

Impact of Coach Gender on Motivation:
A Look into Female Athletes' Perspectives

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An inquiry project in the Master of Arts in Communication Program
submitted to the faculty of the James L. Knight School of
Communication in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts at Queens University of Charlotte

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Date of Graduation

MAY 2, 2014

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Abstract:

Through one on one interviews, this qualitative study examines how female college athletes respond to communication from their coaches based on gender. Current research on sports and gender focuses primarily on the difference that gender has on how athletes interpret communication within a broader sports setting. This work adds to current research by examining how female athletes react to a coach based specifically on gender, how the coach's gender impacts his or her ability to motivate the athlete, and how cursing affects sports related communication. Using motivation as the central theme, subjects were asked to detail how their current coach motivates his or her athletes. Interviews also included a specific line of questioning on the use and impact of curse words to determine whether cursing positively or negatively motivates athletes. Results indicate that the gender of a coach can play a role in motivation when it comes to past experiences the players have had with coaches. Further, female athletes are motivated to be successful if they feel the coach makes the effort to get to know them on a personal level. Overall, players indicated that coach cursing, when used in a positive context only, was motivating. The results of this study provide current and aspiring coaches a better understanding of how to effectively communicate with their female athletes.

Introduction

Title IX, a component of the 1972 Education Acts, created an explosion in the number of females participating in sports over the past several decades (Rhodes & Walker, 2008, p. 2). In 2007, Sean Gregory wrote in *TIME Magazine* that little praise or fanfare surrounded the 35th anniversary of Title IX (p. 1). However, with the growth came a “disturbing statistic: only 42% of women's college teams are led by a female head coach--the lowest level ever, according to a recent study by two retired Brooklyn College professors” (Gregory, 2007, p. 1). This statistic becomes more alarming when compared to the over 90% of active female head coaches in 1972, Title IX's inaugural year (Rhodes & Walker, 2008, p. 3). Research on coach gender indicates this statistic may be attributed to the fact that many girls are introduced to sports by their fathers. Also, according to Gregory (2007), most fathers “remain active in their [daughter's] athletic development, so many female college players say they prefer playing for a male coach” (p. 1). Gregory (2007) also noted that “most student athletes spend more time with their coach than with any other adult at school. Many coaches wield enormous influence on campus and in their communities. So what message is being sent to young women when men fill most with these leadership roles” (p. 1)?

Gregory's observation is essential because having female role models can be beneficial in the personal and professional development of young women while navigating their college years. Penelope Lockwood's (2006) research addresses the need for females to have female role models in their lives and suggests that female support is a determining factor in self-esteem and confidence (p. 42). Her research shows that females related more easily to female role models than male role models because they shared more characteristics, and because of the relationships

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participants had with their mothers (Lockwood, 2006, p. 42). Right To Play (N.D), a global organization whose goal is to educate youth on dealing with adversity through sports and to help them learn life skills, reports female participation in sports can help with increased self-esteem, life skill development, and relationship development (p. 131).

Past research focuses primarily on the ways a coach's gender affects how others interpret communication within a sports setting (Haselwood et al., 2005; Howell et al., 2011; Lovett et al., 1998; Mahoe, 2007; Marback et al., 2005). The research contemplated in this study complements current research by adding a qualitative viewpoint that examines how female athletes react to coaches based on gender, and the effects of cursing in sports related communication. The primary objective of this study is to determine if a coach's gender impacts female college athletes' motivation to be successful on the field. This research examines how players perceive their current coach's ability to motivate them, including a specific line of questioning on the use of curse words. Through the athlete's responses, the research seeks to detect differences in gender-based perceptions. Finally, this study assesses whether cursing yields a positive or negative result in motivating athletes.

More importantly, understanding how gender-based coaching and communication styles impact female athletes will provide current and aspiring coaches with critical information to be successful in their coaching careers and, in time, lead to an increase in the number collegiate female head coaches. Additionally, being aware of how to best communicate with female athletes may encourage the coach to create a safe and trusting relationship with each of his/her athletes. By gaining that trust, the coach will be able to maximize the skill set of his/her athletes, and in turn help the athletes reach their full potential both on and off the field during their time

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on the team.

Thus, in the analysis of the effectiveness of the coach's communication and motivational methods on female college athletes based on coach gender will seek to better understand how these athletes communicate. This approach is considerably different from previous research, Haselwood et al., 2005; Howell et al., 2011; Lovett et al., 1998; Mahoe, 2007; Marback et al., 2005, as the focus will be on the athlete's opinions by taking a deeper look at what they think about their coaches' communication skills. The athletes' responses may indicate whether or not coach gender plays a role in motivating teams successfully. The results of this study could lead to future academic research focused on coach-player relationships and communication models.

Literature Review

“One of the effective ways to understand college athletes' behaviors is to know their perceptions since human behavior is determined by his/her perceptions” (Wang and Callahan (1999, p. 1). Coaches and athletes in a college athletic program work closely together to achieve goals set forth by the team and coach, yet those goals need to be carried out by the athletes to have the most success since they are the ones playing in the game (Wang et al., 2004). Motivation plays a key role in a team's overall success. Also, the leadership development of an athlete in a team sport environment can have a long lasting effect in a positive or negative way (Trninic, Papic, Trninic, 2009), which means what an athlete learns in college and on her sports team can have a significant impact on her future after graduation. If she has been mentored in a positive manner and learning life skills, then she can use what she has learned to be successful outside of sports.

According to Gregory (2007), more men currently coach female sports teams at the college level, but he believes more female coaches are required to even out the gender statistic

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(p. 1). However, numerous studies report that a majority of female collegiate athletes prefer a male coach versus a female coach and often cite the influence of their fathers who introduced them to sports (Haselwood et al., 2005). Outside of a paternal connection, what other factors could be driving a female athlete's presence toward male coaches? How does a coach's ability to motivate play a role in getting a player to respond in a positive manner?

