

2023

Differences in High School Student Athlete Perceptions of Coach Leadership Behaviors

Clarissa Adams
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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Clarissa M. Adams

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Differences in High School Student Athlete Perceptions of Coach Leadership Behaviors

by

Clarissa M. Adams

MA, Grand Canyon University, 2007

BS, Montclair State University, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

The dynamics between athletic coaches and their players have been widely studied with leadership as the focus. The problem was that there is limited literature on the differences in perceptions of high school student athletes regarding their coach's leadership behaviors. The purpose of this group comparison study was to examine the differences in student athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behavior as measured by the Revised Leadership Scale for Sports scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes. Chelladurai's multidimensional model of leadership was the theoretical foundation for this study. The invitation to the study with a link to an anonymous survey was distributed to the parents of high school student athletes through social media and resulted in a sample of 192 high school student athletes. The one-way analysis of variance and Bonferroni test revealed that there were statistical differences in the following leadership categories: democratic $F(2,189) = 7.37, p < .05$ between freshman and varsity participation levels and junior varsity and varsity participation levels; training and instruction $F(2,189) = 3.11, p < .05$ between the freshman and varsity participation levels, and situational consideration $F(2,189) = 3.41, p < .05$ between freshman and varsity participation levels. This study may support positive social change by informing current high school athletic coaches on how they might be perceived by student athletes and the implications of those perceptions when assessing the climate, culture, and efficacy of their athletic program. Additionally, this might also inform educational stakeholders on what coaching behaviors should be exhibited for each participation level when evaluating athletic coaches.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my friend and mentor, Dr. Gerald Glisson, who inspired me in life and continues to do so in death. I would not have started this journey if he had not thrown down the challenge. There were many times I wanted to quit, but in one of his last text messages, he said, “You keep grinding for greatness, give it to God, and he will provide”; without that message, I would not have accomplished this task. It has been an honor and a privilege to expand on what he started; I hope he is proud.

I dedicate this to my support system that I am so blessed to have in my life. I would not have been able to accomplish this without the love, support, and sacrifices of my husband, Rick, and children, Alessandra and Ricky. I also dedicate this accomplishment to the little ones, Eddie and Greyson; always remember what Walt Disney said, “all our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them.”

Acknowledgments

Completing this journey would not have been possible without the support of several people. My sincere appreciation and respect go to my chairperson and methodologist, Dr. Paulette Koss and Dr. Eilene Edejer. You both stood by me for this very long and arduous process. I could never have picked better individuals to help guide, encourage, deescalate, and celebrate with me on this adventure. Thank you!

Thank you to my professional network. Colleagues' turned friends, Dr. Yelena Gould, Dr. Karen Johnson, Shannon Malone, and Dina Scacchetti, your mentorship, advice, and constant encouragement were invaluable throughout this process. To the Eastside High School Physical Education Department, especially Robert Black who kept the department and me afloat. I could never thank you enough.

A special thank you goes to my village (my dad, Ed, mother and father-in-law, brother and sisters-in-law, Jamisin, Marla, Grandma Betty, and Aunt Laura), who have supported me by picking up the slack with the kids and dogs and helping Rick when I could not be there.

Finally, I would like to give sincere gratitude to my mom, Viola, who is one of the strongest, most resilient, and hard-working women I know; my Aunt Anna and Uncle Andy, who do not know the meaning of the word rest; Alexis, who's perseverance and fearlessness amaze me every day; and Grandma, I miss you beyond words and wish you were here. The unwavering love and support you all have shown me have gotten me to this point. You have always helped me, and words could never express how much I love and appreciate you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Participation in athletics provides young people with various educational, physical, and psychological benefits under the support of an athletic coach. The athletic coach has the ability to create an environment that could shape future experiences through the use of certain leadership behaviors. Examining the differences in high school student athlete's perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors can contribute to understanding their influence at varying levels of participation. This study may support positive social change by informing current high school athletic coaches on how they might be perceived by student athletes and the implications of those perceptions when assessing the climate, culture, and efficacy of their athletic program. Additionally, this might also inform educational stakeholders on what coaching behaviors should be exhibited for each participation level when evaluating athletic coaches. It also would provide coaches with the feedback on how they are perceived, which has been linked to athlete performance, team cohesion, team satisfaction, and coach efficacy (Khorram, 2022).

Background

Although the title of a coach infers that the individual is a team leader, not all coaches possess the leadership skills necessary to fulfill the role (Tucker & Black, 2020). Successful leaders can change an athlete's behavior which satisfies the coach's need; an effective leader supports the athlete in satisfying the needs of the team and the athlete (Misasi et al., 2020). The determinants of an athletic coach's effectiveness stem from the ability of the athlete to learn from them in conjunction with their perceptions of the

coach's leadership behaviors (Smoll & Smith, 1989). An essential aspect of coaching lies in the athlete's perception of the coach's behaviors (Horn, 2008). The leadership behaviors exhibited by coaches are critical elements in facilitating physical development, personal development, acquisition of life skills, enjoyment in activity, promoting healthy behaviors, and providing students with a role model whose actions they may strive to replicate (Ettl Rodríguez, 2018; Hinojosa & Maxwell, 2018; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

Many researchers have studied sports leadership from various perspectives (Bandura & Kavussanu, 2018; Charbonneau et al., 2001; Cotterill & Fransen, 2021). Jambor and Zhang (1997) studied the differences between male and female coaches using the Coach's Self-Evaluation Version of the Revised Leadership Scale for Sport (RLSS). The researchers used 162 participants from junior high school, high school, and college-level coaching staff. The results indicated no statistically significant differences in leadership in the coach's gender, but there were significant differences based on the coach's coaching level. Further expounding on Jambor and Zhang's study, Sullivan et al. (2012) examined how coach education was associated with the perceived leadership behaviors of coaches in youth sports. The findings emphasized the importance of coach education to improve coaching efficacy. The findings also underscored the need for educated and effective coaches when coaching ages 12-16. At that juncture, student athletes are developing in the sport, and selecting intentional behaviors to exhibit to encourage physical and psychological growth are essential coaching behaviors and establishing a meaningful relationship. There is a positive correlation between the

environment cultivated by the athletic coach and the student athlete's opportunity to practice autonomy; they could foster multiple life skills through sports (Cronin & Allen, 2018).

Research has also highlighted the different perceptions of student athletes. Instruction and training and closeness predicts athletes' satisfaction with leadership (Fouraki et al., 2020). In contrast, the athlete's role, leadership characteristics, and complementarity predict satisfaction from personal performance, demonstrating a need for understanding how leadership behaviors contribute to the athletes' satisfaction and psychological factors. In more recent research, findings revealed that the level of competition or division played a role in the perception of athletes, and coaches indicated that if applied to high school student athletes, perception might differ depending on whether they are freshman or junior varsity or varsity athlete (Misasi et al., 2020). Additionally, data revealed that gender affected the responses of both athletes and coaches.

Previous studies highlighted the multifaceted effect that an athletic coach had on the performance, development, and life of their student-athlete. However, there was a gap in research on the specific perceptions of high school student-athletes on their coach's leadership behaviors. These were examined, in this study, using the Athletes' Perception Version of the RLSS created by Zhang et al. (1997), which measures perceptions using a Likert scale. The results of this study have begun to fill that gap. Based on the findings of this study, school administration can use them as a guide to evaluate their athletic coaches and programs and secure funding for athletics. The findings might also allow

them to identify if coaches are exhibiting effective leadership behaviors for their target demographic. An effective coach can satisfy the team's needs and the athletes' personal needs, which supports the assertion that leadership is subjective and varies based on the needs of the specific group or participants (Chelladurai, 1980; Tucker & Black, 2020).

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was that limited literature addressed high school student athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors. Therefore, this quantitative comparative study was focused the differences in freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student-athlete's perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors using the Athletes' Perception version of the RLSS created by Zhang et al. (1997). Extensive research regarding the efficacy of coaches, athletic programs, and the perception of athletic coach's leadership behaviors through the lens of international student athletes, the coach, or intercollegiate athletes have been conducted (Calvo & Topa, 2019; Jambor & Zhang, 1997; Burdette, 2008; Sullivan et al., 2012; Tucker & Black, 2020). A positive perspective of the coach could alter the perception of an entire athletic program (Vermillion, 2014). Student athlete perceptions can inform the administration where to allocate resources, identify influential or detrimental aspects of the program, and create a better-rounded student athlete (Vermillion, 2014). The supposition is that student athletes' perceptions would hold coaches accountable, ensure that they are positive teachers and role models, and protect student athletes from potentially harmful coaching behavior that could have long-lasting effects.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative group comparison study was to examine the difference in student athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behavior as measured by the RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes. The role of the athletic coach in a young person's life is intricate and diverse (Lisinskiene, 2018). Through athletics, student athletes could develop or improve leadership skills, demonstrate personal growth, improve social skills, and succeed in current and future educational endeavors (Cronin & Allen, 2018; Cuffe et al., 2017; Sarı & Bayazit, 2017). These fundamental components of adolescent psychological, physical, and social development provide a persuasive case for participation in athletic programs as a critical element of well-rounded high school education. In addition, having the opportunity to participate in athletics and build a rapport with their coach has been shown to decrease the risk of dropping out, athletic ineligibility, delinquency, drugs, and violence, while increasing their chances for improved cerebral, affective, and behavioral capabilities (Aspen Institute, 2021; Eyler et al., 2018; Hinojosa & Maxwell, 2018; Rocha-Beverly, 2019). A successful coach can reach the student physically and emotionally, helping them unlock their potential and push past any boundaries that may hinder their growth, which has lasting implications both on and off the court or playing field (Aşçi et al., 2015; Northouse, 2021).

Research Question and Hypotheses

RQ: What is the difference in RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes?

*H*₀: There are no significant statistical differences between the RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes.

*H*_A: There are significant statistical differences between the RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes.

Theoretical Foundation

The multidimensional model of leadership (MML), created by Chelladurai (1980, 1990, 2007, 2012), is commonly used to describe coaching and leadership connections and was the framework for this study. It delineates how the factors interact when congruency exists between the preferred, required, and actual behavior, which is influenced by antecedents, situational factors, leadership characteristics, and member characteristics (Chelladurai, 1980). The MML posits that since multiple factors influence leadership, effective coaching also must be multidimensional (Chelladurai, 1980, 1990, 2007, 2012). Thus, the efficacy of the athletic coach to motivate athletes, increase athlete satisfaction, develop a relationship with the athletes, have situational awareness, and assist athletes in performing at their apex is determined by their ability to establish a dynamic that allows for all those aspects to be accounted for and implemented. Cumulatively, these influence the performance of the individual athletes, the team, and the coach and are determinants of satisfaction (Vaughan, 2017).

Nature of the Study

This quantitative group comparison study involved the athlete's perception version of the RLSS by Zhang et al. (1997). It was based on the original LSS created by Chelladurai and Saleh in 1980, which encompassed five dimensions of coaching

behavior, with the revised version adding a sixth dimension (Zhang et al., 1997). The RLSS has three versions: athlete's perceptions, athlete's preferences, and coach self-evaluation. Permission was obtained to use the RLSS by the creators to use in this study (Appendix A). The athlete's perception version of the questionnaire, a Likert Scale, was completed by high school student-athletes.

The RLSS contains six dimensions of coaching with approximately 60 items regarding training and instruction, democratic, autocratic, social support, positive feedback, and situational consideration. Each item is preceded with the phrase "My coach ...," with the response options of *Always*, equivalent to 100% of the time, *Often*, equivalent to 75% of the time, *Occasionally*, equivalent to 50% of the time, *Seldom* which is 25% of the time, and *Never* which equated to 0% of the time (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). The responses were entered into SPSS for statistical analysis of student perceptions using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Definitions

Autocratic behavior: Demonstrates individuality in decision-making and independence (Chelladurai, 1980; Zhang et al., 1997).

Democratic behavior: Demonstrates behavior that allows for greater involvement and decision-making (Chelladurai, 1980; Zhang et al., 1997).

Leadership behavior: A person's character and actions in a leadership role (Smith & Smoll, 2017).

Positive feedback: Giving praise and constructive criticism for a superior performance that encourages the athlete to perform well (Chelladurai, 1980; Zhang et al., 1997).

Revised Leadership Scale for Sport: A revised version of the Leadership Scale for Sport initially created by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980). It contains three versions, athlete preference, athlete perception, and coach self-evaluation, which address six factors of coaching: training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support behavior, positive feedback behavior, and situational consideration behavior (Zhang et al., 1997).

Situational consideration: Coaching behavior that considers circumstantial factors such as time, game, environment, gender, individual competencies, and athlete health (Zhang et al., 1997).

Training and instruction: The coach's ability to improve athletes' performances by emphasizing and facilitating demanding and strenuous training to improve the sport's skills, techniques, and tactics (Chelladurai, 1980; Zhang et al., 1997).

Assumptions

The first assumption was that the participants would be truthful when categorizing their perceptions of their athletic coach's leadership behaviors and make decisions based on their opinion, experience, knowledge, and participation level. The anonymous voluntary survey allowed the participant to be candid or not participate and validated the assumption. Additionally, perceptions could differ due to the maturation level of the student-athlete, and the participation level was also an accepted assumption.

Scope and Delimitations

As noted in the problem statement, there is limited literature on high school student athletes' differences in their perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors. Therefore, this quantitative comparative study filled the gap in the literature on the differences in freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athlete's perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors using the Athletes' Perception version of the RLSS created by Zhang et al. (1997). Due to the potential number of participants and variations of the questionnaire, the population of focus was high school student athletes and the athlete's perception version of the tool. Prior research suggested that evaluating student athlete's perceptions might hold coaches accountable and ensure they are positive teachers and role models and protect student-athletes from potentially harmful coaching behavior that could have long-lasting effects (Gearity, 2009). Therefore, the perceived leadership behaviors of athletic coaches by student-athletes were compared with other student athletes' perceptions to gather the most recognized leadership behaviors of high school athletic coaches.

