as captains to the coach and we're like that can't be said because it just completely throws off our confidence.

As shown in Figure 1, the results of the study's participant narratives illustrate the various negative coaching behaviors and their impacts on Gen Z collegiate athletes. The comments from the participants shed light on the different types and combinations of negative coaching behaviors that lead to similar outcomes from the perspective of Gen Z collegiate athletes.

**Negative Reinforcement.** A coach negatively communicating, perceived or actual, may result in decreased morale. Coaches who communicated positively enhanced the morale of individuals and teams. Negatively communicating critique erodes morale. P5 commented about a negatively communicating coach in game day situation regarding expectations and goals to him. The coach's expectations from P5 were not met. The coach later berated the player and held him out of a game. P5 commented:

Generally, I'll let stuff like that go. But I held on that one for a while. And I do feel like it affected the way I performed in the next game. And a lot of it was just I was so in my head and like I was frustrated. And so, I guess to put it, I think it can negatively impact the morale of the individual which can then affect the team.

**Ineffective Instruction.** Like their peers, the Gen Z collegiate athlete participants are heavily influenced by technology use in their daily lives. For Gen Z athletes, communication is about receiving information and feeling connected and engaged with their coaches. Not using current technology in communication with Gen Z collegiate athletes negatively influences their morale. Incorporating current technology into coaching communication demonstrates an understanding and respect for the preferred modes of interaction of Gen Z.

Communicating an athlete's progress, providing individualized feedback, and adopting specific training plans to meet the needs and preferences of the participants leads to increased morale. A coach's use of technology, such as texting, builds team morale among the participants. Integrating current technology can create a culture of open communication where athletes feel connected and supported, influencing positive communication and morale. P2 added that he feels ineffective without proper technology to provide corrective examples, stating, "Sometimes the yelling coach is also not as technical as the non-yelling coach. That can be frustrating. You're yelling at me but I'm not understanding exactly what I'm doing wrong and how exactly want me to fix it."

***Lack of Positive Acknowledgment.*** The participants' discussion of trust focused on their coach's approach to communication. Some participants felt their coach's communication lacked positive acknowledgment and consistency, leading to personal doubt, frustration, and decreased morale. Others felt that the coach's words and behaviors were disconnected, deteriorating their confidence in their coach and increasing negative morale. P4 discussed a situation in which his coach's communication approach resulted in a breakdown of player trust:

[My coach said] Hey, I believe in you like you got a bright future. When you're out there, be aggressive. Shoot the shots you like. I'm like, sweet, now I can go out there and have the freedom and then I'd go in the game. And it's like whoa, miss my first shot and like my coach is already subbing me out. So, then I'm like, is he actually confident in me? I don't know. I was really confused.

A lack of positive acknowledgment from a coach to player decreases morale and causes a breakdown of trust between stakeholders, profoundly affecting participant morale. When trust is eroded, it can lead to a decline in player morale. Rebuilding trust requires a coach to communicate through acknowledgment and engage in concerted efforts to address the issues underlying negative morale. P4 continued his narrative, "So, I struggled to compete with confidence a ton that year. Just solely for that reason, just being unsure, where he was at as a coach and [if] he believed in me or not."

**Public Criticism by a Coach.** The participants stated that team morale is negatively affected when a coach publicly criticizes an athlete without adding praise. They agreed that this type of negative communication decreases self-confidence and motivation, affecting morale and undermining trust. Their experience of being yelled at not only affected the targeted athlete but also created an atmosphere of fear and anxiety among their teammates. Conversely, the participants agreed that encouragement comingled with critique and supportive communication fosters positive morale and enhances player confidence. P6 commented as follows:

Our coach decided to kind of single out myself and our point guard in us being two leaders. Now looking back on it, I think he maybe chose to do that. Thinking that like we could handle it best and just to kind of move attention away from it. But this wasn't something that had been talked about with the coaches and I or between coach and I before it happened, and he really went in on our point guard like criticizing his numbers for the whole year.

P3 commented that a coach singled her out by using solely negative communication, which was perceived poorly by teammates and her, resulting in distrust and a lack of respect for the coach. P3 added:

If someone's [a coach] going to come at me like that, well first of all, like maybe do it in private before we bring it up to the whole team so we can address it. I just didn't think it was the time for that or the place.

**Table 6***Research Question 3*

Codes	Categories	Theme
Lack of positive acknowledgment (9)	Team morale & negativity Lack of constructive feedback	Coaching influence on athlete confidence
Public criticism by a coach (6)	Tension & inconsistency	
Negative reinforcement (5)	Disrespectful behavior Blame without support	
Ineffective instruction (2)	Public criticism Negative comments Miscommunication	

**Summary of Categories for Research Question 3.** The interview participants vocalized the crucial influence of team morale on performance outcomes, noting that they perceived negative morale as being related to poor performance. The categories identified from the analysis of participant responses to RQ3 focused on the influence of coaching behaviors on athlete morale within collegiate athletic teams. Several categories emerged through detailed interviews, highlighting the pivotal role of coaching practices in shaping positive team morale.