Motivation is the ability to invoke action; it's providing a compelling reason to act in a certain way (Cherry, N.d). Motivation can be a complex process because life is often unpredictable, making it difficult to stay focused on the action required to accomplish what one sets out to do. (Perry, 2009). Motivation "involves the biological, emotional, social and cognitive forces that activate behavior. In everyday usage, the term motivation is frequently used to describe *why* a person does something" (Cherry, N. d.). When it comes to helping others reach their goals, the ability to motivate plays an essential role. According to McClelland's Human Motivation Theory (2003), three key factors motivate all people: the need for achievement, the need for power, and the need for affiliation; however, each individual usually has one dominant motivator that drives him or her, which is generally reliant on culture and personal experiences (p. 117). McClelland (2003) breaks down each need as follows: the need for achievement refers to people that are goal focused and put their own achievement before others, the need for power describes more dominant people who like to have a voice, and the need for affiliation defines people who need to have a sense of belonging. Because of this, coaches need to understand what drives each of their athletes to gain the most success within their program. These three factors can be a good determinant of why people decide to play sports. The researcher's 20 years of experience in athletics leads to the application of McClelland's theory in the following ways:

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Achievement: the athlete who wants to win more than anything else; this athlete may be angry at losing and or their own poor performance.

Power: players who like having a say in decisions and usually stand out on the field for having big voices on the team; they want to be in charge and have a leadership position on the team.

Affiliation: players who like being a part of something bigger than themselves; they enjoy being part of a community and are usually team players who are comfortable putting the needs of others before their own.

It is beneficial for a coach to determine which of these three categories their players fall into in order to maintain happiness, satisfaction, and, in turn, motivation to be successful. McClelland's Needs Theory is valuable for coaches in identifying the needs of their players.

This study, concentrated on motivation, focuses on past research of four different variables: team leadership, gender, generational differences, and cursing. The reason for choosing the first three areas is mainly driven by what past research says about motivating today's athletes and the importance of the team's overall success. Additionally, this study investigates whether cursing plays a role in the overall effectiveness in the message the coach is communicating to their team.

Team leadership

There is much existing research on the topic of team leadership. A successful coach motivates and provides clear coaching instruction with purpose to enhance the athlete's level of performance (Mahoe, 2007). Further, "the personality of the coach and his [or her] competition experience and his [or her] experiences in the sports preparation process, competition success, and ability to transfer knowledge can have an important influence on the accomplishment of an

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individual athlete in [his or her] sport (Trninic et al., 2009, p. 18)". Trninic et al. (2009) also states that a coach's motivation has a major influence on the athlete's management behaviors (p. 18). Further, the coach's motivational influence could cause differences within the team on how the athletes feel toward the coach (Trninic et al., 2009, p. 18). Additionally, Kirpatrick and Lock (1991) point out that there are six traits that differ from a leader to a non-leader: "drive, the desire to lead, honesty/integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and [a knowledgeable background in their field]" (p. 49). There is no denying that every college coach is a leader. However, while every college coach qualifies as a leader, that does not mean every leader is effective.

According to Mahoe (2007), five concepts support a coach's ability to better communicate with his or her athletes: cultivate a plan, determine what exactly you want to communicate, figure out when and where this message will be best conveyed, understand why the message is significant, and plan how you are going to deliver the message (p. 44). Regardless of the gender of the coach, to convey their message effectively, the coach must be certain that the message does not get lost in translation. These five concepts can be viewed as instrumental in helping the coach develop a set plan on communicating effectively to the players on his or her team. In addition, Wang, Chen and Chen (2004) noted that, in some cases, a number of athletes might have played sports for years prior to playing in college, while others might have a more limited experience playing sports only when they arrive at college. Therefore, their perceptions on many issues could differ depending on their experience in their sport (Wang et al, 2004, p. 2).

Wang, Callahan, and Goldfine (2001) stated that a coach's behavior can have a significant impact on an athlete's psychological well-being and her overall performance in her respective sport. On top of being able to communicate effectively, coaches need to make sure

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they also listen to their athletes so that the athletes will feel more comfortable with their coaches (Mahoe, 2007, p. 44). Accordingly, Trninic et al. (2009) mentions that, "sports motivation may affect four factors: activity selection, activity persistence, effort investment during exercise and competition, and quality of sports performance" (p. 18). There seems to be a breakdown regarding the coaches' method of communication with the athletes and the method of communication that athletes prefer (Wang et al, 2004, p. 2). This breakdown of communication comes down to the coach's ability to communicate in a way that is both effective and motivating. Many studies have investigated what perceptions athletes have of their coaches, and this topic will need to continue to be researched as the personality of the "college athlete" changes over the years.

Wang et al. (2004) took a deeper look within competition to see if athletes' perceptions change regarding a coach when it comes to the amount of playing time the athlete receives in a game. An athlete's playing time can give considerable insight to the athlete's overall experience. Wang et al. (2004) found female athletes are more concerned about playing time than male athlete. This is contradictory to earlier findings, which found that females ranked friendship and fun as important when being involved in a sport (Wang et al, 1999, p. 9). Additionally, there was a difference to the level of athlete happiness on the team between players who started in games regularly compared to players who did not start consistently in games. Furthermore, Wang (1999) noted that it can be challenging for some college coaches to motivate the nonstarters, especially in sports with fewer opportunities to substitute (p. 9). Coaching can be challenging, so it is important to be able to communicate effectively with college athletes in order to be successful.

Likewise, a coach's success relies on the interaction between the coach and his/her

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players in both an individual setting and a team setting. The coach must possess strong communication skills, an ability to deal with team problems, and conceptual skills to motivate his/her team while also developing the individual athlete (Trninic et al., 2009). Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), said that leaders can be born or made (p. 48). Regardless, not everyone possesses the skills to be an effective and motivational leader. A coach, however, assumes a natural leadership role and has the power to leave a positive or negative mark on each athlete that passes through his or her program. Coaches do not have to be morally good people, but they need to have the "right stuff" which is not equally present in all people (Kirkpatrick, S., Locke, A., 1991, p. 59).