Athletic coaching leadership stems from multiple leadership theories. The framework for this study, the MML, was selected because it was a combination of contingency, situational, and path-goal theory, which addressed the coach, the environment, and the student athlete. The individual leadership theories needed to account for the comprehensive nature and depth of coaching student athletes.

Limitations

One limitation regarding the internal validity of this study was presented in the population's potential to engage in social interaction regarding the survey. Since the survey was administered online, there was no way to determine if the student athlete was completing the survey alone, with teammates, or with parents providing their insights into the coach's leadership behaviors. To mitigate this threat, all informational documentation and the survey informed students that they should not talk about their participation in the survey. A second limitation regarding internal validity was that some teenagers are impassioned regarding several things at any given time and tend to change their views relatively quickly. Therefore, this study's results might only indicate the perceptions of some of the population of high school student athletes.

Regarding external validity, a limitation might be data variability. The minimum number of participants needed for this study was 159. Small-scale quantitative studies might produce findings that cannot be generalized to a larger population. Though 159 student athletes were the minimum, all completed surveys were included in the analysis and results of the study. Using the RLSS, an established instrument should resolve the construct validity issues.

All current high school students and those who participated in the 2021-2022 school year from charter, public, private, and rural schools were eligible to participate, making confounding validity a potential issue. For example, a varsity player from a private high school who played in a more competitive division might perceive their coach's leadership behaviors differently than a varsity player who played for a rural high

school in a less competitive division. The gender of the athlete or the coach was also a variable. To analyze the majority of differences that could affect the findings, the demographic questionnaire asked for the student's gender and the type of school they attended; however, it did not account for the gender of the coach.

The opportunity for bias was present as I was, at the time, employed in an urban public school, a former athlete, and a former athletic coach at the time of the study. Acknowledging and understanding the present biases and a thorough research plan should have mitigated potential issues.

Significance

The results of this study began to fill a gap in research regarding the difference in perceptions of freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes. This study gathered insight into the most observed leadership behaviors of high school athletic coaches to examine if they are using developmentally appropriate behaviors at each level of participation. The behaviors an athletic coach uses have the potential to develop self-directed leaders who have strong communication skills and are adaptable members of society.

Summary

Chapter 1 outlined the research study, which examined if there were statistically significant differences in freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student-athlete's perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors, measured by the athletes' perception version of the RLSS created by Zhang et al. (1997). This study gives student athletes a voice and encourages them to share their perspectives regarding their coach's

leadership behaviors at varying participation levels. Chapter 2 evaluated the literature surrounding leadership and the RLSS. The chapter includes the literature search strategy, theoretical foundations, and a review of prior research supporting the need of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Despite sports' educational, physical, and psychological benefits, a decline in athletic participation has been identified (National Federation of High School Associations, 2019). Though factors such as lack of enjoyment or interest and family obligations might have contributed to the decision to cease participation for some, research revealed that rising participation costs, the desire for children to specialize in one or fewer sports, and the quality or behavior of the coach were also determining factors (Aspen Institute Sports and Society, 2021; Cronin & Allen, 2018). The purpose of this quantitative group comparison study was to examine the difference in student athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behavior as measured by the RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes. This chapter includes the literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, and a review of prior research supporting the need for the study.

Literature Search Strategy

An extensive literature search was conducted to support the investigation regarding high school student athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors. The search garnered peer-reviewed journals and articles from the Walden University Library and multiple databases, including EBSCOhost, Sage research, Complimentary Index, ProQuest, Digital Commons, Education Source, Taylor & Francis, and ERIC. Information was gathered from Google and Google Scholar, the Aspen Institute Health and Sports Program, The National Federation of State High School Associations, and the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) America. A search of the Scholar

Works database also provided dissertations and theses related to leadership and leadership in sports. The terminology was related to the research questions and included *leadership, leadership behaviors, athletics, high school coaches, student-athlete, high school student-athlete, participation levels, and participation in sports*. Coupling the terms in various combinations produced literature related to the research question and hypotheses. Multiple terminology combinations produced pertinent articles and books that aligned with the purpose of the research study.

Using the reference lists from articles also provided additional scholarly works applicable to the research study. The research question and hypotheses for this study focus on how or if the perceptions of high school student athletes differ regarding their coach's leadership behaviors at varying participation levels: freshman, junior varsity, and varsity as measured by the Likert Scale on the Athlete's Perception Version of the RLSS. Additionally, most scholarly works focused on the theoretical foundation, various leadership theories in sports, the differences between high school and intercollegiate athletics, characteristics of a good coach, suburban and urban athletics, leadership behaviors in sports, and the RLSS.

Theoretical Foundation

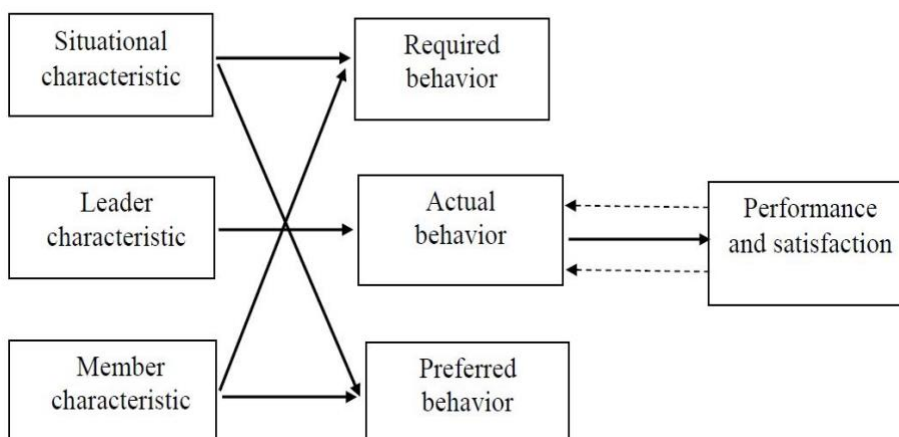
The study of coaching leadership behaviors in sports has been widely studied and has roots in contingency theory, situational leadership, and path-goal theory dating back to the 70s (Pitts et al., 2018). The previous theories concentrated on the situation, the leader/coach, or the follower/athlete, with the inability to adapt to an amalgamation of all three: the multidimensional leadership/coaching traits and follower/athlete. The MML

posits that situational factors, leadership characteristics, and member characteristics influence leadership; effective coaching must incorporate the required behaviors of the coach, the actual behaviors of the coach, and the preferred behaviors of the athletes (Chelladurai, 1980, 1990, 2007, 2012). Thus, the athletic coaches' efficacy to motivate athletes, increase athlete satisfaction, develop a relationship with the athletes, have situational awareness, and assist athletes in performing at their apex is determined by their ability to establish a dynamic that allows for all those aspects to be accounted for and implemented.

The MML, created by Chelladurai (1980, 1990, 2007, 2012), as displayed in Figure 1, was commonly used to describe the coaching and leadership connection. It was selected for this study because it accounts for all three factors: situational, leader, and member characteristics.

Figure 1

The Multidimensional Model of Leadership



This framework was appropriate for this study because it allowed for the identification of effective leadership behaviors based on sports settings and attempts to provide individuals with an understanding of the effect that an athletic coach's behavior has on the satisfaction and performance of the athlete. At the high school level, there are significant differences between the levels of participation and the physical and developmental attributes of the athletes. Hence, a one-size-all approach is ineffective when understanding the differences in member needs and characteristics, thus furthering the body of knowledge regarding the subject.

Literature Review

Sports participation has been linked to the Greek's social change efforts, with the Olympics' inception in 1896, where competition in the games was intended to bring unity and peace (Green, 2008). Athletics for school-age children dates to the beginning of organized and compulsory education as part of an effort by parents to organize their child's time out of school with the development of the Public-School Athletic League for Boys in New York in 1903 (Friedman, 2013). Organized youth athletics grew in popularity, and participation increased with the opening of many sports clubs for boys; however, the Depression caused many private athletic clubs to close, making it difficult for some children to participate in the fee-based programs invoked by the middle and upper class (Baker & Tracy, 2020). Consequently, a socioeconomic disparity is still present in athletics today.

This disparity and the decline continue today despite considerable evidence that there are far-reaching benefits to participating in athletics. In 2017, students from

financially secure homes were 35% more likely to participate in athletics than those from low-income households (Thompson, 2018). Various reasons could contribute to this decline; however, with wealth comes the ability for parents to enroll their children in private sports clubs and programs, which results in the deterioration of local leagues or schools' ability to attract and retain student-athletes (Thompson, 2018).

When it comes to the success of an athletic team or athlete, the most crucial factor is the guidance, knowledge, experience, and leadership demonstrated by the athletic coach during their social, psychological, technical, and tactical development of the athlete or athletic team, regardless of the ability or skill of the student athlete (Sarı & Bayazit, 2017). Additionally, the leadership framework assumed by an athletic coach affects the players' satisfaction and can alter the team's motivation based on their perceptions of the coach (Amorose & Horn, 2001; Horn, 2008). Leadership holds various connotations for many individuals and has been the subject of incalculable qualitative and quantitative research studies. The fluidity of the term has challenged researchers to create a theme or definition that encompasses its variability, and hundreds have emerged since the early 1900s based on several factors (Northouse, 2021). Northouse (2021) defined *leadership* as an assembly of people achieving a common goal through being influenced by an individual. It reflects a leader's diversity and behaviors, allowing followers to feel a sense of belonging while maintaining their individuality (Shore et al., 2018). Conversely, others have theorized that leadership is not a leader's attributes but the progressive actions a leader takes through exchanges with their followers (Aritz et al., 2017).

The efforts to define leadership, especially in competitive sports and coaching, have resulted in several leadership theories: authentic, trait, behavioral, interactional, situational, and transformational. The development of these theories contributed to the extensive body of knowledge to identify facets that differentiate influential leaders from less effective leaders by detecting characteristics, traits, behaviors, techniques, strategies, attitudes, and values (Kovach, 2018).

Authentic Leadership Theory

The authentic leadership theory implicates that leaders genuinely desire to lead and serve with purpose while empowering others through creating enduring relationships (George, 2003; Kovach, 2018). It is defined as a leader's ability to promote a psychologically positive and ethical climate and culture, nurture self-awareness, consistently implement core beliefs and moral character, and demonstrate transparency in their leadership (Bandura & Kavussanu, 2018; Northouse, 2013). Walumbwa et al. (2008) further dissected it into the four interconnected dimensions: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, relational transparency, and balanced processing. Leadership is deemed authentic when leaders exhibit awareness of their influence on followers, convey that established principles guide their actions, act ethically in the face of adversity, and are transparent in decision-making (Bandura et al., 2019). The cohesion between words and actions establishes a workable relationship where trust develops, resulting in physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement that leads to sustainable and genuine performance (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bandura & Kavussanu, 2018; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Successful leaders in the 21st century must develop personal and significant relationships with their followers (George, 2003). These relationships are necessary for the followers to completely give themselves to the task, resulting in greater loyalty to the leader (George, 2003). Coaches perceived as authentic leaders can bolster meaningful relationships, increase commitment and motivation, and foster positive follower behavior through transparent reciprocal relationships, demonstrating the relevancy of authentic leadership in athletic coaching (Bandura & Kavussanu, 2018).

Trait Theory

The trait theory leadership approach asserts that there are fundamental characteristics and behaviors that an individual possesses that would cause them to be effective or ineffective leaders (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). This theory stemmed from the great man theory with the fundamental conviction that “leaders are born, not made or trained” (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Conversely, the interpretation that leaders are born with the predisposition to possess traits to make them effective in certain situations would also insinuate that they might be ineffective in other situations (Cotterill & Fransen, 2021). According to Northouse (2013), trait theory was valuable in advancing leadership because it provided specific standards in the attempt to distinguish between leaders and those who are not.

Sports psychologists have extensively researched personality traits as they relate to athletics (Laborde et al., 2020). The five-factor model, which consists of five broad trait classifications—neuroticism extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness—can distinguish which individuals would be more successful in

various athletic-associated contexts (Allen et al., 2011; Laborde et al., 2020). Research has shown that top athletic coaches consistently demonstrate increased levels of extraversion and conscientiousness and decreased levels of neuroticism (Jones et al., 2014; Piepiora, 2021, 2021; Stanford et al., 2022). Successful coaches and successful athletes possessed similar personality traits (Hardy et al., 2017). However, though trait theory provides a premise for studying leadership and a framework for identifying traits, it primarily focuses on the leader and not the situation or the followers (Northouse, 2013).

Behavioral Theory

Behavioral leadership theories contend that leaders are “made and not born,” suggesting that anyone can become a leader using dominant leadership behaviors (Crust & Lawrence, 2006; Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). This concept directly opposed trait theory, which theorized that leadership traits are innate and only select individuals are born with leadership qualities. The behavioral leadership model accepts that other leaders can replicate and implement the leader’s behavior and that actions instead of qualities are the critical success factors (Chemers, 2000; Yukl, 1999). This leadership style is adaptable in that individuals can select the behaviors and actions they want to employ and become the leader they want to be, and they are flexible based on the context. Equally, though there is versatility in the behaviors chosen by the leader, there needs to be a prescribed behavior or framework to guide the leader during the decision-making process or situation (Avolio et al., 2004; Conger & Kanungo, 1987).

Many studies have been based on the leadership behaviors of athletic coaching and how their behaviors influence the population they are coaching. Behaviors such as

authoritarianism (Penman et al., 1974), communication, the coach-athlete relationship, athlete burnout (Choi et al., 2020), and abusive leadership behaviors and athlete satisfaction (Kim et al., 2020) are a few. As the research on leadership continued, it was evident that there is not one set of behaviors that can become associated with the identification process of a successful or unsuccessful leader; however, there was a myriad of factors for consideration, and similar factors were consistently identified for each category (Crust & Lawrence, 2006).