These categories also underscore various negative coaching behaviors identified by the participants, including (a) a lack of constructive feedback leading to participant frustration, (b) public criticism creating confusion and lowering morale, (c) negative comments damaging athletes' confidence, (d) miscommunication causing unnecessary conflicts, (e) disrespectful behavior undermining team unity, (f) blame without support eroding trust, (g) excessive pressure without positive reinforcement causing stress, and (h) tension from



inconsistent coaching behaviors disrupting morale. Together, these categories highlight the detrimental influences of negative coaching behaviors on team morale and underscore the critical importance of adopting constructive and supportive coaching approaches in collegiate athletics for Gen Z. The categories and brief descriptors are as follows:

- **Lack of Constructive Feedback:** Yelling without constructive feedback leads to participant frustration and lowered morale.
- **Public Criticism:** Public criticism creates confusion and negatively affects team morale.
- **Negative Comments:** Negative comments and predictions damage participants' confidence and overall team morale.
- **Miscommunication:** Miscommunication from coaches leads to unnecessary conflicts and reduced team morale.
- **Disrespectful Behavior:** Disrespect from coaches damages team unity and morale.
- **Blame Without Support:** Blaming participants for mistakes without offering support undermines their confidence and trust.
- **Tension and Inconsistency:** Tension from negative interactions and inconsistent coaching behaviors disrupt team morale.

The theme identified from the interview process for RQ3 resulting from the categories underscores the significant influence of coaching behaviors on athlete confidence and team morale within collegiate athletic settings. Negative coaching practices, such as public criticism, a lack of constructive feedback, and disrespectful behavior, diminish athlete confidence and contribute to team dysfunction and poor morale. In contrast, coaching behaviors characterized by constructive feedback, positive reinforcement, effective communication, and supportive approaches foster a positive team environment conducive to high morale and optimal performance. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for coaches seeking to maximize athlete potential and team cohesion, emphasizing the need for proactive measures to promote positive coaching behaviors and cultivate positive morale.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale. Using a qualitative approach, I developed open-ended interview questions to better understand the experiences of six collegiate athletes after obtaining ethical clearance from the respective Institutional Review Boards. The results highlighted a perception among athletes that yelling, characterized by increased volume and intensity to express dissatisfaction or anger, had a predominantly negative influence when unaccompanied by instructional corrective coaching.

The athlete's perception persisted across various responses, even when unrelated to the original question posed. The study reveals that contrary to some long-held coaching beliefs, athletes view traditional motivational yelling negatively and as ineffective and prefer technical instruction if or when yelling occurs. The study's insight forms a critical part of the data analysis and discussion in the research discussion presented in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5 – Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore the influence of coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes and team morale. The methodological framework for this study included three research questions, RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, complemented by additional interview questions that were adaptable based on the participants' responses to establishing data saturation, which was achieved. The research involved delving into the subjective experiences of six current collegiate athletes concerning coaching behaviors, assessing the personal effects of these actions on participants and their reactions, focusing on the influence on personal and team morale.

Student-athletes meeting the criterion for participation from various and randomly selected athletic teams at the same college provided personal insights into morale and coaching behaviors within collegiate athletics. Chapter 5 consists of the significance and relevance of the research findings, the theoretical and practical implications, and recommendations for future research. Three themes emerged through RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 and the completed interview process: coaching communication approaches, supportive and personalized coaching, and coaching influence on athlete confidence.

### Research Questions

The research, with its practical implications, focused on participant responses to three main questions. These questions were formatted to delve deeply into the relationship between coaching behaviors, such as communication and support, and individual and team morale. To better understand participant views of coaching behavioral influences, participants' responses related to a coach using, if any, Gen Z core values in their coaching methodology were necessary. Prior research has shown that emphasizing core values critical to Gen Z athletes, such as transparent communication, technology-based coaching, and recognition of successes and failures, has positively impacted team morale (Schroth, 2019). Studies have also highlighted the importance of providing positive reinforcement to Gen Z athletes when applying necessary criticism from their coaches (T. Dolot,

2018). The outcomes of this research addressed the following three research questions:

**RQ1:** What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced your personal morale?

**RQ2:** What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced positive team morale on your collegiate athletic team?

**RQ3:** What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influence negative team morale on your collegiate athletic team?