Gender

Existing research on gender and sport is often of different opinions regarding how it plays a role in motivation. "Over the past [several years since Title IX] enactment there has been a significant increase in sport participation by women. It seems logical that an increase in opportunity for female athletes to participate should also result in a great number of females in coaching and leadership positions. [But even though] previous research has shown that participation in sport for females has increased...the employment of women in leadership positions in sports has declined" (as cited in Lovett, D. J., Lowery, C., 1988, p. 106-107). This is important when looking at gender statistics in female collegiate athletic programs. Lovett and Lowery (1988) also state that this decline has nothing to do with the lack of job opportunities for females (p. 107). Further, the evidence does not present a clear picture as to whether the gender of the coach plays a role in effectively communicating to a women's college team or if female athletes perceive differences in a coach based solely on gender.

Lovett and Lowry (1988) assumed that men continue to fill the head coaching roles in

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female team sports as new opportunities continue to come available (p. 114). More recent research suggests that there can be differences in management styles among males and females (Laud, &, Johnson, 2013, p. 57). A male's confidence seems to be a key driver in securing the job they want. One would ask why women are not securing these female coaching positions and Lovett and Lowery (1988) suggest that one reason may be that there are few female coaching role models to help mentor females wanting to coach at the collegiate level (p. 114). Research surrounding gender and communication focuses on taking into account the importance of the coach, in which one needs to determine the quality and success of an athlete's experience in their sport (Lovett, D. J., Lowery, C., 1988). Unfortunately, little research exists on the topic of coaching behaviors that influence the effectiveness of the athletes' behaviors (Marback, T. L., Short, S. E., Short, M. W., & Sullivan, P. J., 2005).

Furthermore, Marback et al. (2005) mentioned how powerful motivation efficacy can be (p. 19). The confidence of the coach in his or her ability to affect the shape and skills of his or her players is integral to a successful team, and these skills include motivating his or her athletes, being able to teach sports skills, and communicating the skills to his or her athletes (p. 19). In addition to motivating athletes, coaches must be able to manage conflict while continuing to provide instruction, all with effective communication (Haselwood, Joyer, Burke, Geyerman, Czech, Munksay and Zwald, 2005).

According to Marback, (2005) female coaches perceived themselves as being effective when it comes to teaching respect and sportsmanship to their athletes (p. 25). However, Haselwood et al. (2005) showed that, in some cases, the ability to communicate ineffectively as a coach could result in a higher burnout among his or her athletes. This example has led to previous research to determine how gender influences success on a deeper level. One major

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difference between female and male coaches is that female coaches are more likely to share personal information with their players, which is important because it can allow players to open up about personal information (Haselwood, et al., 2005). On the other hand, there are number of female athletes who listed male coaches as having more effective communication skills compared to female coaches (Haselwood et al., 2005). Even more, Parkhouse and Williams (1986) determined that, when presented with hypothetical coaching situations, female athletes exhibited more negative responses to female coaches than to male coaches (p. 58). However, female athletes can also see female coaches as more positive and accepting in conflict situations (Haselwood et al., 2005). Lovett and Lowery assumed that one of the reasons for the low number of coaching positions held by women is because "society still expects women to fulfill the roles of the traditional wife and mother" (1988, p. 114). This could be a significant interference from women being able to have successful career in coaching (Lovett, D. J., Lowery, C., 1988). Regardless, more research needs to be completed on the topic of gender, specifically regarding which gender communicates more effectively, and/or the perception of the coach among players. Additionally, future research should focus on the parameters of communication among the millennial generation, which may play significant roles within sports today.

Generational Differences

Existing research about generational differences remains a popular topic that continues to grow as people learn more about the current generation of millennials. The millennial generation refers roughly to anyone who was born between 1980 and 2001 and includes those that are currently in college and who will be going through college for years to come. With the growth of technology, many millennials have grown up using computers, cell phones, and the Internet. Millennials use technology to stay connected with their friends and family and to stay connected

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to the greater society, according to Pearson, Carmon, Tobola, & Fowler (2009, p. 45). McGlynn (2008) notes that “this generation is the most socially connected of all generations” (p. 21). Since millennials include current college athletes, it is important for coaches to know what technology they are using, and for coaches to use this technology to communicate with and motivate their players.

McGlynn (2008) mentioned that before we can start motivating this generation, we need to actively engage them on the learning process, as it is key to motivate millennials to learn (p. 21). Millennials are known to be very team-oriented, which is a beneficial trait for success in today's world; on the other hand, they lack time management skills (McGlynn, A. P., 2008). Since the coach is a major adult figure in an athlete's life during college, it is important for the coach to help mentor athletes on time management skills and goal setting so the athlete can be successful at knowing how to reach the goals she set forth (McGlynn, A. P., 2008). Coaches also need to be persistent with their players to keep them engaged in achieving goals by holding meetings to check in on their progress (McGlynn, A. P., 2008). From McGlynn's (2008) research, it seems goal setting is an important life tool that needs to be taught so that upon graduation young adults can use these skills to help them in the work force (p. 21).

As more millennials are graduating and moving into the work force, they are communicating what they want, which varies depending on whether gender plays a role in effective motivation. Emeagwali (2011) showed that 38% of boys tend to be motivated to become their own boss compared to 33% of females (p. 25). The millennial generation is more motivated by the vision of steady employment, along with a chance of promotions, than any other earlier generation, as stated by Montana and Lenaghan (1999). To determine what leaders millennials will make, one could take a closer look at what type of students are sitting in

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classrooms (Emeagwali, 2011). Although Emeagwali (2011) said that boys like to be their own boss, girls are more likely than boys to become leaders; he believes this occurs because females want to help others more than males do (p. 25). Research shows that millennials want to have more meaning in their lives and demand that they connect with the purpose and mission of any organization they are a part of.

Another trait of this generation is the constant need for instant gratification (McGlynn, A. P., 2008). This need relates to college sports in that the methods necessary to motivate players can be difficult for an older generation to understand. Coaches need to acknowledge players' strengths and communicate them to the player, along with providing continued encouragement (McGlynn, A.P., 2008). "Researching these millennial [players] in order to engage, motivate, and inspire them needs to be addressed so that there can be an intersection between how they learn and how [the coach] teaches them" (McGlynn, 2008, p. 21). This provides a positive avenue for a research approach that determines what motivational tactics are needed to help this generation be successful in college. In turn, that puts pressure back on the coach since his or her leadership behavior affects the athletes' motivation and performance levels, which in turn affects the team's success rate (Trninic et al. 2009).