Interactional Theory

Weinberg and Gould (2019) defined interactional theory as the leader's ability to consider their attributes concerning the setting when determining the appropriate behaviors needed, thus creating an effective leader. Cansoy (2018) simplified it by asserting that it is how leaders meet the needs of their followers and how the followers meet the needs or expectations of the leader. The interactional approach to leadership proposes that effective leadership behaviors can be learned depending on the situation (Chase, 2010). Conversely, Zaccaro et al. (2018) contended that despite the empirical research regarding situational considerations' role, the theory is conceptually weak due to a lack of supportive evidence. It also implies that if effective leadership behaviors can be learned based on the situation, ineffective behaviors can also be acquired based on the situation.

In an athletic context, the coaching behaviors deemed effective in one sport may not translate to another due to characteristics specific to that athletic activity (Crust & Lawrence, 2006; Zaccaro et al., 2018). An interactional approach to leadership stresses

that effective leadership behaviors must match the situation and that there is not one type of leadership trait for every situation, making it essential for athletic coaches or leaders of any organization to be able to adjust their leadership behaviors at any given time (Wallace & Shepherd, 2020; Zaccaro et al., 2018).

Situational Leadership Theory

At the cellular level, situational leadership theory (SLT) proposed that different situations warrant different leadership abilities (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). However, SLT is more complex and based on the interactions of multiple components: task direction, relationship behavior, and the readiness level of the followers (Schermerhorn, 1997). To be an effective leader while employing SLT, the leader must adapt their behaviors to the developmental level of the followers, allowing them to complete the tasks using their ability to transfer leadership skills and knowledge from one situation to another (Pitts et al., 2018; Seong, 2021). Situational considerations could vary in time, environment, developmental stage, skill level, gender, and health conditions. This type of leadership requires the leader to have in-depth knowledge of the followers to support them while increasing or decreasing their task-oriented behaviors based on multiple factors (Beauchamp & Martin, 2014).

Situational factors could alter the efficacy of the leader or athletic coach, making it essential for them to adopt flexible behaviors (Fiedler, 2020). To improve efficacy, athletic coaches should continually amend their leadership styles based on the preferences, skills, and maturity of the athletes they are coaching (Kim et al., 2020, 2021). Research has shown that athletic coaches who used situational leadership models

had higher rates of player satisfaction, cultivated the coach-player relationship, and were overall more successful (Ali, 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Pitts et al., 2018).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns' (1978) opinion of transformational leadership theory (TFL) was that great leaders could alter followers' motives for completing tasks. A leader who placed learning at the forefront of their practice was a concept introduced previously (Brookfield & Preskill, 2009). Northouse (2021) defined transformational leadership as a style that concentrated on the human element and focused on followers' feelings, standards, beliefs, principles, and long-term goals. Transformational leaders inspire others by creating awareness and unlocking that person's intrinsic motivations to see the plan through and beyond expectations (Adedigba & Sulaiman, 2020).

Transformational leadership theory has become more widely recognized for the potential it has as a leadership practice for youth coaching; however, the existing literature only offered perceptions into the varieties of athletic outcomes associated with the theory identifying several intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental that contributed to the coach-athlete connection (Turnnidge & Côté, 2018).

High School Level Sports and Intercollegiate Level Sports

Athletics teaches young people life skills and other practical assets that prepare them for future endeavors, such as college and career. Athletic participation teaches collaboration, resilience, teamwork, and physical benefits (Waid & Uhrich, 2019). Coaching and developing student-athletes occurs by cultivating an internal psychological process motivating the student-athlete to participate in sports (Dahab et al., 2019).

Evidence also suggests that the coach's behavior is a significant factor in a student-athlete's psychological, psychosocial, and physical development regardless of age (Kim et al., 2020; Wałach-Biśta, 2019). These findings establish that the coach's role and the leadership behaviors exhibited by the coach hold implications that might affect the student-athlete's moral character, motivation, and success in the long term (Stanger et al., 2013).

High School

Many students decide to participate in high school sports for multiple reasons. The National Federation of State High School Associations (2022) identified reasons such as love of the sport, desire to become part of the school community, help with the transition from elementary to high school, cultivating friendships, maintaining friendships for health benefits, and aspirations to participate in sports beyond high school. Research also indicates that students who participate in a quality athletic program are more likely to demonstrate the following: remain in school, have higher grade point averages, score better on standardized tests, rank higher in class, have lower absenteeism rates, have a greater propensity for attaining high-school and college degrees, and facilitate a more favorable adult labor market (Cuffe et al., 2017).

Gould and Carson (2010) examined the relationship between perceived coaching behaviors and the developmental benefits of high school sports participation. A survey of former high school student-athletes revealed that coaches who emphasized competitive strategies, and goal setting, cultivated a positive rapport, and who identified sports themes that interconnect with life lessons reported the development of emotional,

cognitive, and social benefits from sports participation (Gould & Carson, 2010).

Conversely, former student-athletes surveyed by Gould and Carson (2010) who reported a negative rapport with their athletic coach felt stress, exclusion, and a toxic group environment. Garcia and Subia (2019) supported beneficial claims with their research identifying that the students who participated in high school athletics had increased academic performance and higher athletic performance motivated by their desire to compete; however, they had difficulty identifying life skills that were acquired.

A high school athletic coach's role is complex and often extends beyond the court or field. A high school athletic coach plays a vital role as an educator and a mentor in a young athlete's life (Amorose & Horn, 2001; Camiré & Kendellen, 2016; Christensen et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2021; Misasi et al., 2020). Coaches are viewed as role models and, in some cases, parental figures. Research indicates that athletes who receive support from their coaches tend to progress faster and farther in developmental processes (Lefebvre et al., 2021). Exploration into the efficacy of athletic coaches as mentors has revealed that a quality athletic coach who embraces the multiplicity of their role in a student-athlete life has a more significant effect on students completing high school, college, and the transfer of life skills (Christensen et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2021).

Intercollegiate

The National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) report from the 2018-2019 High School Athletics Participation Survey, conducted by the National Federation of State High School Association, demonstrates that out of approximately seven million high school athletes, only 6% go on to participate in either Division I, II, or III athletics in

college. These students are elite in their sport and must be able to manage their time between academics and rigorous training, practice, and game schedules. Collegiate student-athletes have academic support, medical care, elite coaching, and facilities (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2022).

The coach-athlete dynamic is also complex at this level of performance. Most research on student-athlete's perceptions of coaching behaviors stems from intercollegiate studies. Researchers have identified variables such as instruction and training, coach-athlete relationships, athlete leadership, the athlete's role, and complementarity positively correlated with student-athlete perceptions of leadership behaviors at the intercollegiate level (Fouraki et al., 2020). Research has also found that coaches who provide a positive and supportive team environment, positive feedback, focused instruction and training, and create intrapersonal relationships with the athletes help build confidence within the team, satisfying the needs of the athletes and allowing them to perform at their peak (Forlenza et al., 2018).

Equally, there is a greater level of dissatisfaction and less desire to participate when coach-driven activities strain interrelationships or when there is intent to develop certain players instead of the team resulting in a high turnover rate (Vveinhardt & Fominiene, 2020). Vveinhardt and Fominiene (2020) also found that some coaches use psychological influence measures to drive away athletes that do not fit the mold of a successful athlete instead of implementing training at the intercollegiate level. In a qualitative study, the researcher sought to explore athlete perceptions of poor coaching in collegiate, professional, and semi-professional sports, participants who experienced poor

coaching did not like or respect their coach, labeling them ineffective, felt they would have performed better under a coach who focused more on instruction, social support, and positive feedback (Gearity, 2009).

Characteristics of Good Coaches

The premise of good coaching has always been subjective because, like leadership, everyone has a style specific to their discipline or organization. Leadership, like coaching, is an amalgamation of an individual's attributes, skills, and traits that help followers meet the organizational objectives, thus making them successful (Yukl, 2011).

To be an effective athletic coach, the individual must have an in-depth knowledge of the sport. The coach's breadth of knowledge is a substantial factor in the coach's success (Frost, 2009). From basic skills to advanced tactics and strategy, sport-specific knowledge allows the coach to develop effective and efficient practices, provide constructive feedback, and adjust game settings (Frost, 2009; Mason et al., 2020). Frost (2009) notes that knowledge of the sport does not guarantee success; however, the coach must understand how to leverage their knowledge to benefit the athletes and meet goals while providing an organized atmosphere for athletes to be successful.

Part of creating a climate and culture of success involves adopting the mindset of a life-long learner. It involves keeping current with new training techniques, nutrition, sport psychology, safety, and anything else that would contribute to the growth of the coach and team. (Denison & Avner, 2011) contend that athletic coaches must practice introspection and commit themselves to be lifelong learners who are less likely to succumb to the dangers of complacency. Research has established that the level of coach

education regarding content and pedagogy determines coaching efficacy, illuminating that more research must occur at varying competition levels (Denison & Avner, 2011; Gilbert, 2017; Sullivan et al., 2012). Gilbert (2017) notes that some coaches who do not have a formal background in sports psychology struggle to teach the game's strategic side and more skills. In contrast, other coaches believe athletes will acquire the tactical aspect by modeling. Regardless, an athletic coach is responsible for teaching a student-athlete all aspects of the game.

Researchers are divided on the efficacy of formal coach training, stating that the programs do not effectively meet the diverse needs of the coaches, whereas others claim that they do (Erickson et al., 2008; Ettl Rodríguez, 2018; Lisinskiene, 2018; Van Woezik et al., 2022). More recent studies have determined that accessing resources in a less formal setting, engaging in peer mentoring, and interacting with other coaches is more appealing (Denison & Avner, 2011; Erickson et al., 2008; Van Woezik et al., 2022).

Communication is essential for any effective leader or athletic coach (Cherubini, 2019; Flaws, 2021; Gould et al., 2006, 2020; Pandolfi, 2020). The ability of a coach to communicate effectively and meet all student-athlete's needs can take multiple forms in any situation. Coaches must verbalize expectations, provide quality feedback, motivate, and convey empathy with their words, but they must also demonstrate active listening and appropriate body language (Cherubini, 2019; Pandolfi, 2020). Gould et al. (2020) identified digital communication as a convenience and a challenge for present-day coaches and athletes. Individuals who have grown up in the digital age of the 21st century might be easier to connect with, progressive, tolerant of diversity, and realistic, but also

potentially have trouble in social situations, anxiety, depression, reduced attention spans, and might lack intrinsic motivation and mental resilience (Gould et al., 2020). These factors make a compelling case for the importance of the coach-athlete relationship and understanding the best way to communicate, meet the team and individual goals, and create an environment conducive to success and understanding most effectively.

One of the main objectives of leadership is to bring a diverse group of individuals together to work toward a common goal. Theorist Thomas Peters (2005) believes great leaders become great by empowering others. The leader or coach must view themselves as the group or team's leader and lead by example. Research supported the notion that the best and most influential coaches were the ones who employed a collective leadership approach and who empowered their athletes to develop their leadership quality (Cronin & Allen, 2018; Falcão et al., 2020; Fransen et al., 2020; Gearity, 2009; Hakimi et al., 2010; Peters, 2005). Some instances of leading by example mean that the leader demonstrates empathy, and respect, recognizes hard work, develops relationships, shares leadership, fosters open communication, creates opportunities to lead, and embraces diversity (Peters, 2005).

Kovach (2018) notes that in most achievement-oriented settings, such as sports, the focus is placed on the individual(s) who are instrumental in reaching or exceeding the predicated goals set before engaging in the activity, emphasizing the role of individuals designated as the leader. However, in youth sports at any level, the primary focus should be on the student-athlete and how the coach's pedagogical choices influence the evolution and development of the athletes (Griffin et al., 2018).

Suburban Sports and Urban Sports

A United States Government Accountability Office (2017) study reported that 39% of high school students participated in high school sports. However, only 32% of students in urban schools and 27% in high-poverty schools participate (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017). For the 2018-2019 school year, the last full year before the pandemic, the National Federation of State High School Association (NFHSA) (2019) reported that sports participation had declined by approximately 43,000 after a slight resurgence in the 2017-2018 school year.

Pre-pandemic and post-pandemic, the decline in athletic participation for many districts stemmed from increasing demands for improved academic performance, a decreasing school budget, and the popularity of club sports, causing districts to act by decreasing competition levels and eliminating less popular sports to reduce operational, administrative, and coaching costs (Bennett et al., 2020; Eyler et al., 2018; Tandon et al., 2021). A club sport is a competitive sports organization that is not affiliated with school sports, requires athletes to try out, train year-round with coaches, and has a fee to participate (Dahab et al., 2019). The attraction to club sports that offer benefits such as advanced competition, intensive skill development, increased playing time, and access to highly trained coaching, lock out students of low-income means with exorbitant costs and fees (Bennett et al., 2020). The estimated cost of club sports is \$500 to \$3000 annually, and those participating have a household income of more than \$100,000 (Pandya, 2021). Research has also shown that geography plays a role in accessibility to activities (Baker & Tracy, 2020; Solomon, 2020). More affluent areas possess facilities that are easily

accessible to accommodate walking or bicycle pedestrians, have low incidences of crime and violence, and have physically and visually appealing facilities, unlike low-income areas (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

Kroshus et al. (2021) conducted a study regarding the parental perspective on the costs and benefits of encouraging their children to participate in athletics between the ages of five and 18. Their findings were that regardless of socioeconomic status, all parents wanted their children to be physically active and have fun; however, parents of low socioeconomic status found sports as an opportunity to keep their children out of trouble and obtain an athletic scholarship to help them afford post-secondary education (Kroshus et al., 2021).