### **Relevance of Research Findings**

The findings from this research highlight the importance of a coaching approach that is aligned with the critical characteristics of Gen Z's larger cohort, which includes collegiate athletes, in fostering positive team morale. The results may be not only significant for coaches who lead Gen Z collegiate athletes but may also have more extensive application to Gen Z participation in other settings. As this generation brings unique characteristics and preferences to the athletic environment, coaches must understand and implement best practices that encompass coaching behaviors that build morale, which is pivotal for individual and team performance. Therefore, the study's insights can help coaches personalize their approaches to Gen Z trait needs effectively.

This research on Gen Z collegiate athletes' preferences for coaching methods and behaviors revealed a strong preference for coaching behaviors that incorporate corrective coaching feedback that is technical and positive. This finding is reassuring for coaches, as it suggests that Gen Z athletes respond well to this type of coaching. The most significant insight from this research pertains to the influence of negative coaching behaviors on Gen Z collegiate athletes, mainly yelling without instruction. This finding suggests a potential shift in how Gen Z athletes, unlike their millennial or Gen X counterparts, process information to build morale. Although a coach's behavior of yelling is common in athletics, Gen Z prefers corrective coaching that builds morale even as yelling occurs. The participants consistently reported that coaches who yell without instruction are less effective in building team morale than those who yell with instruction. It is critical

to note that at no point in the interview process did a participant perceive yelling without instruction type of coaching behavior as positive or motivating. This finding underscores the need for coaches to continue using technical guidance and positive reinforcement in their coaching methods while considering Gen Z's communication styles in building team morale.

The participants in the study voiced concerns regarding the damaging influences of coaching behaviors, such as assertive communication or yelling without instruction, particularly emphasizing the toll it took on their morale, confidence, and team morale. The participants' responses to interviews indicated that they felt disconnected from a coach yelling without corrective instruction. The participants also felt that it was essential for a coach to use their position to influence positive morale and build a sense of cohesion among teammates. Their concerns were particularly voiced by highlighting the importance of coaching strategies centered on technical guidance and positive reinforcement. Gen Z athletes might experience frustration with a coach's assertive communication style delivered without technical instruction, which hinders their ability to correct performance.

An observation made during the interviews and supported by academic findings in the area of social media and online usage of Gen Z is the significant amount of time spent on YouTube for learning purposes. Coaches of Gen Z collegiate who understand players' learning preferences may leverage Gen Z's propensity for online learning. As noted in this study, 65% of Gen Z members consult YouTube daily for entertainment and learning skills (Fromm & Read, 2018; Priporas et al., 2020; Suwana et al., 2020). The increasing trend of online learning highlights that Gen Z is most comfortable acquiring knowledge through online technology. Possible learning extracted from this study is the influence of Gen Z online learning behaviors; they prefer YouTube because it does not engage the learner with yelling but with instruction. Coaching behaviors that shift to align with Gen Z traits will increase positive morale.

This study's significant finding that yelling with instruction is more acceptable for producing positive morale among the Gen Z athletic population has

far-reaching implications for all levels of Gen Z-rostered sports. The impact of this research on coaching behaviors may influence collegiate recruitment strategies, coaching methodologies, athlete retention efforts, and even the management of NIL through booster or affiliated organizations. The study's implications may extend to coaching on an unknown scale, which remains to be learned due to the limited findings on this research topic. Coaches can leverage this research to enhance their communication efforts and team morale. By understanding and integrating these best practices, coaches can create an environment where athletes feel supported, positive, and connected.

### **Theme Analysis and Discussion**

During the interviews, the participants shared their personal experiences and perceptions about the coaching behaviors they received. They described, without hesitation or prompting, their support from coaches during their athletic journey and their preferences as collegiate athletes. The themes from these interviews highlight the intricate nature of athlete experiences within collegiate athletics, shedding light on various aspects of their competitive experiences. Specifically, the interviews revealed three significant themes throughout the descriptions of collegiate athletes: coaching communication approaches, supportive and personalized coaching, and coaching influence on athlete confidence.

### **Research Question 1 Theme Discussion**

#### ***Coaching Communication Approaches***

How a person understands or receives care is subjective and varies according to experience and biased preference. However, in this research, which has a narrow focus on Gen Z collegiate athletes, the participants' responses to RQ1 and subsequent questions consistently highlighted their desire for a coach to communicate caring behaviors, such as supportive communication, coupled with technical coaching instruction and how they felt about negative coaching behaviors. The theme for RQ1 underscored the critical influence of coaches' perceived support and caregiving behaviors on the morale of Gen Z athletes. This finding further

highlighted the significance of comprehending how these athletes perceive and interpret such care, which can significantly impact individual and team morale.