Diversity is also something millennials are learning to appreciate in a different way from earlier generations. The most notable differences are regarding ethnic and racial diversity (Broido, 2004). Broido (2004) states that there is more diversity in colleges today as a result of more multiracial, biracial, and immigrant children attending college. With this note, more college teams are seeing more athletes from diverse backgrounds.

More millennials are being raised by single parents, stepfamilies or blended families, and parents of the same sex (Broido, 2004, p. 76). Therefore, there is a great need for schools to

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“advocate for curricular diversity requirements that go beyond just learning about international cultures” (Broido, 2004, p. 82). Colleges must continue to educate themselves on this topic to meet the changing profile of their student body. College coaches must also require similar education on the topic of diversity in order to better communicate with a team with variety cultural backgrounds.

Cursing

Cursing, as it relates to the overall effectiveness in motivation, has not been studied in detail, especially as it relates to how college coaches communicate with their teams. Mowry (2011) asserts that profanity is more accepted in the workplace because more people use profanity in their everyday language today than in the recent past (p. 1). He adds that employees walk a fine line when cursing at work and should be aware that this language could be perceived as abusive (2011, p. 1). Howell and Guiliano (2011) suggest that cursing in coaching may be an ineffective strategy to motivate athletes because it can be seen as a threat (p. 69). The results of a recent Careerbuilder.com survey on whether or not swearing at work could harm one's career prospects found that it could ultimately cost one a promotion stating that “bad words leave bad impressions” on employers (Careerbuilder, 2012). From personal experience as a head coach, the use of expletives seems to degrade the conversation between the coach and the team, and adversely impact the coach's ability to connect with female athletes. Most sports fans see the use of expletives as a common behavior within competitive sports and they do not seem to impact how the fans view their team. Profanity used by coaches, however, could cause an athlete to respect her coach less. Assuming the level of respect is a key indicator in a coach's ability to motivate his/her team, excessive profanity may directly impact the coach's end goal—to lead and motivate. Because specific research on this topic is scarce, this study fulfills the need to

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investigate this topic and will focus specifically on collegiate female athletes.

Research approach

In continuing the conversation surrounding gender motivation within collegiate female athletic teams, this study uses a qualitative approach to evaluate the athletes' perception of the coach's role, gender, and communication methods on motivation. This approach helped determine how female athletes in the millennial generation prefer to be motivated by utilizing the three needs from McClelland's theory. Applying this theory provides better understanding of the millennial generations' preferred methods of communication. By looking at motivation among student female athletes, this study focused on the variables to uncover how female athletes respond to coach gender. The study also shows how this current generation of college athletes responds to certain styles of communication. One specific communication tactic highlighted in this study is cursing. The results of this research will provide a better understanding of the coach/athlete relationship, and potentially develop a set of best practices for present and future coaches of both genders.

Therefore, the following research questions were examined:

RQ1: How does coach gender influence female athletes' perceptions of motivational coaching communication within a team environment?

RQ2: Does the coach cursing impact athlete perceptions of the coach's motivational abilities? If so, how?

Methodology

This study used one-on-one interviews for the purpose of having open discussions and creating a safe environment where participants were most likely to speak honestly. Each athlete

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completed demographic and personality surveys which were used to help identify each participant's background and personality traits in order to compare and cross reference those results with the interview. Prior to interviews, each athlete was asked to sign an informed consent form to acknowledge her understanding of her role in this study and how the interview data would be used. Participants had an opportunity to ask questions regarding participation in the study before the interviews began, and the researcher explained to each participant that she had the right to discontinue participation at any point throughout the study for any reason.

Participants

The researcher randomly selected 30 participants among the female student athletic body at University of Virginia's College at Wise in Wise, Virginia, by pulling names out of a cup that contained all of the female athletes at UVA Wise. All of the players' names and email addresses were taken from the UVA Wise athletic website, which is a public site. All participants were members of a Division II women's sports program that were currently coached by both female and male coaches in order to gain knowledge from both genders in the 2013-2014 school year. Ten students volunteered to participate from the 30 whom were selected, which means this study was a combination of random and volunteer sample. The sample of participants consisted of freshman through senior student athletes, all ranging in age from 18 to 22 years old. Out of the 10 that were interviewed two student athletes were 18 years of age, three were 19 years of age, two were 20 years of age, two were 21 years of age and one was 22 years of age. A total of 9 were Caucasian and/or white and one was Hispanic and/or Latino. All of the sample had been involved on a sports team for more than seven and a half years. Out of the 10 that participated in the interview, 6 are currently coached by a female head coach and 4 are currently being coached

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by a male head coach. When it came to how many of them had experience with head coaches of different gender, 100% of participants have been coached by both male and female head coaches in the past. The teams being represented were volleyball, basketball, softball, tennis and cross country. Of these teams, volleyball, basketball, and softball have female head coaches while tennis and cross country are coached by males.

Procedures

Research was conducted through a series of one-on-one interviews. The researcher randomly selected 30 collegiate female student athletes to invite to participate in the study, with the intent of having close to a 50% response rate. The invitation to participate was emailed to student athletes, whose contact information was available on the college's website, and included the purpose of the study and contact information for the researcher. In order to make sure the student athletes were in a safe environment, each participant was given an informed consent form before the interview started. The form explained their role within the study as well as stated there was no risk for their participation. The questions asked in the interview pertained to the effectiveness of their current coach's ability to motivate their team in a positive manner in order to get the most out of each player. Further questions investigated whether the coach cursed when communicating to the team, and if so, how the player saw this practice in reference to effective motivation for the team.

Data Analysis

All of the individual interviews were audio taped and transcribed for post-interview analysis. When recording the interviews, participant's names were not revealed for privacy purposes. The researcher also took field notes focused on participant reactions, notable visual

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observations, e.g. body language, and notation on topics respondents intentionally avoided. All narrative data was categorized using preset and emergent categories. Preset categories include the list of themes and topics developed prior to the interview that address the key objectives of the research. Emergent categories are defined during data analysis when various themes, issues, and topics recur in the interview set. All notes were saved onto the researchers' personal computer and a USB portable storage drive, which are both password protected.