Researchers attribute student-athlete attrition to multiple factors (Solomon, 2020; Tandon et al., 2021). Examples are lack of experience in organized sports, lack of facility space, lack of school funding, high residential mobility, educational eligibility, lack of familial support, care for siblings, contributing to the household financially, and untrained coaches identified in multiple studies and reports as barriers to participation by parents and students of low-socioeconomic means (Aspen Institute, 2021; Falcão et al., 2020; Hinojosa & Maxwell, 2018).

Multiple media outlets have detailed the pros and cons of both avenues of athletic participation and the associated financial, physical, and mental cost; however, Bennett et al. (2020) illuminate that only a few scholarly researchers have investigated the subject in depth. The popularity of sports specialization and club athletics has created a division in the world of youth athletics, shifting it from being a seasonal pastime to being a year-

round commitment which increases the propensity for injury and burn-out and is diminishing school sports programs (Aspen Institute, 2020, 2021; Pandya, 2021).

Prior Studies of Athletes' Perceptions of Athletic Coaches

There has been extensive research conducted regarding the perception of athletic coach's leadership behaviors primarily through the point of view of elite athletes (Calvo & Topa, 2019; Foulds et al., 2019; Keatlholetswe & Malete, 2019, 2019; Nascimento-Júnior et al., 2018), the coach (Jambor & Zhang, 1997; Keatlholetswe & Malete, 2019; Lefebvre et al., 2021; Sullivan et al., 2012), or intercollegiate athletes (Berestetska, 2019; Misasi et al., 2020; Burdette, 2008; Pitts et al., 2018). However, there is limited research regarding high school student-athlete's perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors.

Elite Athletes

Calvo and Topa (2019) conducted a study of non-professional elite soccer players and found that positive feedback, training, and instruction were the most preferred leadership styles of the coach. Foulds et al. (2019) established that instruction and training, transferrable skills, and positive coach-athlete relationships were most important to high-performance athletes. They also looked for coaches to have a positive mindset and practice an athlete-centered mindset (Foulds et al., 2019). These claims echo the research of Nascimento-Júnior et al. (2018), who also discovered that elite athletes found their coach's leadership style was most effective when it was democratic, reinforced instruction and training, and provided social support.

The common thread for elite or high-performance athletes was that they found the coach to be more effective when their behaviors aligned with emotional and physical

support and democratic behaviors. In a study by Jiménez et al. (2019), coaches who demonstrated autocratic behaviors and used abusive tactics saw an increased cortisol level in their athletes, corresponding with the findings that the athletes had a negative perception of the coach and themselves with the increased stress levels. Conversely, a study of elite Malaysia athletes regarding local and foreign athletic coaches revealed a positive correlation between athlete's perceptions and player satisfaction in training and instruction, democratic, social support, positive feedback, and autocratic leadership styles (Razali et al., 2018). However, the positive correlation between autocratic leadership was significant between genders, but there was no significant correlation between athlete satisfaction and autocratic behaviors regarding local or foreign coaches (Razali et al., 2018).

The Athletic Coach

An athletic coach can create a positive or negative experience for any athlete they coach through their behaviors. Researchers believe a coach's effectiveness lies in their self-perception, beliefs, expectations, values, and goals (Horn, 2008; Misasi et al., 2020). Additionally, their ability to recognize that their leadership influences others demonstrates that they accurately perceive their capabilities and are congruent with their values and morals (Soto Garcia et al., 2021). Although the title of a coach infers that the individual is a team leader, not all coaches possess the leadership skills necessary to fulfill the role and not all coaches have a realistic perception of self (Rodrigues et al., 2021; Tucker & Black, 2020).

The ability of an athletic coach to have a realistic self-perception and employ reflective strategies to escalate the quality of coaching behavior can provide infinite value when developing a team and creating significant learning experiences for the athletes regardless of age (Keatlholetswe & Malete, 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2021). Coaches deemed more efficient demonstrated common leadership behaviors perceived by athletes from coaches who engaged in formal coach education courses instead of those who did not, presenting a case for formal coach education (Keatlholetswe & Malete, 2019; Sullivan et al., 2012).

Intercollegiate Level

An athletic coach's effectiveness stems from the ability of the athlete to learn from them in conjunction with their perceptions of the coach's leadership behaviors, which is an essential component of coaching (Horn, 2008; Smith & Smoll, 2017; Smoll & Smith, 1989). Several studies have examined the perceptions of student-athletes at the intercollegiate level.

Pitts et al. (2018) studied the student-athlete leadership preferences of Midwest college students who participated in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics program. The study found that positive feedback, training, and instruction were the most preferred leadership behaviors, and autocratic behaviors were the least favorite (Pitts et al., 2018). Additionally, democratic leadership was identified as a preferred leadership behavior by student-athletes who participated in independent sports (Pitts et al., 2018).

A quantitative study conducted by Misasi et al. (2020) surveyed coaches and Division I and II athletes to assess the perceptions of leadership and athletes in highly

competitive sports using multiple data collection tools. The first questionnaire, the Coach-Athlete Relationship tool completed by both athletes and coaches, indicated no significant difference that assesses closeness, commitment, and complementarity. The LSS, which both athletes and coaches also completed, determined statistical significance in instruction and training, democratic behaviors, autocratic behaviors, and social support, yet no significance in positive feedback. The athletes completed the Coach Behavior Scale with subscales: physical training and planning, technical skills, mental preparation, competition strategies, personal rapport, and negative personal rapport, with statistical significance found in competition strategies, personal rapport, and negative personal rapport.

Vermillion (2014) posited that a positive perspective of their athletic coach could alter their athletic experience and color their perception of an athletic program. Furthermore, he noted that the perceptions of the student-athletes could also drive decisions that affect the operational and fiscal components of the program to meet the needs of the student-athletes (Vermillion, 2014). In addition to fiscal and operational management, Gearity (2009) highlighted the fact that a student's perception of the athletic coach's leadership behaviors adds a level of accountability to ensure that the culture of the team and the athletic program remains positive and protects student-athletes from potentially harmful coaching behavior that could have long-lasting effects.

The Revised Leadership Scale for Sport

The RLSS is a modified version of the LSS created by P. Chelladurai and S. D. Saleh (1980). The LSS addressed leadership in sports issues that arose from the

Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML), also created by Chelladurai and Saleh in 1980, assessing whether specific leadership theories applied to the sporting context (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980).

Leadership Scale for Sports

The five categories of the LSS comprise 40 items identified as being the most relevant dimensions of coaching behavior (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). These categories address Training and Instruction, Democratic Behavior, Autocratic Behavior, Social Support, and Positive Feedback. Each factor is used in all three versions of the tool: athletes' perception, preference, and coach self-evaluation (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). Table 1 outlines the dimensions and describes what the coaching behavior aims to accomplish (Chelladurai, 2012, p. 333).

Table 1

Dimensions of Leader Behavior in Sports

Dimension	Description
Training and instruction (TI)	improving athletes' performance by emphasizing and facilitating hard and strenuous training; instructing them in the skills, techniques, and tactics of the sport; clarifying the relationship among the members, and structuring and coordinating the members' activities
Democratic behavior (DB)	allows greater participation by the athletes in decisions about group goals, practice methods, and game tactics and strategies
Autocratic behavior (AB)	involves independent decision making and stresses personal authority
Social support (SS)	characterized by a concern for the welfare of individual athletes, positive group atmosphere, and warm interpersonal relations with members
Positive feedback (PF)	reinforces an athlete by recognizing and rewarding superior performance

The RLSS created by James Zhang, Barbara Jensen, and Betty Mann (1997) expounded on the work from Chelladurai and Saleh's LSS based on Chelladurai's (1990) observations regarding the tool. The items identified the frequency in which the coach exhibited the behavior instead of the situation. Additionally, the original tool was based

on industrialized scales, not the intended population of coaches and athletes (Chelladurai, 1990; J. Zhang et al., 1997). Chelladurai (1990) also noted that the LSS was created based on the cultural norms of Canadian intercollegiate athletes, which might not be transferrable to the United States. The RLSS maintained the original five categories; however, it added a sixth factor of Situational Consideration, increasing to 60 item statements for all three versions (coach self-evaluation, athlete perception, athlete preference) of the tool. Table 2 outlines the dimensions and a description of the objective the coaching behaviors are trying to achieve, and Appendix E contains the athlete's preference version of the tool (Zhang et al., 1997, p. 1-2).

Table 2

Revised Leadership Scale for Sport

Dimension	Description
Training and instruction (TI)	improving athletes' performance by emphasizing and facilitating hard and strenuous training; instructing them in the skills, techniques, and tactics of the sport; providing facilities, equipment, and practice strategies focused on safety; planning training practices and evaluating athlete performance; being knowledgeable and responsible
Democratic behavior (DB)	allows greater participation by the athletes in decisions about group goals, practice methods, and game tactics and strategies; respecting and acknowledging athlete rights; encouraging involvement of the athlete in personnel selection and performance evaluation; admitting mistakes and addressing problems
Autocratic behavior (AB)	involves independent decision making; stresses personal authority; makes demands; punishes; acts without considering the feelings or thinking of the athlete; prescribes ways to accomplish work
Social support (SS)	Provides psychological support regarding training or competition; assists with personal issues; considers the athletes welfare; establishes friendship, positive atmospheres, and warm interpersonal relations with the athletes; makes sports enjoyable; protects from outside harm
Positive feedback (PF)	reinforces an athlete by recognizing and rewarding superior performance; encourages and corrects instead of laying blame or pointing out mistakes; complements the athletes; appropriate body language
Situational Consideration (SC)	considering situational factors, such as time, game, environment, individual, gender, skill level, and health condition; sets individual goals and ways to accomplish tasks; differentiating coaching; selects an athlete for the appropriate game position or lineup.

The RLSS is a Likert scale used in multiple studies to assess an athlete's perception or an athlete's preference for an athletic coach's leadership behaviors. Additionally, it is a self-reflection tool for the coach to their leadership behaviors. Understanding a leader's behavior allows for identifying behaviors that make the leader effective or ineffective and provides the athletes and coach with a level of accountability that can influence the success of individuals and the team (White & Rezania, 2019).

Athlete Perception

The perception of an athlete can alter the course of a program, inform the administration where to allocate resources, identify influential or detrimental aspects of the program, and create a more well-rounded student-athlete (Vermillion, 2014). Much research on athlete perception has centered around intercollegiate athletes and premier or elite athletes' perceptions (Berestetska, 2019; Chia et al., 2015; Keathletswe & Malete, 2019; Burdette, 2008; Perera, 2019).

Leadership behaviors exhibited by coaches can alter multiple factors associated with the team's performance or success, as evidenced by the study conducted by Perera (2019). Researchers assessed the athlete's perception of the coach's leadership behaviors using the RLSS and other implemented surveys (Perera, 2019). The results from the 160 Sri Lankan University athletes confirmed that the leadership behaviors exhibited by the athletic coach act as an intermediary between variables that could potentially affect the leadership style and success of the team by augmenting the coach's behavior through successful team performance (Perera, 2019).

Berestetska's (2019) objective was to examine the relationship between perceived coaching behaviors and the commitment of Division I tennis players. Additionally, the researcher wanted to ascertain if intrinsic motivation is a strong predictor of commitment to sport compared to perceived coaching behaviors. Data were collected by using the RLSS, the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS), and the Sport Commitment Scale (SCMS). The findings concluded a positive association between increased sports commitment, perceived coaching behaviors, and intrinsic motivation. Conversely, the results did not support the postulation that intrinsic motivation produced a more substantial influence on sport commitment when compared to the perceived coaching behaviors.

Nasiruddin et al. (2020) also sought to gain the perception of Malaysian student-athletes in response to a decline in performance and lack of motivation. The 313 under-14-year-old participant's responses demonstrated a modest positive association between the athletic coaches' leadership style and the student-athlete's motivation (Nasiruddin et al., 2020). Further dissection of the data revealed that leadership behavior from the democratic and social consideration factor significantly increased student-athlete's motivation level (Nasiruddin et al., 2020).

Athlete Preference

Understanding an athlete's preferred style of leadership allows for an athletic coach to tailor their behaviors to maximize motivation, increase satisfaction, improve performance, and maximize team and individual performance (Allami et al., 2022; Bridges & Roquemore, 1996; Moen et al., 2014; Pitts et al., 2018). Allami et al. (2022) sought to contribute to expanding knowledge surrounding the leadership behaviors of

physical education teachers by surveying Iraqi athletes. They found that democratic behaviors, instruction, and training positively affected athlete satisfaction, while the utilization of autocratic leadership behaviors had a negative influence (Allami et al., 2022). Based on the findings, the researchers propose that to increase athlete satisfaction and improve performance, athletic coaches should center their leadership behaviors on the factors that satisfy the needs of the athletes.

Coach Self-Evaluation

Reflection is touted as an indispensable tool in any leader's arsenal who wishes to effect change (Grant, 2022; Greif & Rauen, 2022). The coach self-evaluation version of the RLSS allows the coaches to reflect on their leadership behaviors and take inventory of their strengths and weaknesses.

Jambor and Zhang (1997) studied the coach's self-perceptions to widen the scope of knowledge regarding the complexities of athletic leadership. They elaborated on the already significant findings regarding leadership in sports to identify differences between male and female coaches using the RLSS. This quantitative study hypothesized that the coaches would respond differently to the six dimensions based on gender, and there would be other differences regarding coaching level. The researchers used 162 participants from junior high school, high school, and college-level coaching staff. They determined that there were no differences between genders or gender and coaching level; however, their significant differences between coaching levels dispel the stereotype that gender affects leadership (Jambor & Zhang, 1997). Jambor and Zhang (1997) found that the coach's perceptions of leadership at the junior high school, high school, and college

levels differed regarding democratic behaviors, instruction and training, and social support behaviors.