These insights from RQ1 emphasize the importance of understanding how Gen Z collegiate athletes perceive and interpret care, significantly affecting individual and team morale. The research findings suggest that a support framework in collegiate athletic settings should align with athletes' preferred coaching styles to optimize performance and morale. The study participants indicated that feeling valued by their coach as a team member significantly impacted their morale. This research underscores that Gen Z athletes desire specific coaching behaviors. Recognizing and adopting key care strategies for collegiate coaches overseeing Gen Z athletes may enhance team morale more effectively than other approaches.

It is important to note that the conclusion for RQ1 does not suggest that Gen Z collegiate athletes are demanding a specific coach response, as this was not a research finding. However, the research uncovered that coaches should be understanding to create positive team morale for Gen Z collegiate athletes. During the interviews, the participants elaborated on areas where they felt valued by their coach as a team member and how this perception of care influenced their personal and team morale.

**Preference for Coaching Communication.** Consistent with the broader values of their generation, Gen Z collegiate athletes seek genuine relationships and mentors committed to their success as athletes and individuals. Gen Z athletes prefer coaches who provide direct feedback that fosters confidence through a caring and collaborative approach. This Gen Z athlete preference resonates with their generation's inclination toward teamwork, intentional mentoring, and a strong connection between player and coach (Hampson & Jowett, 2014; Lafferty et al., 2019). Coaches who lead Gen Z athletes should consider the mentor role in a collegiate person's life. A coach's mentoring approach helps build affinity with their players, including increased morale and overall team confidence.

**Exhibiting Care.** In listening to the participants' personal experiences, it was evident that yelling was acceptable. However, it became disheartening when it

was used to belittle instead of correcting. Determining what Gen Z athletes perceive and understand through coaching behaviors is crucial in enhancing positive morale among teams competing at the collegiate level (Parker et al., 2012). Although the types of leader behaviors may be required for specific situations, understanding that creating an environment that Gen Z players perceive as caring is essential in maintaining positive morale (Gould et al., 2020).

**Yelling With Instruction.** During the interview discussion, various perspectives were shared regarding the different coaching styles prevalent in college athletics and their impact on team morale. Yelling is a part of coaching; however, yelling that included instruction was considered positive by the participants. Gen Z athletes participants highlighted the positive outcomes associated with coaches who yelled with instruction as a perceived type of care and support toward their players, which they felt was conducive to positive morale. Previous research confirms that Gen Z responds best to leader behaviors where truth and care are present, even in conflict like a correction that occurs in a practice or game setting (Koulopoulos & Keldsen, 2016; K. Moore & Frazier, 2017).

**Yelling Without Instruction.** The study's findings consistently revealed a detrimental pattern: assertive communication or yelling, when not accompanied by corrective technical instruction, erodes Gen Z athlete morale. Coaches who rely solely on intense emotional behaviors with Gen Y might find their motivational tactics less effective with Gen Z, potentially leading to diminished team morale and success (Diffley, 2021; Gomes et al., 2018). This issue of yelling without instruction was a recurring theme in participant feedback during the interview process, with a unanimous view that such practices has a detrimental effect on individual confidence and team morale. The participants strongly advocated for coaching methods that prioritize technical guidance and positive reinforcement, particularly when yelling is used.

### ***Research Question 1 Theme Summary***

Throughout the interviews, the participants consistently highlighted the negative impact of assertive communication or yelling, particularly its effect on personal morale, confidence, and team cohesion. They underscored the need for



coaching strategies that strike a balance between constructive feedback and encouragement. This approach, the participants felt, would foster a supportive atmosphere conducive to enhancing team morale. They emphasized that effective coaching requires more than yelling; it should integrate motivation with technical instruction so that they can correct mistakes and maintain positive team morale.

Coaches of Gen Z collegiate athletes should understand the learning preferences of their players. Gen Z members value online learning, which allows them to learn through social media platforms. As previously stated in this study, 65% of Gen Z members consult YouTube daily for entertainment and learning skills (Fromm & Read, 2018; Priporas et al., 2020; Suwana et al., 2020). The increasing trend of online learning underscores that Gen Z is most comfortable acquiring knowledge through online technology. Online learning environments, tailored to user needs, focus on correcting issues and teaching skills without fostering a hostile atmosphere for learners.

It would be a valid concern for a coach who engages in only yelling without offering corrective skills to understand that Gen Z will view them as ineffective shapers of morale and may skew Gen Z collegiate athletes' perception of care. Recognizing that Gen Z athletes often respond more favorably to coaching styles that prioritize technical guidance and encouragement over criticism alone, coaches can adapt their strategies to align with these preferences, enhancing individual and team morale.