Findings

To answer the first research question, how does coach gender influence female athletes' perceptions of motivational coaching communication within a team environment, the data was organized in to major themes. Two themes emerged from the data: motivation and emotional influence and/or connection.

The motivation theme refers to the manner in which the player gets motivated as an athlete. Out of this theme came three sub-themes: team motivation, self-motivation, and coach motivation. These sub-themes emerged based on how the respondent's current team connects and gets motivated as a whole. An example of team motivation is what the team in general does to get each other motivated. For example, four participants were quoted saying "I love the bonds I've made with my team". When it comes to self-motivation, it strictly indicates that the individual being interviewed was self-driven to become better in her sport. One player mentioned in the interview that "[she is] very self-motivated", while another said "if you [coach] tell me that there is something I can't do, I am going to do whatever to prove you wrong". In the interviews, coach motivation came to mean the coach having a personal relationship with the athlete and wanting that athlete to be a better person and player. Three players were quoted

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saying “they [coach] got to know us on a one on one basis” or “[the coach] never made me feel like I wasn’t important and someone that was not worth trying to make better” and “he genuinely cares, like his team...we were pretty much like his kids, like he cared about us as much as he cared about his kids and went above and beyond the call of a coach”. Another participant said “she was more personable...[she] knew me better than the other ones and that was how she was with all the girls, wasn’t just me”.

The second theme that emerged from the data collected was emotional influence and/or connection. This was based on the perception of the players experiences with both male and female head coaches and what different characteristics vary based on gender. This theme helps answer the first research question to identify whether or not the gender of the coach plays a role in personally motivating their team. Four different participants mentioned that there was more “drama” when their head coach was female coach compared to a male coach, because “females care about what others think of them”, which was seen as a negative. On the other hand, another participant said “the emotional side is important because we are girls and we need that but having a male aspect is really good for the team as well”. Another mentioned that with a male coach “it’s strictly more physical and the best player plays”, while conversely, a participant that is currently being coached by a male coach said “any time there is a gender gap, communication is different to the girls than it is to the guy’s team so what he says” might be taken differently.

To answer the second question regarding how coach cursing impacts athlete perceptions of the coach’s motivational abilities, the researcher noted any discussions about cursing and came to the third overall theme: reinforcement. Reinforcement refers to how the coach used his or her authority as a coach and if it was seen as motivational to the players. There were two sub-

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themes from reinforcement which were: positive reaction and negative reaction to reinforcement.

The most common examples of this theme surrounded coaches yelling at their players to get their message across; some of the participants saw this as being acceptable where others saw this as un-motivating. One participant said “[cursing] in a positive way I think has a better effect” and another one said “curse words don’t really bother me”; both of these are examples of positive usage of curse words. Negative examples were mentioned from the participants’ as well. For instance, one player said that the “coach wasn’t really cussing but was really using demeaning kind of language to players and you could tell it made the rest of the team uncomfortable”; another said “using [curse words] toward a players is inappropriate but if it is in the moment and you are giving a good speech then its ok”. The overall response from participants was that using cursing to communicate with their team was viewed as either positive and motivating or negative and un-motivating based on how the language was used.

The three themes selected were used for both of the sets of athletes- those being coached by female head coaches and those being coached by male head coaches. There were similarities as well as differences that emerged from the data depending on their past and present experiences with their coaches.

Discussion

It is the goal of this study that all current and aspiring coaches will benefit from learning better ways to communicate with athletes, specifically those who make up the millennial generation. Further, this research will also help coaches identify the effectiveness of cursing at and around their athletes.

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An important question asked in each interview was why the players decided to dedicate herself to her sport. While this question doesn't specifically answer either research question, it does lay a foundation for understanding what drives each athlete to participate and be successful in collegiate athletics. The answers repeated most often were that (1) they were passionate about their sport and didn't want to stop playing, (2) they were excited for the new level of competition, (3) the sport has always been part of their life, and (4) they loved being part of a family. The responses were similar regardless of whether the respondent's coach was male or female; no response could be attributed specifically to the gender of the coach. This finding correlates to McClelland's human motivation factors indicating the need for affiliation (McClelland, D. C., & Burnham, D. H., 2003). People that sign up to be members of a team do so for many reasons. One of those is so they can be a part of something bigger than themselves. Being affiliated with a sports team is a great method for someone to achieve this sense of belonging.

It also should be noted that all of the athletes currently being coached by a male coach play on a team where that same male coach also coaches the opposite gender team. This is important since their experience with their coach could differ from a player's relationship with a coach that only has one team.

Theme One: Motivation

This study examined how the athletes are motivated, so it is not a surprise to see motivation emerge as a strong theme. All of the athletes commented that motivation was very important in achieving success on their sports team. One player made a point to say that

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motivation went hand in hand with sports. It was also mentioned that there are different ways a team can get motivated.

Teammate Motivation

The first sub-theme that emerged was team motivation, meaning the motivation derived from teammates and being part of a whole was unlike the motivation athletes found on individual sports. This makes sense since motivation can come from players as well as the coaches. Two athletes being coached by a female head coach commented that their team members “pump each other up” to motivate each other. This can be huge in helping team morale. Even if the coach is being hard on them, at any given time having a teammate motivate you to keep pushing will help keep up the team chemistry. Another player stated that players are competitive with each other; competition is positive on a sports team, and most of the athletes playing sports are competing for a starting spot. McClelland's 2003 theory indicates people need achievement; along these lines, Wang et al. (2004) found that female athletes are more concerned about playing time. Playing time fits in with the need for achievement as it is a direct relation to whether or not the athlete is reaching her goals, and for someone that plays a sport playing time matters mostly because she wants to be successful and achieve the goals she set forth. A coach can be instrumental in this factor by making sure that he or she has open lines of communication in order to define players' individual goals for the year in an effort to meet that need for achievement. The athletes being coached by male head coaches felt positively about having friendly competition among their teammates and in looking to their teammates for ways to improve. Another development that came from the set of athletes being coached by male coaches implied that athletes love the bonds they have made with their teammates; this finding is

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important for any female sports team as it can be one of the motivating factors in playing collegiate sports, as those bonds will most likely stay with the athletes far after graduation.