These findings reveal that perceptions of a coach's leadership behaviors vary at every level and sub-level studied (Jambor & Zhang, 1997; Misasi et al., 2020). Further examination of the results indicated that high school coaches used democratic behaviors over college coaches, and junior high coaches reported instruction and training to a lesser degree than high school or college coaches (Jambor & Zhang, 1997). Jambor and Zhang (1997) noted that this supports Chelladurai's (1980, 1990, 2007, 2012) claim that leadership behaviors are relative to the context.

Sullivan et al. (2012) sought to examine if the coach's coaching context and level of education were related to the perceived leadership behaviors in youth sports. They determined that the degree of coaching education significantly influenced coaching efficacy, whereas the setting did not (Sullivan et al., 2012). Additionally, Sullivan et al. (2012) determined that the leadership behaviors of training and instruction, positive feedback, social support, and situational consideration were predictors of coaching efficacy.

Most recently, Gama, Nunes, de Castro, de Souza, Júnior, and de Souza Vale (2019) investigated the personality traits of handball coaches in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, as they relate to leadership characteristics. The 31 male coach participants were accredited coaches at the Federation of Student Sports of Rio de Janeiro (FEERJ). They completed the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire and the coach self-evaluation version of the RLSS (Gama et al., 2019). The results showed that positive feedback behavior had moderate

positive correlations with extroversion and neuroticism and a moderate positive correlation between autocratic behavior and neuroticism (Gama et al., 2019). Gama et al. (2019) also found that social support behavior was present in all coaching contexts to varying degrees. The results of this study demonstrate that certain personality traits are associated with leadership behaviors, supporting Chelladurai's (1980, 1990, 2007, 2012) position that leader characteristics are one of the three antecedents of a leader's behavior.

Multiple Perspectives

The RLSS is a Likert scale used in numerous studies to assess an athlete's perception or preference of an athletic coach's leadership behaviors. It is used as a coach's self-evaluation tool to assess their leadership behaviors. Some studies used multiple versions of the same tool to determine if a relationship exists as another facet of the intricacies of coaching.

Burdette's (2008) study of NCAA Division I student-athletes, and coaches attempted to determine which coach leadership behaviors were preferred based on race, gender, and playing time and how they measured against the coaching behaviors reported by the coaches. The researcher found a lack of variance concerning the predictor groups; however, they identified incongruence between the student-athlete's perceptions and the self-reported coaching behaviors, indicating a higher means in the democratic and situational consideration subscales than the coaches (Burdette, 2008).

In 2015, Chia et al. applied the Multidimensional Leadership Model to examine Singaporean coaches' preferred and perceived leadership behaviors and how they relate to athletes' satisfaction. They determined congruence in social support as an indicator of

athletes' satisfaction; however, the perception scores determined a relationship between leadership and athlete satisfaction in all six categories (Chia et al., 2015). Conversely, Chia et al. (2015) found that none of the preference scores had statistical relevance regarding satisfaction in any of the six categories revealing that perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors were significantly meaningful.

Keatlholetswe and Malete (2019) also conducted a study regarding coaches' perceptions and if they were associated with player perceptions from Botswana. The participants were 15 premier league soccer coaches who completed the Coaching Efficacy Scale and 226 players with a mean age of 25 who completed the Athlete Perception version of the RLSS (Keatlholetswe & Malete, 2019). They found that the coaches' ratings on technique efficacy predicted all six categories regarding their perceptions of their coaches; however, motivation efficacy had no significant association with any leadership behaviors, and character building had a negative association (Keatlholetswe & Malete, 2019).

This literature review has illuminated many common threads regarding leadership behaviors and how they affect student-athletes and coaches. The coach's leadership style can affect outcomes, increase a player's intrinsic motivations, satisfy the needs of the players and coaches, and increase player performance (Allami et al., 2022; Berestetska, 2019; Nasiruddin et al., 2020; Perera, 2019). The literature has also revealed that democratic behaviors, when coupled with social support and instruction, and training, have yielded positive results, whereas autocratic behaviors have yielded negative results and shown that external forces do not increase a player's motivations (Allami et al., 2022;

Berestetska, 2019; Gama et al., 2019; Jambor & Zhang, 1997; Keattholetswe & Maletle, 2019; Nasiruddin et al., 2020).

Researchers also demonstrated that coach efficacy increases with coach education and race and gender yielded no significant results when evaluating leadership behaviors; however, there were significant differences in coaching levels (Jambor & Zhang, 1997; Sullivan et al., 2012). These conclusions support the claims of many researchers that when athletic coaches recognize that student-athletes have diverse needs and adapt their behaviors to satisfy those needs, there is a higher level of player satisfaction and more positive outcomes (Allami et al., 2022; Jambor & Zhang, 1997).

Finally, findings from the literature regarding the results of the RLSS Coach self-evaluations, athlete's preferences, and athletes' perception versions of the tool were the incongruence discovered. Burdette (2008) found inconsistencies between the coach's self-evaluation reports and the player's perceptions of their coaches. Further research by Chia et al. (2015) found congruence between player perception and preference in social support only. There was insignificant data regarding the preference of student-athletes and satisfaction leading researchers to believe that the satisfaction of Singaporean student-athletes stems from their perceptions of their athletic coach's leadership behaviors (Chia et al., 2015).

Limited research has examined high school student-athletes' differences in their perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors. Therefore, this quantitative study will examine the gap in the literature on the differences in high school student-athlete's perceptions of their coach's leadership behaviors using the Athletes' Perception version

RLSS created by Zhang, Jensen, and Mann (1997) at the freshman, junior varsity, and varsity participation levels.

Summary

Chapter 2 summarized existing research on leadership, high school, and intercollegiate sports, the characteristics of a good coach, the difference between suburban and urban sports, and the RLSS. Chapter 3 will present the research methods for this study. This chapter includes the research design and rationale, the methodology, the research question, hypotheses, threats to validity, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this quantitative group comparison study was to examine the difference in student athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behavior as measured by the RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student-athletes. This chapter presents the quantitative research method used to gather these perceptions. Additionally, this chapter presents the reasoning for the approach, a description of the research design, the selection of participants and sites, and the methods used to gather data. This chapter also discusses the ethical considerations, data analysis procedures, the researcher's role, and the trustworthiness of the results.

Research Design and Rationale

The dependent variable was the RLSS scale scores, and the categorical independent variable was the student athlete's participation level: freshman, junior varsity, or varsity. The RLSS contains six dimensions of coaching with 60 items regarding coaching behaviors related to training and instruction, democratic, autocratic, social support, positive feedback, and situational consideration. This group comparison quantitative study was needed to examine and identify the differences in high school student athletes' perceptions of their athletic coach's leadership behaviors. Other causal-comparative studies have studied the perceptions of university athletes (Beam, 2001; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004), the coach (Turgeon et al., 2021), or a specific gender (Gomes et al., 2020). The group comparison design selected for this study provided insight into the differences in high school student athletes' reported perceptions of their coach's

leadership behaviors that can inform decisions regarding operations and staffing and identify positive and potentially harmful coaching behaviors.

Methodology

Population

The target population for this study was high school student athletes who were currently enrolled in high school or attended high school during the 2021-2022 school year. The criteria for participation in the study were that the student participated in sports for at least one season during their high school tenure.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

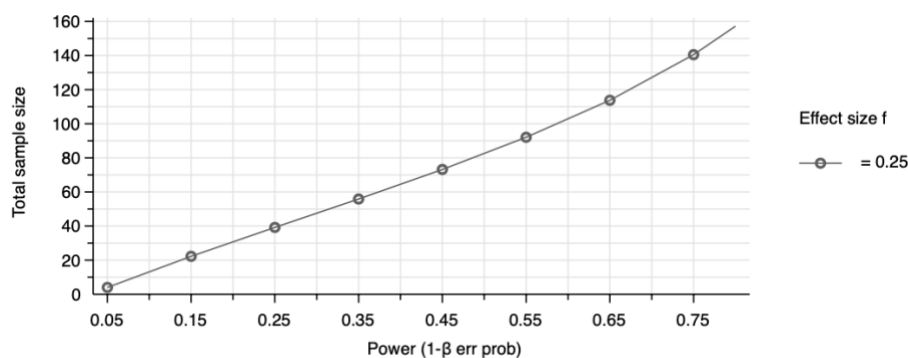
The recruitment procedures for this study were social media and snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling. Using social media as a recruitment method allows researchers to network and connect with individuals that share interests and information while maintaining anonymity (Gelinias et al., 2017). This study's social media recruitment strategies targeted parent groups and contacts. Additionally, the request to share the study information for participation among the parents of other high school student athletes was made, which was snowball or chain-referral sampling. Snowball or chain-referral sampling is a form of non-probability sampling.

Due to this study using inferential statistics, the sample size was determined using power analysis. Calculations were completed using the G*Power tool by Erdfelder et al. (1996). The sample size for this study, a priori, had the effect size set at .25, the significance alpha level was .05, and the power was .8 (see Figure 2). This produced a total sample size of 159 participants. The minimum sample size of 159 high school

student athletes was needed and had to be distributed equitably across the participation levels: freshman, junior varsity, and varsity, with a minimum of 53 participants in each group.

Figure 2

Total Sample Size



Note. F tests- ANOVA: Fixed effects. Omnibus. One-way; Number of groups = 3. α err prob = .05; Effect size $f = 0.25$

Power is the assumption that a test of significance will identify any present effect. The power increases when the sample size increases, thus reducing the possibility of identifying a false null hypothesis; accepting a power of 0.80 means there is a 20% probability that a null hypothesis can be accepted inaccurately (Prajapati et al., 2010). Statistical significance or alpha level is the probability of making an inaccurate decision when the null hypothesis is correct. Accepting an alpha level of .05 and a confidence interval of 95% means that there is a 95% chance that the study reflects the perceptions of the population and less than a 5% chance that it is inaccurate. Finally, the effect size is the extent of the relationship between the variables, differences, or associations.

Cohen's *d*, the scale used in this study, demonstrates the standardized mean differences between multiple groups or variables (Brydges, 2019). Using online surveys increases the likelihood that the inferences made from the data are a more reliable and accurate representation of a broader population (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). Conversely, having a sample size that is too small overall may lead to inaccurate inferences; further, having an unbalanced number of responses for each group would also lead to validity issues (Jager et al., 2017; Nayak & Narayan, 2019).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

This study's target sample was student-athletes and students enrolled in high school during the 2021-2022 school year. Following the protocols set forth by Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) after obtaining approval (approval number 02-08-23-1027221), I used various methods to recruit participants via social media platforms. I contacted parents of high school student-athletes, providing the parental consent form and a link to the student assent form, demographic questionnaire, and survey (Appendix B). Additionally, for students who were 18 years or older, I had a consent form also available. All documents were on SurveyMonkey electronic surveying platform. In all communications with parents and student athletes, they were assured that participation was anonymous, meaning nobody would know their identity. The benefit of using the SurveyMonkey platform was that all confirmatory documents, demographic questions, and surveys could be completed anywhere, especially in the privacy of the student's home with parental supervision. After the data were collected, it was uploaded directly into IBM SPSS Statistics Software for analysis.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

The RLSS is a Likert scale used in multiple studies to assess an athlete's perception or preference of an athletic coach's leadership behaviors. It is used as a coach's self-evaluation tool to assess their leadership behaviors. Understanding a leader's behavior allows for identifying behaviors that make the leader effective or ineffective and provides the athletes and coach with a level of accountability that can influence the success of individuals and the team (White & Rezania, 2019).

This tool was used in multiple research studies as the sole research tool (Jambor & Zhang, 1997; Zhang et al., 1997; Burdette, 2008) and in conjunction with other tools (Berestetska, 2019; Calvo & Topa, 2019; Foulds et al., 2019; Keatlhoetswe & Maletle, 2019; Lefebvre et al., 2021; Nascimento-Junior et al., 2018; Perera, 2019; Pitts, 2018; Sullivan et al., 2012) to gather the insights of elite athletes, coaches, and intercollegiate athletes, but never explicitly for high school student athletes. Using this tool in a high school setting gave student athletes a voice regarding topics they are not involved in but will affect them physically, emotionally, and socially. Research has shown that providing students with a voice allows the administration to understand their needs better and increases buy-in for students (Halliday et al., 2019; Mitra, 2018).

One of the creators, J. Zhang, provided permission to use this tool via email, as shown in Appendix A. The administration of the RLSS for this study was administered online through SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey is an online platform that allows the participant to complete the confirmatory documents, demographic form, and survey using one link. 60 items on the survey reflected the six dimensions of the RLSS: training and

instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, positive feedback, and situational consideration.

Each item was preceded with the phrase “My coach ...,” with the response options of *Always*, which equated to 100% of the time, *Often*, which equated to 75% of the time, *Occasionally*, which equated to 50% of the time, *Seldom* equated to 25% of the time, and *Never* which equated to 0% of the time (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Zhang et al., 1997). Student athletes were asked to consider their coach’s behaviors and rate the items on a Likert Scale with *Always* or 5, meaning that the coach embodies that item 100% of the time to *Never* or 1, meaning the coach’s behaviors do not embody the item. Likert scales are one of the most used tools to measure perception; therefore, the reliability and validity of the tool are essential to ensure that the data collected is truthful and applicable to the research (Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021; Taherdoost, 2019).

The most accepted assessment of internal consistency is the use of Cronbach’s alpha, which is recommended to have a reliability of .70 or higher is sufficient, but .90 is desirable (Drost, 2011; Nunnally, 1978). The RLSS reliability was measured by Jambor and Zhang (1997) and Sullivan et al. (2012) for internal consistency for the coach’s self-evaluation version of the tool, finding it to be adequate for reliability. Jambor and Zhang reported that for instruction and training, it was .84, democratic was .66, autocratic was .70, social support was .52, feedback was .78, and situational considerations were .69 (Jambor & Zhang, 1997). Berestetska (2019), who used the athlete’s perception version of the RLSS for intercollegiate athletes, found that the internal consistency for the behavior subscales was higher with .86 for democratic, .70 for autocratic, .90 for social

support, .88 for positive feedback, .90 for situational consideration, and .92 for instruction and training. Perera (2019) also used the RLSS and found the tool to have Cronbach's alpha value of .891. Other researchers who also used the athletes' preference version of the RLSS, such as Allami et al. (2022) and Pitts et al. (2018), found the tool to have acceptable levels of reliability. However, Burdette (2008), who also used the athlete's preference tool, found a low internal consistency of .52 and .69, correspondingly for autocratic behavior and situational considerations. Overall, the reliability of the RLSS has remained consistent throughout many studies it has been used in for gathering perceptions. The reliability and validity of the assessment can be increased by ensuring that directions are explicit, the survey's length, and the constructs' repetition and clarity (Drost, 2011; Nunnally, 1978).