## **Research Question 2 Theme Discussion**

### ***Supportive and Personalized Coaching***

Coaching behaviors, such as method or style of communication, increase or decrease positive morale among Gen Z-rostered collegiate sports teams. In response to RQ2, a coach's method of communicating support and personalized coaching instruction toward influencing morale is critical. A coach's method of support influences individual athlete performance and morale, possibly affecting team goals. How a coach conveys discipline, provides instruction, and offers support significantly shapes the overall morale of Gen Z teams. Consequently, the effectiveness of a coach's method of support extends beyond the technical; coaches

serve as a mentoring teacher who communicates motivation toward building team chemistry, successful strategy, and a sense of unity among team members or morale.

**Personal Conversations Between Coach and Athlete.** Effective communication between coaches and athletes is crucial, particularly within the context of blending possibly traditional coaching methods from older generations with the modern communication strategies favored by Gen Z. Gen Z values leaders who engage in mentoring, communicate effectively, and show genuine concern for personal development within the organization (Bridges, 2015). This generation also values coaches communicating decisions, setting clear expectations, and providing constructive feedback (Jowett & Arthur, 2019). Active engagement and communication are vital to enhancing Gen Z's retention of information (Saxena & Mishra, 2021). With the rise of Gen Z, understanding their distinct communication preferences in all venues is paramount (Dimock, 2019).

**Positive Communication.** A coach's communication style significantly impacts athletes' emotional and psychological well-being, either boosting or diminishing their morale. Coaches communicating constructive correction and encouragement create a supportive atmosphere that enhances Gen Z collegiate athletes' self-esteem and confidence. Recognizing and affirming athletes' efforts can foster positive team morale (Keatlholetswe & Maletse, 2019). All participants in this study noted that their coaches' communication profoundly affected their emotional and mental health, shaping their character in either positive or negative ways.

Coaches who engage in negative communication behaviors risk embedding such behaviors into the team culture, potentially fostering mistrust and discouragement (Kaplan et al., 2013; Parker et al., 2012). Insights shared by the participants during the interview phase of the research highlighted that effective communication strategies are crucial for ensuring athletes feel validated. Validation through effective communication is crucial for building stronger connections within the team and can lead to significant growth in player morale.

**Mentoring for Player Development.** The participants perceived coaches who use effective communication strategies in a mentoring relationship to progress personal and athletic growth positively influences team morale. Building personal growth within the team environment is crucial in strengthening morale (Wachsmuth et al., 2017). The communication methods employed by coaches are viewed as crucial in promoting personal development (Graham & Fleming, 2016). The participants noted that effective coaching has a foundation of quality communication between the coach and the athlete that targets personal and athletic growth. Because Gen Z seeks truth in everything, they desire honest communication that provides evaluation and correction while maintaining mutual respect and building trust (Schroth, 2019; Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

#### ***Research Question 2 Theme Summary***

A crucial finding from the interviews and analysis of RQ2 is that the participants viewed coaching communication as integral to their perception of collaboration and care. They consistently pointed out that a collaborative communication style builds trust and empowers them to take ownership of their development, thereby boosting team morale. Understanding how Gen Z athletes perceive coaching behaviors is essential for creating strong team dynamics and improving athletic performance. Coaches can establish collaborative and respectful relationships with their team members by emphasizing communication. Athletes subjected to negative verbal communication from their coaches experienced increased anxiety, reduced self-esteem, and diminished satisfaction with their performance (Barney & Tauiliili, 2017).

Conversely, coaches who promote a positive and supportive environment through effective communication enhance morale and strengthen team relationships (J. L. Moore et al., 2017). Effective communication involves two-way communication, with listening being a key component for Gen Z collegiate athletes who feel the need to be included in collaborative efforts. Coaches need to incorporate Gen Z athletes' feedback into the communication dynamic.

### **Research Question 3 Theme Discussion**

#### ***Coaching Influence on Athlete Confidence***

The study's critical finding highlights the impact of negative behaviors, such as yelling without corrective instruction, on Generation Z collegiate athletes. The findings for RQ3 indicated that the participant responses were similar in feelings of the influence of negative coaching behaviors on morale. Even when unrelated to the original question posed by the researcher, the participants seemed to gravitate toward their feelings of coaching negative behaviors. Of note is that the participants were asked about positive and negative coaching methods they experienced as collegians. It is possible that, provided the opportunity, the participants could have vocalized more negative than positive experiences. However, in the overall schematic of the study, it is more likely that their experiences highlight the more significant finding that negative coaching unaccompanied by positive reinforcement disengages Gen Z collegiate athletes and influences damaging team morale.

Negative coaching practices elicited responses from the participants, including, sometimes, decisions to transfer to another institution. Previous literature agrees with the responses indicated by the participants that Gen Z values positive communication (A. Dolot, 2018; Saxena & Mishra, 2021; Wadey et al., 2019). However, the crucial insight from this study is not that Gen Z collegiate athletes are to process negative behaviors such as yelling without instruction. Instead, Gen Z collegiate athletes expressed their desire to understand the reasons behind negative coaching behaviors, including being provided information to correct mistakes. For example, one athlete, after receiving what was perceived as significant public criticism, approached the coaching staff to resolve the issue and correct their playing mistakes.