According to McGynn (2008), the millennial generation can be characterized as team-oriented.

Given this trait, it is not a surprise that all of the players interviewed said that they get along with their teammates and the chemistry among all of their teams is strong.

Something else to consider is player leadership on their team. On a sports team, some players naturally fall into a leadership position among their fellow teammates; this leadership position may be defined, as a team captain, or less structured, such as in the form of a player who leads by example or is well liked by her teammates. If females are more likely to assume a leadership role as Emegawali (2011) suggests, this assertiveness could hinder a female coach's ability to establish herself as the team leader (p. 25); a female coach may respond differently to a player who challenges her leadership.

Self-Motivation

The second sub-theme that emerged from this study was self-motivation. Athletes coached by females expressed a high degree of self-motivation to improve their game and "to prove the coach wrong if they said that there was something I couldn't do." This mentality could be seen as a negative or a positive regarding the real reasons behind any extra (outside of practice) work the player does in order to better her skills. When it came to the female athletes being coached by males, no one mentioned anything about being self-motivated. This could be due to the fact that the female sports coached by male coaches, tennis and cross country, are more individually focused than team focused, so athletes are constantly working on their individual skill. This dynamic of team versus individual sport is one that could be studied

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further. Overall, differences among team and individual sports could relate to the need for power which is McClelland's other factor (2003).

Coach Motivation

The third sub-theme was coach motivation based on an individual connection. All 10 players interviewed stated that the one factor that made them feel most positively about a past or present coach centered on the coach creating an individual connection by getting to know the players on the team more personally; the significance of a personal connection between coach and player was equally important to the athlete regardless of the coach's gender. Because this shows motivation from a coach may not always be driven by the coaches' gender, it implies that the players were more motivated to play for a coach who knew them more as a person and not just a player. Haselwood (2005) mentioned that a major difference between female and male coaches is that female coaches are more likely to share personal information with their players when compared to male coaches. This inclination to share can certainly help make players feel more comfortable about opening up and sharing personal information with their coach, which implies that the coach may have more success in motivating his or her players. Athletes in this study who are coached by female coaches stated that "[she] knew exactly what to say to me to get me motivated", or "[she] pulled me aside for feedback"; additionally, the players felt "that overall [she] wanted the best from me". Similarly, athletes from male-coached teams felt that a personal relationship was integral to their success as an athlete. For instance, the coaches who knew the participants more personally were said to "genuinely care about me" and go "above and beyond the call of a coach". Even though Haselwood said that female coaches seem to be more likely to open up to their players, this research suggests that male coaches were also able to

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reach the athlete in a more personal way. The first research question is focused on how gender plays a role in personally motivating female athletes; the information gathered within this first theme seems to indicate that gender could play a role in motivating female athletes, but that the more important factor in coach to player motivation is a personal connection with their players, regardless of gender. McGlynn's (2008) research shows similar findings. His work discusses the coaches' need to acknowledge players strengths and to communicate those strengths to the player while also providing continued encouragement. Further, Marback's (2005) study on motivation efficacy showed that it is a powerful tool for a team because it determines the confidence of the coach to affect the shape and skills of his or her players; motivation efficacy can be a determining factor in encouraging athletes to be successful, and this is supported from the data in this study. Additionally, participants verbalized the importance of their coach having competence in his/her position in reference to the coaches' ability to motivate.

Theme Two: Emotional Connection & Influence

Themes dealing with connection, defined as the one-on-one player-coach relationship, and influence, defined as the coaches' ability to modify athlete behavior, emerged quickly within the data collection. More than any other theme or thread emerging from this study, this theme proved to be more heavily dependent on the coach's gender. It seemed to go hand in hand with the notion that different genders have different personalities which can help or hinder the team's chemistry. There was an astonishing number of participants being coached by female coaches that said female coaches are too focused on emotions and care about what the players think about them more than they care about playing the sport. Because of this, there is more "drama" on the team. Additionally, three of the six players coached by female coaches stated that female coaches seem to show favoritism more often than male coaches. As much as favoritism is seen as a

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negative, it also relates to the players wanting to have an individual relationship with their coaches. The female athletes being coached by males also commented on a few occasions that female coaches tend to read into things more than their male counterparts. Like Haselwood et al, (2005) mentioned, in addition to motivating athletes, a coach has to be able to manage conflict while continuing to provide instruction, all while utilizing effective communication. This knowledge paired with the data collected from this study suggest female coaches could struggle more than male coaches, as they may get too wrapped up in team "drama" that they forget to stay on top of what they are trying to communicate and achieve.

The athletes currently being coached by female coaches felt that male coaches are more laid back when compared to female coaches, but still have high expectations for their teams. Also, they mentioned that male coaches do not care about how the team feels about them as a person, and that they would always play the best players. This could correlate with Laud and Johnson's research from 2013 that suggested that there can be differences in management styles among males and females. Out of all themes, this was the only one for which the participants' opinions differed drastically among the athletes being coached by males or by females. These female athletes felt that a male coach doesn't understand "what a girl goes through" and in some instances the male coaches may be afraid of making their female athletes angry, so they do not always enforce rules. Also, one participant mentioned that "communication is different to the girls than it is to the guys", implying that messages are perceived differently by males and females.

Both groups of participants felt that having a representative from each gender on the coaching staff would provide a positive balance of personalities among that staff. Participants mentioned that a dual-gender coaching staff would allow athletes to speak comfortably to their

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female coach about things they may not feel comfortable discussing with a male coach, provide different personalities to aid in balancing the energy of the team, and allow different perspectives to when dealing with any issues that arise. These statements could help a coaching staff in motivating the different player personalities on their team. To further answer the first research question regarding how the gender of a coach influences female athletes' perceptions of motivational coaching communication within a team environment, gender doesn't seem to be a big component in motivating a female team; instead, the personality of the coach plays a bigger role in the motivational success.