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis program used was IBM Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis of student perceptions. All surveys were uploaded into the SPSS software to scrub the data, ensuring no missing values.

Research Question and Hypotheses

RQ: What is the difference in RLSS scores between the freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school athletes?

H_0 : There are no significant statistical differences in RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school athletes.

H_a : There are significant statistical differences in RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school athletes.

The statistical test run on the data was an analysis of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA is an inferential statistics method that allows a researcher to test for a significant difference between two variables across two or more groups (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2021). The ANOVA is used to examine the differences between and within the sample and contains three main assumptions. The first assumption was that there was a normal distribution for each group's dependent variables; the second was that variances were homogeneous, and finally, observations were independent. The one-way ANOVA was run using RLSS scores as the dependent variable and the freshman, junior varsity, and varsity participation levels as the independent variables. The scores identified possible significant overall differences between the three levels of student participation, and a post hoc analysis was run to determine exactly where the significant differences lie.

The study's design and the three individual participation levels addressed the first assumption of ANOVA analysis, normal distribution. The second assumption that the variances were homogeneous was addressed using Levene's Test for equality of variances. For the hypothesis, Levene's test verifies that all groups have equal variance, whereas if at least one pair has unequal variances, the alternate hypothesis is accepted. Finally, since the assumptions were met, the F ratios were calculated using an alpha of .05. If the p -value were less than .05, the null hypothesis would be rejected. The null hypothesis is retained if the p -value is greater than .05.

Threats to Validity

Threats to validity for this study were construct validity and statistical conclusion validity. Construct validity is the extent to which the test measures what it is intended to

measure. The construct for this study was high school student athletes' perceptions. Since the survey was administered online, there was no way to determine if the student athlete completed the survey with or without others providing their insights into the coach's leadership behaviors. Another threat to validity was that some teenagers are impassioned regarding many things at any given time and tend to change their views relatively quickly. Therefore, the results of this study might not be indicative of the entire population of high school student athletes. These threats might lead to questioning the statistical conclusion validity of the study, potentially yielding inaccurate results.

Ethical Procedures

IRB approvals were obtained to ensure that this study followed the ethical research standards of Walden University. I used my network via social media to contact parents of high school student-athletes. I provided the parental consent form and a link to the student assent form, demographic questionnaire, and survey (Appendix B). Additionally, for students who were 18 years or older, I had a consent form also available. All documents were on SurveyMonkey electronic surveying platform.

In all communications with parents and student athletes, they were assured that participation was anonymous, meaning nobody would know their identity. Their athletic coach would not be informed of their decision to participate in the voluntary study or decline, and they were advised not to talk about their decision to avoid any fear of retaliation by the athletic coach. The benefit of using the SurveyMonkey platform was that all confirmatory documents, demographic questions, and surveys could be completed anywhere, especially in the privacy of the student's home with parental supervision.

This study had some ethical considerations because the participants were under 18. The consent form, parent consent form, and student assent form were marked and explicitly explained the study. Participants could withdraw consent at any point in the process. There was no penalty if a student athlete or parent withdrew consent, and there was no reward.

There were no identifying indicators of participating student athletes. They were advised against talking to anyone about their decision to participate or answer to the survey. I was the only one who would have knowledge or access to the confirmatory documents, demographic forms, and completed surveys.

The final research report was posted on a Facebook page exclusive to the study. After 5 years, all electronic data will be erased from the hard drive, and the data stored obtained and stored on SurveyMonkey will be permanently deleted in addition to the account.

Summary

This quantitative group comparison study aimed to examine the difference in student-athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behavior as measured by the RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes using a one-way ANOVA and Bonferroni tests were conducted to analyze the data. Chapter 4 addresses the study's results. Furthermore, it details the data collection procedures and results of the study overall.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this quantitative group comparison study was to examine the difference in student athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behavior as measured by the RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes. The research question was "What is the difference in RLSS scores between the freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school athletes?" This chapter presents the data collection process and time frame, the descriptive statistics for the participants, the results of the statistical analyses, and a summary of the results to address the research question and hypotheses.

Data Collection

This study used data collected from high school student athletes and student athletes who participated in high school athletics during the 2021-2022 school year via SurveyMonkey. Participants were recruited over 90 days through their parents via social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram after obtaining IRB approval. The demographic form and survey were available on SurveyMonkey. The recruitment strategies yielded 196 student athlete participants ($N = 196$). The RLSS responses were uploaded directly from SurveyMonkey into SPSS version 27.

Once the data were collected, the information was scrubbed to ensure that any data errors or incomplete surveys were eliminated from analysis using the filter function. Four of the 196 surveys were incomplete, bringing the total number of usable surveys to ($N = 192$). Unusable information was deleted, such as the IP address and the columns for name, start time, and end time. When the data were imported, the demographic variable

name was reflected as a question, which was abbreviated, and the label, which was also the question on the survey, was shortened to reflect the corresponding demographic information. The demographic information collected was participation level, the state of residence, the location and type of the school attended, and the gender of the participant. Finally, each of the 60 items was changed from the sequential number provided by SurveyMonkey to reflect the item number on the RLSS. A composite score was calculated for each item associated with each factor to ensure accurate analysis, as directed in the RLSS Manual for Application (Zhang et al., 1997).

Table 3 details the states where the participants attended high school and participated in athletics. Figures 3-5 depict a breakdown of participation level, gender, school locale, and school type.

Table 3

Respondent's State

		N	%
Arkansas	AR	1	0.5%
California	CA	5	2.6%
Colorado	CO	7	3.6%
Connecticut	CT	7	3.6%
Delaware	DE	3	1.6%
Florida	FL	6	3.1%
Idaho	ID	1	0.5%
New Jersey	NJ	134	69.8%
North Carolina	NC	4	2.1%
Pennsylvania	PA	8	4.2%
Tennessee	TN	13	6.8%
Texas	TX	2	1.0%
Missing		1	0.5%
Total	12	192	100.0%

Figure 3

Freshman Demographics

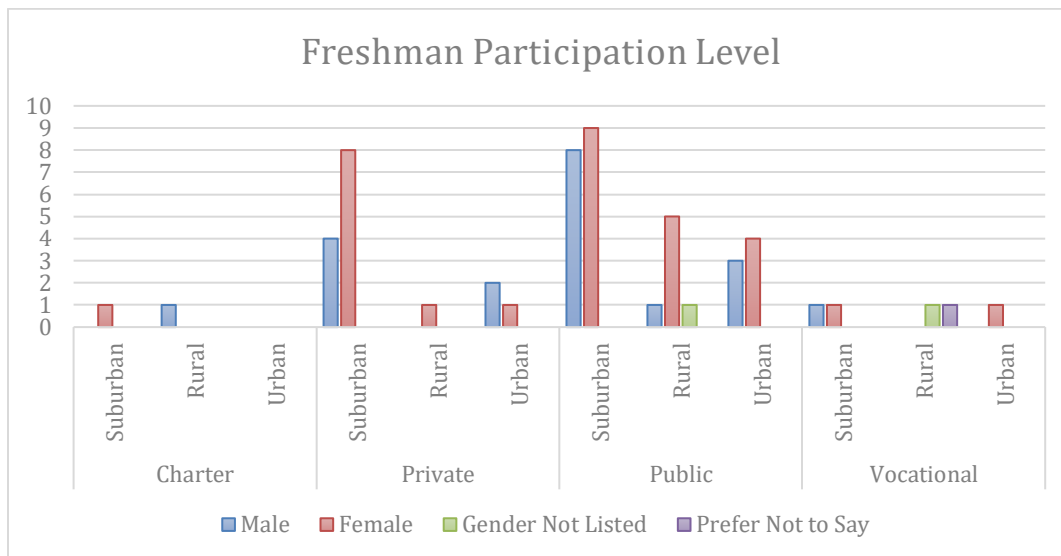


Figure 4

Junior Varsity Demographics

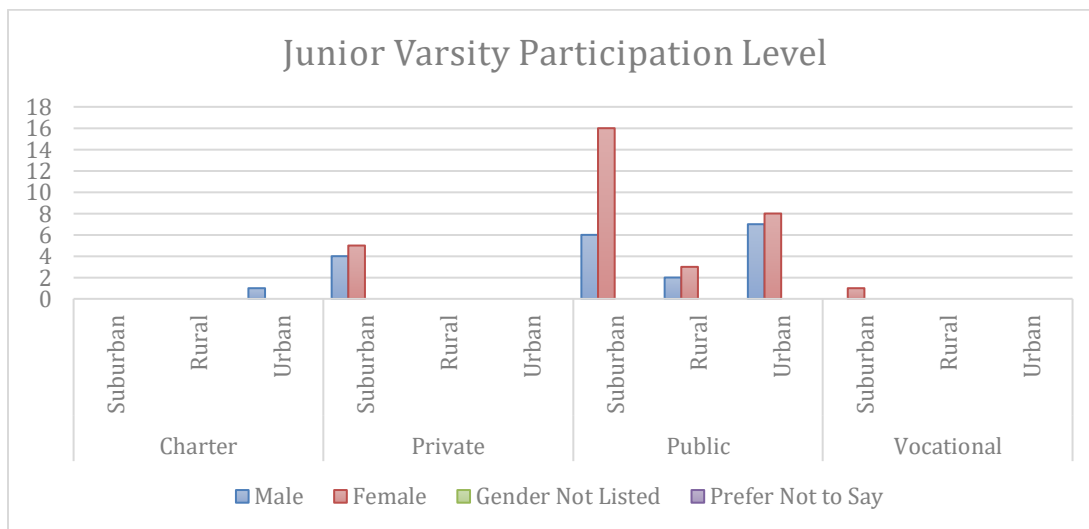
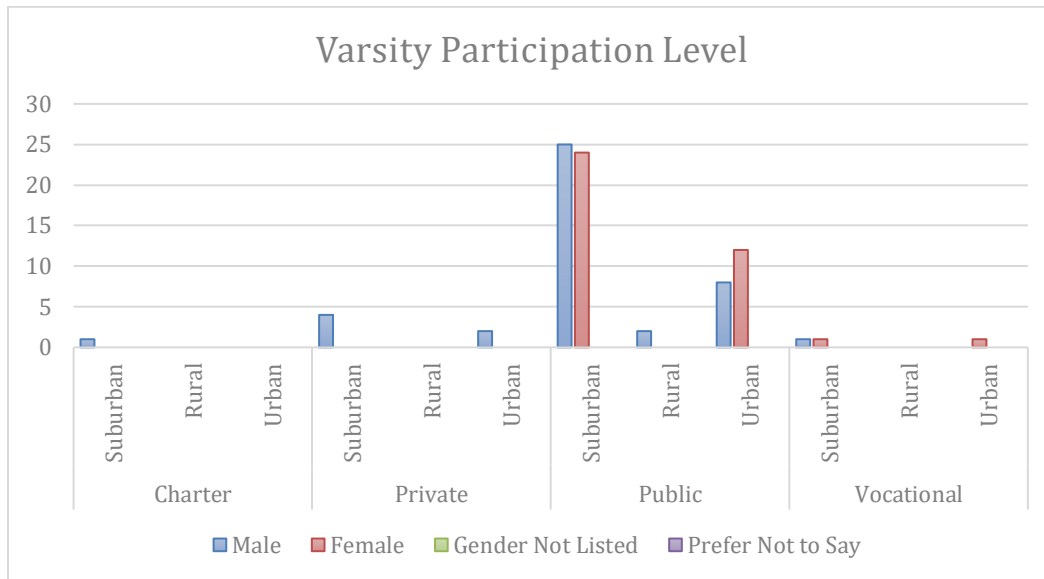


Figure 5

Varsity Demographics



Results

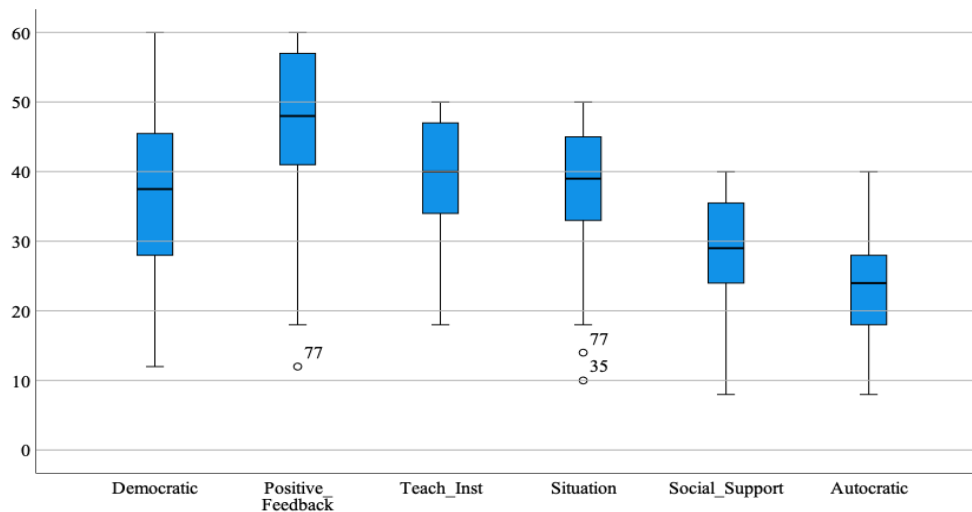
The results of the sample for this study consisted of 29% freshman ($N = 55$), 28% junior varsity ($N = 54$), and 43% varsity ($N = 83$). The descriptives in Table 4 outline the mean scores amongst groups concerning the scoring plan from the Likert Scale. This scale allowed the respondent to indicate their strength of agreement or feeling by responding with *Always*, *Often*, *Sometimes*, *Rarely*, or *Never*. Each item had a numeric mathematical equivalent, with *Always* = 5 and *Never* = 1. Each factor was assigned a composite score based on the total number of items in the factor.