The research and findings align with this cohort's broader trait of seeking truth in all situations (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Sriprom et al., 2019). The findings from this research further highlight the importance of clear and supportive communication between coaches and Gen Z collegiate athletes. Gen Z collegiate athletes benefit from direct explanations of their errors rather than motivational

yelling or a lack of communication. The participants described the results of negative coaching behaviors as revolving around how a coach speaks.

**Negative Reinforcement.** A coach who communicates effectively fosters positive morale among individuals and teams by building trust through transparent, honest, and constructive feedback. This communication approach enhances both individual and team morale. Conversely, a coach lacking proper communication skills may lead to confusing messaging, resulting in strained relationships and decreased morale.

**Ineffective Instruction.** Gen Z collegiate athletes are influenced by technology daily. For these athletes, communication involves receiving information and feeling connected and engaged with their coaches, which technology facilitates. Coaches who fail to use current technology in communication with Gen Z collegiate athletes can negatively impact morale. Conversely, incorporating current technology into coaching communication demonstrates an understanding and consideration for Gen Z collegiate athletes' preferred methods of communication and learning.

**Public Criticism by Coach.** The participants stated that team morale is negatively affected when a coach publicly criticizes an athlete without adding praise. The participants agreed uniformly that this type of negative communication decreases self-confidence and motivation, affecting morale and undermining trust. The experience of being yelled at impacted the targeted athlete and created an atmosphere of anxiety among their teammates. Conversely, the participants agreed that a combination of encouragement, critique, and supportive communication fosters positive morale and enhances player confidence.

**Lack of Positive Acknowledgment.** The participants' discussion of trust focused on their coach's approach to communication. Some participants felt their coach's communication lacked transparency and consistency, leading to personal doubt, frustration, and decreased morale. Others felt that the coach's words and behaviors were disconnected, which deteriorated their confidence in their coach. The breakdown of trust between a coach and a player can profoundly affect participant morale. When trust is eroded, it can lead to a decline in player

confidence. Rebuilding trust requires a coach to communicate transparently, make a concerted effort to address the underlying trust issues, and possibly use a shift in coaching methodology.

A significant finding emerged from the interviews with all participants of the same athletic team, which had a moderate level of success. This finding was what the participants described as a *coaching shift*. In the context of this research, a coaching shift refers to a behavioral change in which a coach transitions from using negative behaviors that adversely affect team morale to employing positive behaviors that enhance team morale. The participants described their experience of feeling disconnected from their head coach for much of the regular season. However, toward the end of the season, the head coach led a team meeting, shared his personal challenges outside of coaching that affected his morale, and acknowledged that these challenges also impacted his coaching behaviors and, consequently, the team morale.

The participants' accounts of this meeting and the subsequent changes in the coach's methodology revealed a potential implication of coaching shifts from negative to positive methods. The coach told the team he was committed to maintaining a more positive coaching style by adding encouragement with correction and being more positive. In essence, the coach was shifting his behaviors from negative to positive.

Per the participants' interview responses, the coaching behavior shift from negative to positive resulted in increased positive morale. The team went from an average season win-loss record to winning the next 10 games and a national championship at their division level. The interview participants noted that the result was beyond their scope of reality and would not have occurred before the coach-initiated meeting and a significant change in coaching behavior. The testimony of the participants further underscore the potential benefits of a positive coaching approach that increases positive morale for Gen Z collegiate athletes.

### ***Research Question 3 Theme Summary***

The study highlights that negative coaching behaviors, such as yelling without corrective instruction, detrimentally impact the morale of Generation Z

collegiate athletes. Despite being asked about positive and negative coaching experiences, the participants frequently discussed the negative aspects, indicating a negative response in morale to coaching practices lacking positive reinforcement. The participant's view aligns with previous findings that Gen Z values transparent and constructive communication. Key issues include the negative effect of public criticism without praise, which undermines confidence and team morale. In contrast, effective communication, trust-building, and the use of current technology in coaching practices are crucial for maintaining positive morale and engagement among these athletes. The study underscores the importance of coaches understanding and adapting their methods to support the preferences and values of Gen Z athletes, emphasizing the need for clarity, support, and constructive feedback in coaching, and the need for further research.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Research on Gen Z-aged collegiate athletes is limited (Schailleé et al., 2021). Due to the limited literature available, the significance of the findings from this research may offer new insights to aid coaches working with Gen Z collegiate athletes. The findings reveal Gen Z athletes' preferred coaching behaviors within collegiate athletic teams and positive team morale, a critical component of a team's success. By exploring the influence of coaching behaviors experienced by Gen Z athletes, this study was also an attempt to address the knowledge gap and contribute to the existing literature, potentially informing team dynamics and performance.