Theme Three: Reinforcement

The third theme, reinforcement, refers to the effect the coach has on the behavior of their players. Using curse words in order to motivate a team is a method of reinforcing expectations that some coaches use; this behavior is viewed as both positive and negative, depending on the way the language is used. For example, when a coach reinforces good behavior by pointing out that a player does something well, this is seen by players as positive communication. In contrast, negative reinforcement can be described as the coach yelling at the team or a player for doing something wrong; this has a negative impact on the communication from the coach to the players. Reinforcement emerged from the questions that had to do with ways in which coaches communicate, and if cursing is involved when communicating a message to the team. Responses on this topic varied; some participants, who described themselves as responding well to harsh instruction, found cursing to be positive where others saw it as very negative and detrimental to the team's motivation. All of these responses were focused on the participants' current coach and like Wang et. al, (2004) mentioned, an athlete's perceptions on many issues could differ depending on their past experiences in their sport (p. 2).

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Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement refers to how the players perceive their coaches' behaviors, specifically cursing in an effort to motivate, and in this context is used to describe the participants' positive reactions to those behaviors. One athlete commented that her female coach "bribes" the team to do well in a drill or practice by "rewarding" them for good performance by canceling a practice or conditioning session. In this athlete's eyes, this motivates her to work hard and earn a rest day. Another commented that when her coach curses, "it shows she cares because she knows [the team] can do better." One player said that, because her coach rarely curses, using curse words shows how serious her coach is. There were some similarities among the two coaching groups; three players commented that cursing really didn't bother them and this can be related to Mowry's (2011) research on profanity in the work place as he found that cursing is becoming more accepted because more people use it in their everyday language compared to the past (p. 1). Another four of the 10 participants commented that cursing was fine if used in a positive way, like during a strong, motivational speech. The participants who are coached by male coaches had differing views, but still found cursing to be a positive reinforcement: one said she is used to cursing within their sport, so she does not find it to be negative, and another said that her coach is British so when he curses, which is very rarely, it is fine because it is seen as a cultural difference. This also relates to Mowry's (2011) research on cursing in the workplace as it seems from the data collected for this study that cursing is becoming more accepted when used in a positive context.

Negative Reinforcement

Negative reinforcement refers the players' negative reactions to their coaches' motivational behaviors. Even though some of the participants are motivated by cursing or

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yelling, others see it as being very negative and, in some cases, demeaning. Most participants commented that they felt yelling did not motivate them at all, but actually hurt the team morale. An athlete being coached by a female mentioned that when the coaching staff is perceived to be in a bad mood, practices are less enjoyable. Others being coached by female head coaches said that they “just don’t respond well to being yelled at”, and one participant mentioned that she finds cursing to be very belittling. There were similarities to the female athletes being coached by females in that some thought using curse words when speaking to a player was always inappropriate and demeaning. One player commented that she feels the team is uncomfortable when her coach is demeaning to a player. Based on these responses, cursing and yelling in a negative way it is not an effective way to motivate a team. In 2011, Howell and Guiliano made this same observation in the coaching world indicating that cursing and yelling may be an ineffective strategy in motivating athletes because it can be seen as a threat, which was true in the research in this study. Mowry (2011) said that people walk a fine line when cursing and should be aware that this could be perceived as abusive (p.1). From this information it seems that a coach walks a fine line when using curse words because players have varied perceptions on it being acceptable or unacceptable behavior. Overall, the millennial female athlete does not mind if their coach curses every once in a while, but if the coach starts to use it in a negative context, he or she will lose the ability to successfully motivate the team. Because of the comments on reinforcement, this study found that the coach cursing impacts athlete perceptions of the coach’s motivational abilities (RQ2).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to determine how the gender of the coach plays a role in motivating female collegiate athletes (RQ1), as well as to investigate how much cursing is being

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used by coaches at the college level, and if it is seen as an effective method of communication when talking to their team (RQ2). The sample size of this qualitative study and the individual nature of each athlete's experiences gives a unique understanding to these questions. Through one-on-one interviews with current female college athletes, the answer to RQ1 is largely based on the personal experiences of each individual athlete. Every athlete seemed to have a preference of coach gender based on their past experiences; one "bad" coach formed their feelings on that gender of coach, which would influence their thoughts on coaches in the future. However, this study finds that the gender of the coach does not directly play a role in how the player feels about the coaches' ability to motivate a collegiate team; building personal relationships with each of the players on a team is found to be instrumental in motivating players on the field regardless of the gender of the coach. When addressing the second research question concerning cursing as part of team communication (RQ2), interviews suggest this generation is less likely to perceive cursing negatively, particularly if used in positive context. When profanity is used in a negative context or in a demeaning way, this could negatively influence the team. Overall, these findings coincide with McClelland's (2003) human motivation theory in that each coach can be successful in motivating players by getting to know them on a personal level; by determining which of the three motivating factors is most important to each individual athlete, the coach can tailor his or her motivational style to the individual needs of each player.

The goal of this research is to help coaches identify the best approaches in motivating their college teams, which will ultimately lead to successful athletic programs. It is important to note that success on a team can be measured both by the record of the team and by the culture that is created on the team; both of these factors will be aided by this research.

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Limitations/ Challenges

A limitation to this study is the sample of athletes; all of the athletes in this study attend the same NCAA Division 2 college. Colleges and universities throughout the country have different expectations for their coaching staffs and athletes, so responses may vary significantly dependent on location and size of the school. Additionally, coaches at a college that competes in the NCAA Division 2 level may possess a different motivational mentality when compared to coaches at Division I or III schools. Additionally, because this study used interviews from 10 female athletes, the findings cannot be generalized to other teams across the country since there are numerous varying factors which could determine how athletes respond. Further, another limitation to this study could be the researchers' past and current history as a female coach who has coached female teams for the past nine years. Even more, a limitation could be the role of cursing in cultural areas in the nation, which should continue to be studied in the future. In short, all coaches of both genders should be aware of how they are communicating with their athletes as it can play a key role in the team's overall success and level of their players' satisfaction.

A challenge within this study was working around a college athlete's schedule to find time that worked for them to participate in the interview; many of the athletes selected were in season at the time the interviews were being conducted so their schedules were limited.