Table 4*Descriptives*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min.	Max.
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Democratic	Freshman	55	34.2000	12.20565	1.64581	30.9004	37.4996	12.00	60.00
	Junior V.	54	34.2593	12.77702	1.73873	30.7718	37.7467	12.00	60.00
	Varsity	83	41.1807	12.32897	1.35328	38.4886	43.8728	15.00	60.00
	Total	192	37.2344	12.82962	.92590	35.4081	39.0607	12.00	60.00
Positive Feedback	Freshman	55	44.8727	11.00009	1.48325	41.8990	47.8465	18.00	60.00
	Junior V.	54	47.6852	13.09303	1.78174	44.1115	51.2589	12.00	60.00
	Varsity	83	48.7349	9.35882	1.02726	46.6914	50.7785	22.00	60.00
	Total	192	47.3333	11.04599	.79718	45.7609	48.9057	12.00	60.00
Training & Instruction	Freshman	55	37.4545	7.97640	1.07554	35.2982	39.6109	18.00	50.00
	Junior V.	54	39.4630	8.96684	1.22023	37.0155	41.9104	18.00	50.00
	Varsity	83	41.0000	7.75069	.85075	39.3076	42.6924	21.00	50.00
	Total	192	39.5521	8.26254	.59630	38.3759	40.7283	18.00	50.00
Situational Consideration	Freshman	55	36.0909	8.39151	1.13151	33.8224	38.3595	10.00	50.00
	Junior V.	54	37.9444	9.68838	1.31842	35.3000	40.5889	14.00	50.00
	Varsity	83	39.8795	7.46765	.81968	38.2489	41.5101	22.00	50.00
	Total	192	38.2500	8.50993	.61415	37.0386	39.4614	10.00	50.00
Social Support	Freshman	55	27.6727	7.65229	1.03183	25.6040	29.7414	9.00	40.00
	Junior V.	54	29.6481	9.26783	1.26119	27.1185	32.1778	8.00	40.00
	Varsity	83	29.5783	7.11426	.78089	28.0249	31.1318	13.00	40.00
	Total	192	29.0521	7.93015	.57231	27.9232	30.1809	8.00	40.00
Autocratic	Freshman	55	22.3636	7.00625	.94472	20.4696	24.2577	8.00	40.00
	Junior V.	54	23.5370	7.43453	1.01171	21.5078	25.5663	8.00	34.00
	Varsity	83	22.2289	7.51961	.82538	20.5870	23.8709	8.00	34.00
	Total	192	22.6354	7.33580	.52942	21.5912	23.6797	8.00	40.00

Assumptions

The statistical assumptions must be met to ensure the validity of the results before conducting the one-way ANOVA. Assumption number one indicates that the dependent variable should be measured at the interval or ratio level. The dependent variable for this study was the scores on the RLSS. The second assumption indicates that the independent variables for this study were categorical, with three levels: freshman, junior varsity, and varsity. The third assumption requires that the observations were independent, meaning that no participant fell in the same group, and each survey entry represented one distinct participant. All participants were instructed to respond to the survey regarding the coach's leadership behaviors for the level in which they participated. Therefore, while a respondent might be at a freshman grade level if they played varsity sports, their responses were analyzed at the varsity participation level. Assumption four supposes that there are no significant outliers. Figure 6 box plot displays the outliers that were present. The factor, Positive Feedback, had one potential outlier, and Situational Consideration had two potential outliers. The assumption was considered satisfied since the potential outliers were all within the normal range of the other factors.

Figure 6*Box Plot Factors*

Assumption five, normality of distribution for sample sizes under 20, would require the normality assumption; however, for larger sample sizes, the mean is always normal. Finally, assumption 6, the product of Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variances, showed that the variances between the following factors were equal: Democratic, $F(2, 189) = .868, p > .05$; Positive Feedback, $F(2, 189) = .057, p > .05$; Training and Instruction, $F(2, 189) = .572, p > .05$; Situational Consideration, $F(2, 189) = .433, p > .05$; and Autocratic, $F(2, 189) = .693, p > .05$; apart from Social Support, $F(2, 189) = .036, p < .05$. Alternatively, the standard deviation for social support was used to determine variance $\sigma(7.65) = \sigma^2(58.52)$ displayed in Table 5.

Table 5*Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variances*

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Democratic	.142	2	189	.868

Positive Feedback	2.910	2	189	.057
Training & Instruction	.560	2	189	.572
Situational Consideration	.841	2	189	.433
Social Support	3.396	2	189	.036
Autocratic	.368	2	189	.693

ANOVA

The results from the ANOVA analysis, as seen in Table 6, revealed that there were statistical differences in three out of the six factors: Democratic $F(2,189) = 7.37, p < .05$, Training and Instruction $F(2,189) = 3.11, p < .05$, and Situational Consideration $F(2,189) = 3.41, p < .05$. The ETA Squared for the three factors confirms variability with $\eta^2 = .072, .032$, and $.035$ respectively. Democratic leadership behaviors accounted for 7.2%, Training and Instruction leadership behaviors accounted for 3.2%, and Situational Consideration leadership behaviors accounted for 3.5% of the variability regarding the differences in scores of freshmen, junior varsity, and varsity perceptions of coach leadership behaviors as it relates to the RLSS.

Table 6

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Democratic	Between Groups	2276.994	2	1138.497	7.379	.001
	Within Groups	29161.460	189	154.293		
	Total	31438.453	191			
Positive Feedback	Between Groups	502.741	2	251.370	2.084	.127
	Within Groups	22801.926	189	120.645		
	Total	23304.667	191			
Training & Instruction	Between Groups	416.417	2	208.208	3.117	.047
	Within Groups	12623.062	189	66.789		
	Total	13039.479	191			
Situational Consideration	Between Groups	481.826	2	240.913	3.411	.035
	Within Groups	13350.174	189	70.636		
	Total	13832.000	191			
Social Support	Between Groups	146.814	2	73.407	1.169	.313
	Within Groups	11864.665	189	62.776		

	Total	12011.479	191			
Autocratic	Between Groups	61.675	2	30.838	.570	.566
	Within Groups	10216.804	189	54.057		
	Total	10278.479	191			

The Bonferroni post-hoc test, Table 7, identified where the differences in perceptions amongst freshmen, junior varsity, and varsity exist. The Democratic factor showed statistical differences between freshman and varsity participation levels (Mean difference = -6.98, $p < .05$) and junior varsity and varsity participation levels (Mean difference = -6.92, $p < .05$). Varsity had the highest reported mean for democratic behaviors; however, since the sample size for that level was more considerable than freshman or junior varsity, looking at the standard deviation, it shows that junior varsity ($M = 34.25$, $SD = 12.77$) perceived more democratic behaviors than varsity ($M = 41.18$, $SD = 12.32$) followed by freshman ($M = 34.20$, $SD = 12.20$). As for the training and instruction factor, there were differences between the freshman and varsity participation levels (Mean difference = -3.54, $p < .05$). The freshman level ($M = 37.45$, $SD = 7.97$) perceived that they received more training and instruction behaviors as opposed to varsity ($M = 41.00$, $SD = 7.75$). Finally, the Situational Consideration factor also showed a difference between freshman and varsity participation levels (Mean difference = -3.78, $p < .05$). The freshman level ($M = 36.09$, $SD = 8.39$) reported perceiving more situational consideration behaviors than varsity ($M = 39.87$, $SD = 7.46$). All other pairwise comparisons between the participation levels revealed non-significant results.

Table 7*Bonferroni Post-Hoc: Multiple Comparison*

Dependent Variable	(I) Level of Participation	(J) Level of Participation	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Democratic	Freshman	Junior V.	-.05926	2.37963	1.000	-5.8072	5.6887
		Varsity	-6.98072*	2.15970	.004	-12.1974	-1.7640
	Junior Varsity	Freshman	.05926	2.37963	1.000	-5.6887	5.8072
		Varsity	-6.92146*	2.17169	.005	-12.1671	-1.6758
	Varsity	Freshman	6.98072*	2.15970	.004	1.7640	12.1974
		Junior V.	6.92146*	2.17169	.005	1.6758	12.1671
Positive Feedback	Freshman	Junior V.	-2.81246	2.10421	.549	-7.8951	2.2702
		Varsity	-3.86221	1.90974	.134	-8.4751	.7507
	Junior Varsity	Freshman	2.81246	2.10421	.549	-2.2702	7.8951
		Varsity	-1.04975	1.92034	1.000	-5.6883	3.5888
	Varsity	Freshman	3.86221	1.90974	.134	-.7507	8.4751
		Junior V.	1.04975	1.92034	1.000	-3.5888	5.6883
Training & Instruction	Freshman	Junior V.	-2.00842	1.56562	.603	-5.7901	1.7733
		Varsity	-3.54545*	1.42092	.040	-6.9777	-.1132
	Junior Varsity	Freshman	2.00842	1.56562	.603	-1.7733	5.7901
		Varsity	-1.53704	1.42881	.850	-4.9883	1.9142
	Varsity	Freshman	3.54545*	1.42092	.040	.1132	6.9777
		Junior V.	1.53704	1.42881	.850	-1.9142	4.9883
Situational Consideration	Freshman	Junior V.	-1.85354	1.61008	.753	-5.7426	2.0356
		Varsity	-3.78861*	1.46127	.031	-7.3183	-.2589
	Junior Varsity	Freshman	1.85354	1.61008	.753	-2.0356	5.7426
		Varsity	-1.93507	1.46939	.568	-5.4843	1.6142
	Varsity	Freshman	3.78861*	1.46127	.031	.2589	7.3183
		Junior V.	1.93507	1.46939	.568	-1.6142	5.4843
Social Support	Freshman	Junior V.	-1.97542	1.51786	.584	-5.6418	1.6909
		Varsity	-1.90559	1.37758	.505	-5.2331	1.4219
	Junior V.	Freshman	1.97542	1.51786	.584	-1.6909	5.6418
		Varsity	.06983	1.38523	1.000	-3.2762	3.4158
	Varsity	Freshman	1.90559	1.37758	.505	-1.4219	5.2331
		Junior V.	-.06983	1.38523	1.000	-3.4158	3.2762
Autocratic	Freshman	Junior V.	-1.17340	1.40852	1.000	-4.5756	2.2288
		Varsity	.13472	1.27834	1.000	-2.9531	3.2225
	Junior Varsity	Freshman	1.17340	1.40852	1.000	-2.2288	4.5756
		Varsity	1.30812	1.28544	.930	-1.7968	4.4131
	Varsity	Freshman	-.13472	1.27834	1.000	-3.2225	2.9531
		Junior V.	-1.30812	1.28544	.930	-4.4131	1.7968

Note. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The factors that did not reveal statistical differences were Positive Feedback $F(2,189) = 2.08, p > .05$, Social Support $F(2,189) = 1.16, p > .05$, and Autocratic leadership behaviors $F(2,189) = 0.57, p > .05$. This means that there were no statistical differences in the leadership behaviors exhibited by the athletic coach at the three participation levels as perceived by the student-athletes.

However, looking back at Table 4, the overall mean score and standard deviation, as seen in Table 4 for the Positive Feedback factor, junior varsity ($M = 47.68, SD = 13.09$) reported a higher instance of receiving positive feedback than freshmen ($M = 44.87, SD = 11.00$), followed by varsity ($M = 48.73, SD = 9.35$). The Social Support factor, while it also did not demonstrate significant statistical differences, junior varsity ($M = 29.64, SD = 9.26$) reported a higher instance of receiving social support, followed by freshmen ($M = 27.67, SD = 7.65$) and then varsity ($M = 29.57, SD = 7.11$). Finally, the Autocratic factor, which also did not exhibit any statistical differences among the participation levels, revealed that varsity ($M = 22.22, SD = 7.51$) reported a higher instance of observing Autocratic behaviors exhibited by their coach, followed by junior varsity ($M = 23.53, SD = 7.43$) and then freshman ($M = 22.36, SD = 7.00$).

Summary

The conclusion was that there were significant differences between the freshman participation level, the varsity participation level, and the junior varsity and varsity participation levels for the Democratic Factor. There were also significant differences between freshman and varsity levels for the Teaching and Instruction Factor, and there were significant differences between the freshman and varsity levels for the Situational

Consideration factor. Therefore, statistical differences exist, and the null hypothesis that no significant statistical differences in RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school athletes was rejected. Chapter 5 contains the key results from the study. This includes an interpretation of results, an explanation of the study's limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this quantitative group comparison study was to examine the difference in student athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behavior as measured by the RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student athletes. The tool used to accomplish this was the Athlete's Perception version of the RLSS by Zhang et al. (1997). The findings revealed that there were significant differences between the freshman participation level and the varsity participation level and the junior varsity and varsity participation levels for the democratic factor; there were also significant differences between freshman and varsity levels for the teaching and instruction factor, and there were significant differences between the freshman and varsity levels for the situational consideration factor. Therefore, statistical differences exist, and the null hypothesis that no significant statistical differences in RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school athletes was rejected.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings revealed significant statistical differences across the three participation levels for many factors. All three participation levels have unique elements both players and the coach should acknowledge.