Future studies should prioritize the inclusion of a more extensive and diverse qualitative sample of Gen Z collegiate athletes. Increasing the range of participants is crucial to ensure the broader generalizability of the findings (Gibbs, 2007; Griffin, 2024). By including athletes from different sports, levels of competition, and multiple universities, more comprehensive and representative findings may be obtained. In-depth studies on negative coaching behaviors are also important. Understanding the origins of these behaviors, their persistence, and ways to mitigate their effects on team morale is a pressing need in this field. I envision possible future studies that could address these aspects.

### ***Conduct Longitudinal Research***

Longitudinal research has the potential to reveal how coaching behaviors influence morale over a designated period. A longitudinal approach may reveal how immediate and long-term coaching behaviors influence athletes' morale throughout their collegiate careers, potentially tracking the morale of an incoming freshman class to graduation. A more extended study could enable researchers to identify patterns and measure the effectiveness of specific coaching strategies in cultivating morale.

### ***Compare Generational Experiences***

Each generation's experience with coaching behaviors may be unique. Research to understand the experiences of Gen Z athletes juxtaposed with previous generations (e.g., Millennials, Gen X, etc.) may offer insights into generational differences in these experiences. Identifying such differences may aid in improving coaching behaviors that influence morale.

### ***Gather Coaches Perspectives***

Interviews with coaches are also suggested to gain the opposite perspective on behaviors that influence Gen Z athletes and team morale. Conducting interviews with coaches who lead Gen Z collegiate athletes could also help identify gaps between athlete and coach perceptions of positive morale. By understanding these differences, researchers can suggest tailored approaches to bridge communication gaps and enhance morale across generations within athletic teams.

### ***Research Psychological Factors***

Examining the role of psychological factors that a Gen Z collegiate athlete encounters, such as mental health and social factors, may influence morale. Issues of team dynamics, teammate relationships, and even social media may be significant to understanding the relationship between coaching behaviors and morale. Considering these factors could provide a better view of how external and internal pressures affect athlete morale, allowing more effective coaching strategies tailored to the challenges faced by Gen Z athletes.

By addressing these areas of suggestion, future research, in collaboration with academic researchers, sports psychologists, and coaches involved in collegiate

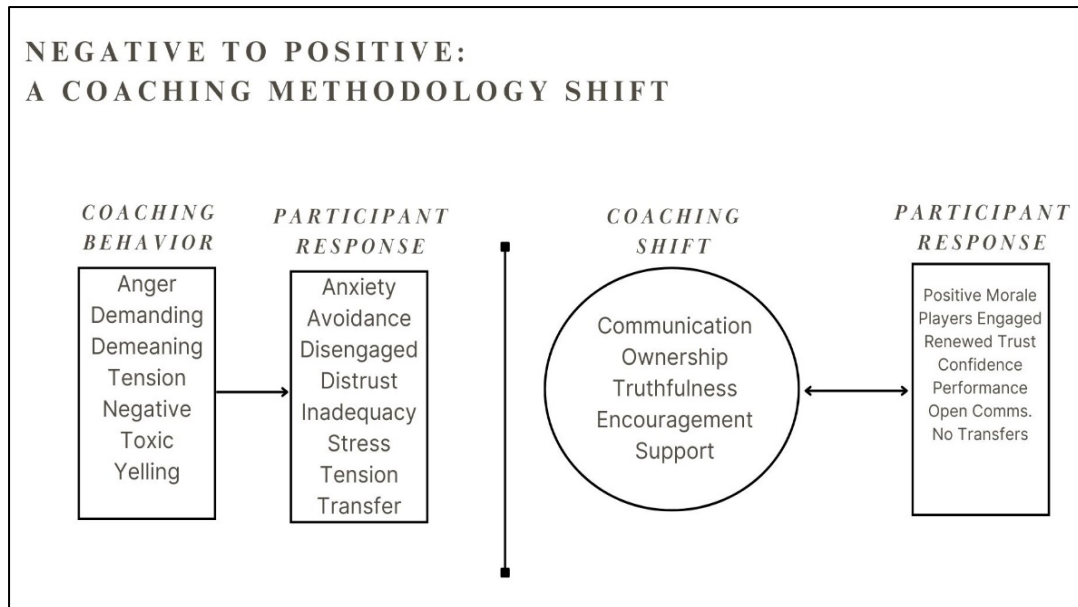


athletics, can provide a more nuanced and thorough understanding of how coaching behaviors influence Gen Z collegiate athletes' morale. A longitudinal study may yield the most compelling data and involve the most challenging research of the suggested studies. Periodic qualitative interviews could improve the data and offer further insights into the intricate exchanges between coach and athlete. Further research could lead to developing targeted coaching strategies that enhance performance and promote a healthy, supportive environment conducive to Gen Z collegiate athletes' personal and athletic growth.