Recommendation for future study

Research on this topic should be expanded by including female athletes across all three NCAA divisions by using a quantitative approach with the goal of reaching a sample size yielding statistically significant results. Another avenue would be to study both successful female and male coaches of female collegiate teams to determine how they have built the

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communication lines with their female players. Also, future studies should focus on how this generation communicates in terms of technology, including cell phones and social media, because it would help a coach know how the player likes to communicate in different situations and will help the coach develop a more personal relationship with players. Further, there is a need to determine why men are securing more coaching positions among women's collegiate sports teams; a future study on this topic could interview athletic directors to see if gender plays a role in filling head coaching positions for female athlete teams. The topic of successful means for motivating teams will constantly need to be revisited in future years as the generation of collegiate athletes' changes. Overall, research in the field of motivation and sports teams will vary depending on the environment, the sport, and the personnel on the team.

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Research Documents to be used:

Informed Consent

A Coach's Gender Motivational Impact: A Look into Female Athletes Perspective

Project Title and Purpose:

You have been invited to participate in a research study entitled **A Coach's Gender Motivational Impact: A Look into Female Athletes Perspective**. This is a study to examine how people perceive certain activities.

Investigator(s):

This study is being conducted by Meghan Dennehy, a student in a Communication Capstone Class at Queens University of Charlotte as part of a class project under the direction of Dr. John McArthur in the Communications Department.

Description of Participation:

In this study you will be asked a series of questions in a one-on-one interview.

Length of Participation

Your participation in this project will take approximately one hour. If you decide to participate, you will be one of approximately 15 participants in this study. Participants will be a snowball sample based on contacts in the female student athlete population at University of Virginia's College of Wise.

Risks and Benefits of Participation:

There are no risks known at this time associated with participating in the study. However, there may be risks which are currently unforeseeable. The only benefit of participation in this study is the knowledge you will gain about the topic being investigated. The results of the study will only be used for this class project. You may obtain a copy of all results by contacting me any time after May 30, 2013. You will not receive financial reimbursement for your participation.

Volunteer Statement

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop **at any time**. You may skip any item you do not wish to answer. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate or if you stop once you have started.

April 7th, 2014

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Confidentiality:

All information you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous. You will not be identified nor will your name appear with the data. All data files will be destroyed at the end of the project.

Fair Treatment and Respect:

Queens University of Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the University's Institutional review Board (Dr. Daina Nathaniel at 704.688.2743) if you have any questions about how you have been treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the project, please contact Dr. John McArthur at 704.688.2745.

Participant Consent:

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, am an emancipated minor*, or my guardian has signed below, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I am entitled to receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the researcher.

By signing your name below, you agree to participating in the one on one interview research and keeping the identities and information shared by other participants confidential.

Participant Name

Participant Signature

DATE

(PLEASE PRINT)

Researcher Signature

DATE

*Emancipated Minor (as defined by NC General Statute ~~7B-101~~7B-101.14) is a person who has not yet reached their 18th birthday and meets at least one of the following criteria: 1) has legally terminated custodial rights of his/her parents and been declared 'emancipated' by a court; 2) is married, or 3) is serving in the armed forces of the United States.

Email letter to college athlete about study

November 6, 2013

Attn: X,

April 7th, 2014

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Dear player X,

My name is Meghan Dennehy. I am presently conducting a study based on female athletes at the college level to investigate perceptions on communication when it comes to the gender of the head coach. I am not sure if you are aware, but in 2007, TIME magazine stated that "only 42% of women's college teams are led by a female head coach--the lowest level ever, according to a recent study by two retired Brooklyn College professors". My plan is to explore why the number of females coaching female teams is so low and to understand which gender female athletes respond to more positively in regards to motivating them to be successful.

I would like you to be a participant for this study, because you are a member of a college-level female team. Participation requires a one-on-one interview on the UVA-Wise campus at a time that is convenient to you. The interview will last anywhere from 30-60 minutes and will contain questions centered on motivation, specifically on methods your current and past coaches have used. From this interview I hope to learn how the gender of a coach affects the ways in which female sports teams internalize the motivation given. All of the data collected will be kept confidential, and so will your participation in the study.

If you are willing to participate in this study please email me back. From there I will contact you regarding your availability so we can find the best time for your one-on-one interview.

Your help would be most appreciated.

Thanks again for your attention,

Meghan Dennehy

Background survey:

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your ethnicity? (Please select one of the following)

____ African American / Black

____ Asian

____ Caucasian / White

____ Hispanic or Latino

____ Native American

____ Other

3. How long have you been involved in sports teams? (Please select the correct response)

____ 1 – 3 years

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____ 3– 5 years

____ 5 – 7 ½ years

____ 7 ½ - 9 years

____ More than 10 years

4. Since you started playing sports how many teams have you been on with a male head coach?

____ Female head coach? _____

5. Are you currently being coached by a female or male head coach? _____

Self-Monitoring Scales:

I will use the Snyder 1974 self-monitoring scale as a personality base for each participant that I interview.

Discussion Questions:

Why did you decide to continue to play your sport in college?

Was the coach that recruited you a big reason you chose this school? Is that coach still here?

What do you enjoy most about playing your sport in college?

What do you enjoy most about attending practices?

What do you enjoy least about it?

Do you work on your game outside of practices etc?

How do you think the gender of a coach plays a role in getting you personally motivated?

When you think of a coach that you liked a lot what did they do and what was the gender of the coach?

Why was he/her motivational compared to other coaches you have had or have?

What does your current coach do to get you motivated?

Has it been successful in motivating you?

Do you think your coach communicates his or her message clearly and effectively? Why or why not?

Do you think it helps if the gender of your assistant coach is the opposite gender of your head coach? Why or why not?

Does your coach curse while communicating to the team during practice, games etc?

April 7th, 2014

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IMPACT OF COACH GENDER MOTIVATION: A LOOK IN TO FEMALE ATHLETES'
PERSPECTIVES

Do you think the use of curse words is appropriate, demeaning or motivating? Why?

Do you think it is different when used in positive context (damn good game) compared to negative context (shoot the damn ball)?