Democratic Leadership Behaviors

Democratic coach leadership behaviors concentrate on inclusive actions when it comes to setting group goals, practice objectives, the selection of game tactics and strategies, respecting the rights of athletes, encouraging athlete involvement in personnel

selection and performance evaluations, and being upfront about mistakes and confronting problems (Zhang et al., 1997).

The results of the one-way ANOVA were significant regarding the democratic factor $F(2,189) = 7.37, p < .05$, indicating differences in perception regarding their coach's exhibitions of those behaviors. A freshman high school team aims to introduce student athletes to a more competitive environment than they might not have experienced playing youth or travel and recreation teams. Many freshmen do not have the physical or developmental abilities or experience to execute the skills required of an athlete on the field or court. However, they should have the ability to experience democratic coaching in other aspects of being a member of the team. Additionally, due to inexperience, freshman coaches take a more autocratic approach when dealing with young players, whereas varsity student athletes should be moving into a leadership role, calling plays, reading and adjusting on the field or court, and managing teammates on the court or field with minimal guidance from the coach.

There was a statistical difference found between junior varsity and varsity levels. Junior varsity athletes are generally between 14–17 years old. In some cases, some junior varsity players have had basic training and should be developing the skills and strategy associated with their position. Coaches should be infusing more democratic behaviors on this level. However, the line between freshman and junior varsity teams may be blurred if a school is not large enough to assemble a freshman team; junior varsity may have predominately introductory-level players.

Research at the intercollegiate, elite, and international levels has concluded that the implementation of democratic leadership behaviors at every participation level develops the coach-athlete relationship, which has been deemed one of the most important interactions that occur in sports (Allami et al., 2022; Burdette, 2008; Tucker, 2017). Additionally, it allows student athletes to communicate their thoughts, ideas, and opinions, creating buy-in for the team and the coach.

Training and Instruction

Training and instruction coaching behaviors emphasize vigorous physical training, honing skills, techniques, and tactics, a safe training environment, creating focused practice goals, evaluating athletic performance, and having knowledge and being responsible (Zhang et al., 1997). The one-way ANOVA and Bonferroni test results regarding the differences in perception of training and instruction coach leadership behaviors were significant between the freshman and varsity levels: $F(2,189) = 3.11, p < .05$.

For many freshman student athletes, a high school team might be their first introduction to sports; therefore, they need to learn the basics before they can turn their attention to the strategy and psychology behind the sport. At this level, there should be a focus on learning the fundamentals, and the coach should establish team norms, behaviors, team building and provide constructive feedback. Players should try different positions and acclimate to a more rigid practice schedule and structured environment. Varsity players should spend more time on conditioning, training, and execution. Varsity student athletes should already know their positions and understand the psychology

behind the plays and sports and therefore can handle a more intensive cognitive and physical workload. This study supports the claims that junior high coaches reported using instruction and training to a lesser degree than high school or college coaches (Jambor & Zhang, 1997). Studies have also shown that when a coach implements behaviors specific to training and instructional practices, the environment shifts from an unintentional and casual atmosphere to learning and growth (Calvo & Topa, 2019; Johnson et al., 2011; Larkin et al., 2022).

Situational Consideration

The final factor that revealed statistical differences was situational considerations, $F(2,189) = 3.41, p < .05$, between the freshman and varsity participation levels. Behaviors specific to that factor are the cogitation of time, game, environment, individual, gender, skill level, health condition, setting individual goals and ways to achieve them, differentiated instruction, and selecting the most appropriate athlete for the game, position, or lineup (Zhang et al., 1997). The age range from freshman to varsity is between 13 and 18. When dealing with a freshman-level player, the student athletes are generally around the same age with comparable physical and cognitive abilities; however, the physical composition of a varsity player has the potential to far outweigh their freshman counterparts in experience and physicality. The coach's capacity to discern that their players are in proper physical condition to participate, using proper techniques, in a safe physical environment, matched appropriately, free of injury, and provide first aid, if necessary, could alter the player's experience and jeopardize their safety and fall under the scope of situational consideration (Flegel, 2014).

This finding raises questions as to where the statistical differences precisely lie regarding the two participation levels. Are there differences due to training, lack of training, experience, or lack of experience? In 2022, coaches were surveyed by the Aspen Institute (2022) regarding the training they attended, never attended, and those they wished to take. The report revealed that between 86% - 91% of coaches have taken training such as CPR, first aid, concussion management, injury prevention, general safety, and physical health and safety; 57% - 70% have never been trained in community resources, trauma-informed practices, performance anxiety, stress and coaching, emotional regulation, and working with parents and caregivers; and 66% - 75% want to be trained in coaching tactics and strategy, sports skills and techniques, relationship building, performance anxiety, motivational techniques, leadership development, team dynamics, mental health, effective communication, and life skill development through sport (Aspen Institute, 2022).

Situational characteristics and the coach's subsequent actions are a structural component of the theoretical foundation for this study, the MML. Situational consideration requires the athletic coach to have an in-depth knowledge of their players and a firm grasp of the setting and their role as an athletic coach to provide support and maintain a safe environment relative to the physical and cognitive readiness level of the players with or without training (Beauchamp & Martin, 2014; Schermerhorn Jr., 1997).

Autocratic Behaviors

The Autocratic behavior factor did not demonstrate any statistical differences, $F(2,189) = .570, p > .05$, among the participation levels. Autocratic behaviors encompass

independent decision-making, stressing authority, punishment-based behavior plans, acting without consideration, and prescribe methods to get work done (Zhang et al., 1997). For inexperienced athletes, autocratic leadership eliminates the need for decision-making (Jin et al., 2022). However, for individuals who are highly skilled or more autonomous, the use of autocratic behaviors might cause angst and low satisfaction levels and does not teach problem-solving skills, stimulate communication, or cultivate the coach-athlete relationship (Allami et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2020; Jawoosh et al., 2022; Jiménez et al., 2019; Jin et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2020).

The use of autocratic behaviors inspires negative thoughts and connotations, and studies have shown that those who predominantly autocratic leaders coach have higher stress levels, lower satisfaction levels, and an adverse perception of their coach (Allami et al., 2022; Jawoosh et al., 2022; Jiménez et al., 2019). Inversely, positive responses toward autocratic behaviors depend on the athletes' level and gender (Razali et al., 2018).

Social Support

Social support was another factor that did not yield statistical difference, $F(2,189) = 1.169, p > .05$, between freshman, junior varsity, or varsity participation levels. Attributes of social support leadership behaviors are providing psychological support, helping athletes with personal problems, providing for the welfare of the athletes, creating a positive team culture, making playing the sport enjoyable, and protecting athletes from outside harm (Zhang et al., 1997). Recent studies of high school student-athletes and the influence that high school athletics has on them emotionally is in part attributed to the coach acting as a mentor, focusing on character education, creating a

positive environment, emphasizing sportsmanship, empathy, goal setting, and building relationships (Amaro, 2022).

While no one factor is attributed to the success of a coach, program, or athlete, social support is a component that is continually present in research when positive outcomes are the outcome (Chia et al., 2015; Gama et al., 2019; Gearity, 2009; Nascimento-Júnior et al., 2018; Razali et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2012).

Positive Feedback

There were no statistical differences in the positive feedback factor $F(2,189) = 2.084, p > .05$ regarding the different participation levels. The basis of the positive feedback factor is that the coach exhibits behaviors that reinforce good behavior by rewarding performance, encouraging the athlete after making a mistake, correcting behavior as opposed to assigning blame, and complementing the athlete by using positive verbal and body language (Zhang et al., 1997). Across multiple studies regarding coach leadership behaviors, positive feedback has been at the forefront of all of them being identified as an effective tool for successful coaches (Calvo & Topa, 2019; Forlenza et al., 2018; Gearity, 2009; Pitts et al., 2018; Razali et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2012).

The absence of significance regarding differing perceptions of positive feedback in this study is significant. Many student-athletes who participated in this study reported that their coach exhibited behaviors associated with positive feedback “Often.” It is good that the student-athletes receive positive feedback, but is it effective?

Coaches providing an abundance of generalized feedback will not produce the intended results for their athlete or team, whereas providing concurrent augmented or

extrinsic feedback is a powerful motivator and educational tool (Baudry et al., 2006). Baudry et al. (2006) elaborated that providing extrinsic feedback supplements the information provided by the muscles and allows the athlete to make the mind-body connection. Research has concluded that when a coach emphasizes the strengths of an athlete and provides productive approaches on how to build upon those strengths, the athlete develops positive emotions and makes them amenable to looking at the alternate methods prescribed, which in turn unlocks creativity and problem-solving skills (Roulier, 2014). Additionally, it has been found that feedback is more effective when athletes observe feedback provided to others through the environment the coach has created (Roulier, 2014).

When providing negative feedback, a more recent study evaluated the barriers associated with the behavior. It was found that “entitlement attitudes” and the “participation trophy” mentality play a role in how receptive student-athletes are to constructive criticism (Mason et al., 2020). Mason et al. (2020) note that regardless of the type of feedback, it should be provided in a way that is suitable for the personality of the student-athlete, reinforcing the need for the coach-athlete relationship.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study presents the population’s potential to engage in social interaction regarding the survey. Since the survey was being administered online, there was no way to determine if the student-athlete was completing the survey alone, with teammates, or with parents and providing their insights into their coach’s leadership behaviors. Participants were instructed in the informational documents that they should

refrain from discussing their survey involvement. Another limitation was that teenagers are impassioned individuals regarding multiple things at any given time and tend to change those views relatively quickly. Therefore, the results of this study might only be indicative of some of the population of high school student-athletes.

The issue of variability could also be a limiting factor for the study. The minimum number of participants needed for this study was 159. However, the final number of participants was 192, spanning 13 states, primarily New Jersey. The results of this study might only be indicative of some of the population of high school student-athletes in those states. This study does not account for the perceptions of student-athletes who play in a more competitive division than those who play in a less competitive division, nor does it account for the gender of the coach.

Finally, the opportunity for bias was present as I am an employee in an urban public school, a former athlete, and a former athletic coach. Acknowledging and understanding the limitations and biases of a thorough research plan should mitigate these issues.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research include replicating the study in many ways. Due to the vast expanse of respondents but low participant numbers in geographical locations of the United States, the results could not be generalized to those locations. Therefore, focusing on differences in perceptions from student-athletes in various geographical locations could yield different results.

The RLSS has three versions of the tool: coach self-reflection, athlete preference, and athlete perception. Future research could include statistical analysis of the differences in preference and perception of the student-athlete versus the coach's self-reflection providing insight as to how the coach sees them to how the student-athlete perceives them, alongside the behaviors that the student-athlete would prefer the coach to exhibit.

Implications

According to Üzümlü (2018), a coach has a vital role in increasing a student-athlete's potential and should be in tune with their insights regarding training, competition, and work in conjunction to develop communication as part of a healthy relationship. Additionally, studies have illuminated that discord between an athlete and a coach presents when a coach exhibits inconsistent behaviors, is disrespectful, lacks technical aptitude, and has unrealistic expectations of the athlete's ability (Üzümlü, 2018). This study may support positive social change by informing current high school athletic coaches on how they might be perceived by student-athletes and the implications of those perceptions when assessing the climate, culture, and efficacy of their athletic program. Additionally, this might also inform educational stakeholders on what coaching behaviors should be exhibited or not exhibited for each participation level when evaluating athletic coaches.

The factors that emerged as statistically significant and those that were not deemed statistically significant should be analyzed at the item level to provide coaches with feedback on how they might be perceived. Additionally, the results could provide

school administrators with a benchmark for what factorial items a coach is addressing or not addressing at each participation level.

Conclusion

The purpose of this quantitative group comparison study was to examine the differences in student-athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership behavior as measured by the RLSS scores between freshman, junior varsity, and varsity high school student-athletes. This study attempted to clarify and add to the body of literature regarding the perceptions of the different sports participation levels and how student-athlete's perceptions differed at each level.

While the number of respondents lived in multiple geographical locations, the respondents were primarily from New Jersey, which limits the generalizability of the study; the findings revealed significant differences in three out of the six factors. There were differences between the freshman participation level and the varsity participation level and the junior varsity and varsity participation levels for the Democratic Factor; there are also significant differences between freshman and varsity levels for the Training and Instruction Factor; and there were significant differences between the freshman and varsity levels for the Situational Consideration factor; however, there were no statistical differences found in the Autocratic, Social Support, or Positive Feedback factors.

I am confident that this study may support positive social change by informing current high school athletic coaches on how they might be perceived by student-athletes and the implications of those perceptions when assessing the climate, culture, and efficacy of their athletic program. Furthermore, this might inform educational

stakeholders on what coaching behaviors should be exhibited or not exhibited for each participation level when evaluating athletic coaches to ensure that they are providing student-athletes with an educational high school athletic career while helping them become self-directed members of society who have strong communication skills and the ability to reach their goals.

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Appendix A: Permission

Re: Permission

James Jianhui Zhang <[REDACTED]>

Wed 8/11/2021 1:35 PM

To: Clarissa Adams <[REDACTED]>

2 attachments (222 KB)

RLSS Manual.pdf; RLSS Manual.doc;

Hi Clarissa:

Attached is the scale. You have my permission to adopt it for your study.

James J. Zhang

Dr. James J. Zhang, Professor and Editor
International Journal of Sport Marketing & Sponsorship

[REDACTED]

From: Clarissa Adams <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, August 11, 2021 1:26 PM
To: James Jianhui Zhang <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Permission

[EXTERNAL SENDER - PROCEED CAUTIOUSLY]

Good Afternoon,

I hope my email finds you well. I am writing to request permission to use the statements from the Revised Leadership Scale for Sports as a data collection tool as a basis for my proposed doctoral research study. My goal is to gather information regarding urban high school student-athletes perceptions of how their coach's leadership behaviors affect their motivation to participate in athletics.

I thank you in advance for your attention to this email. Please feel free to contact me via email or phone if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Clarissa Adams

[REDACTED]