### **Implications**

Using a qualitative approach, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with athletes from a specific college, approved by Institutional Review Boards, to explore the real effects of coaching influences on morale. The study has compelling implications for the critical role of coaching behaviors in influencing team morale and success among Gen Z collegiate athletes. The implications of the findings of this study hold both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the implications bring forward new insights and perspectives to the existing literature. Practically, coaches who guide Gen Z collegiate athletes can use the findings and recommendations in this research on preferences and best practices to build or maintain positive team and personal morale. An additional practical implication is the possibility of a new metric measuring a coach's influence on the team's morale, which may prove to be as essential as other team statistics.

The findings implicate a significant shift in perception. Contrary to the traditional belief among some coaches that yelling on its own motivates, Gen Z athletes find it counterproductive when unaccompanied by corrective instruction. The participants agreed that they respond more positively to technical instruction and encouragement, which significantly boosts morale, rather than yelling on its own, which has been shown in this research to lower morale and performance, as indicated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2***Methodology Shift and Results*

Notably, this research revealed that the negative impact of yelling without corrective instruction does not imply that Gen Z athletes cannot handle stress from yelling coaches. Rather, it underscores the need for a nuanced approach to coaching that aligns with Gen Z preferences for constructive feedback and mentorship for improved morale and success. This research insight is crucial for transforming coaching methodologies to foster individual and team success through positive morale.

**Conclusion**

The implications of this study are profound, suggesting a pivotal shift in coaching behavior to reflect the Gen Z collegiate athlete dynamic that could redefine success in collegiate sports programs through improved team and personal morale. As Gen Z becomes a larger demographic in collegiate athletics, understanding and adapting to their unique needs and characteristics is beneficial and essential for all team stakeholders. This research revealed that coaching practices incorporating mentoring, praise, and corrective strategies that include instruction to resonate with Gen Z traits and preferences will ultimately enhance team morale and lead to greater success. Coaches who align their behaviors with

Gen Z athletes' values, needs, and preferences will positively influence their teams and morale.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

#### **RQ1: What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced your personal morale?**

1. What behaviors from your current coach(s) have the most influence on you and your teams overall morale?

*As needed to prompt further discussion:*

*Could you share an example of a coaching behavior, at the collegiate level, that you feel had a noticeable effect on team morale, either positively or negatively?*

#### **RQ2: What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influenced *positive* team morale on your collegiate athletic team?**

1. Could describe an instance where your current coach exhibited behavior that positively influenced your team's morale?

*As needed to prompt further discussion:*

*Could you elaborate on the behaviors (verbal or non-verbal) by your current coach that influence a positive atmosphere within the team?*

#### **RQ3: What coaching behaviors have you experienced that influence *negative* team morale on your collegiate athletic team?**

1. Could you share an example where you observed your coaching behavior that significantly influenced the team's morale negatively?

*As needed to prompt further discussion:*

*What coaching styles or approaches have you encountered while working with your coach that you find preferable or resonate with you?*

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Consent Form**

You are invited to take part in a research interview on \_\_\_\_\_.

You were chosen for the interview because you meet the criterion of a current collegiate athlete, between 18 – 22 years of age and a full-time college student. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have as a part of the interview process.

This interview is being conducted by a researcher named Erik Bennett, who is a doctoral student at Southeastern University.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this interview is to learn about the participant's experiences with a coaching behavior and how it affects both athlete and team morale.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Interview:**

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the interview. No one at ██████████ College will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the interview. If you decide to join the interview now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal. No information you provide will be shared with your coaches or any other parties outside of the dissertation committee. Your actual names, team affiliation or university enrollment will not be used in the report of the interview.



**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Interview:**

There is the minimal risk of psychological stress during this interview. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. There are no benefits to you from participating in this interview. The interviewer will benefit by practicing interviewing skills.

**Compensation:**

There is no compensation for participating in this interview.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this interview project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the interview.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher's name is Erik Bennett. The researcher's Chair is Dr. Debra Dean. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at ebennett1@seu.edu or the instructor at djdean@seu.edu. If you want to communicate privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact Dr. Joshua Henson, the Chair of the Southeastern University PhD/DSL programs, at jhenson@seu.edu

The researcher will provide a copy of this form to keep if requested. Forms can be signed digitally.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the interview.

Printed Name of  
Participant

Participant's Written  
Signature

Researcher's Written  
Signature

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