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Sabine Fuchs

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Running Head: Coaching behavior and taking conflict personally

Perception Of Coaching Behavior And Its Impact  
On Taking Conflict Personally

Sabine Fuchs

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In Partial Fulfillment of Graduation Requirements

University of Portland

Department of Communication Studies

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine athletes' perception of coaching behavior and its effects on taking conflict personally. Considering athletes' competitive, emotional, and defensive nature and reflecting on personal experiences, it was predicted that athletes' perception of coaching behavior would be directly correlated with taking conflict personally. Participants (N=83) completed a survey that measured direct personalization, persecution feelings, relational effects, like/dislike valence, and the effects of coaching behavior on athletes and their perception of performance. The results of the Pearson correlation analyses provided support for the hypothesized association that athlete perception of coaching behavior was correlated with persecution feelings and with a like/dislike valence. The study also found that coaching behavior was correlated with taking conflict personally. The paper concludes with a discussion of future research possibilities.

## **Introduction**

In order for any athlete to advance in his or her area, the athlete requires feedback from a qualified coach. Feedback, however, can be productive or destructive. Athletes use feedback to acquire the skills and knowledge of sport in order to become “champions” (Cromartie, Esposito, Foley, Johnson, Moon, Price, & Wojnar). I have been playing tennis for over 14 years and during this time I have had over 20 different coaches. They have all had their own particular coaching behaviors and unique ways of delivering feedback. However, one thing they will all tell you is to not take conflict personally.

My favorite coach and the one I credit most of my success to is Waldemar Holowitzi. He had the most positive attitude of all my coaches and he taught me in a way that mirrored his positivity. Although he would constantly give me feedback, he did so in a constructive manner, never once framing the feedback in a negative light. This tactic worked very well for me as I not only trusted and respected Waldemar, but I was able to incorporate his feedback into my tennis game and it helped me improve immensely. His coaching behavior and feedback motivated me to strive to be the best tennis player I could be. In addition, because Waldemar treated me as an equal and was encouraging rather than demeaning, my self-esteem rose and my love for tennis grew. My least favorite coach was quite the opposite of Waldemar. He was forceful, negative, and always spoke to me in a degrading way. Whenever I made an error he would yell and say I was a terrible tennis player or that I was the slowest person on the court. I can recall numerous times where his behavior and feedback caused me to start crying either right at that moment on the court or later that night when I was at home. When he saw how upset I would get at his comments, he would merely tell me that I needed to learn not to take his criticism personally. This advice didn't help and I grew really fearful of missing any shots because I could not stand

to have him yell negative things at me. In addition, I began to feel defensive and started trying to ignore his remarks in an attempt to save myself from the pain of his harsh comments. My tennis game got increasingly worse as a result of his coaching behavior and feedback. It eventually got to the point where I didn't even want to play tennis anymore because it was no longer fun and my performance was becoming steadily worse. As a result of his behavior and feedback and my declining performance levels and low feelings of self-esteem, I lost all trust and respect for this coach. Finally, after three years of playing for this coach, I switched to a new one (Waldemar) and saw my internal responses and external behaviors completely change for the better. These are just two of the many examples I have of the effects coaching behavior and feedback had on my internal responses and external behaviors.

Researchers are learning increasingly more about the impact of feedback and the influence that coaches have on their athletes. About twenty percent of research on feedback has focused specifically on the coach-athlete relationship (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). Some research has focused on how coaching behaviors influence athletes' perceptions of performance, self-esteem, and motivation. Other research focuses on the coach-athlete relationship including athletes' preferences and perceptions, as well as behaviors that affect team cohesion. In this study I would like to explore a slightly different aspect of coaching behavior. I will examine how coaches' feedback influences athletes' internal responses and external behaviors.

## **Literature Review**

### **Coaching Behavior and Feedback**

Feedback is "the information provided to a performer during or after an activity that enables the performer to assess the success or failure of his or her performance" (Sports Science

and Medicine, 322). Effectiveness of a feedback session may vary from player to player because people draw on a wealth of previous experiences which affect their response to a coach's remarks. This is because feedback is subjective; it is based on a person's own interpretation and understanding of the critical message (Pollard-Jarrell).

Feedback is regarded by many sports coaches as "the single most important factor in training; without it, a person does not know how well he or she is progressing" (Food and Fitness, 147). Some feedback is a natural consequence of performing an activity; athletes see and feel how well the activity is being accomplished. In a coach-athlete relationship, the type, amount, and timing of criticism or feedback coaches provide underscores the nature of their relationship (Black & Weiss, 1992; Sinclair & Vealey, 1989; Smith & Smoll, 1990; Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986). Black and Weiss (1992) found that athletes' self-perceptions and motivation were significantly related to the quantity and quality of coaching feedback they received concerning both performance successes and errors. Feedback can "become detrimental when it affects a person's self-esteem and when a person becomes so fearful of future critical feedback that they become unmotivated or avoidant of risks and challenges" (Pollard-Jarrell, 2007, 1). Additionally, Sinclair and Vealey (1989) found that high performance athletes received more criticism or feedback from coaches than their low performance counterparts and that this feedback was more specific and evaluative and less prescriptive in nature. Smith and Smoll (1990) found that athletes low in self-esteem responded negatively to coaches who were not supportive. However, these athletes responded more favorably to coaches who were reinforcing and encouraging (Smith & Smoll, 1990). In addition, the most effective feedback is often provided by an external observer (e.g. coach) or from some other objective source (e.g. a video camera) (Food and Fitness). Athletes reported being more satisfied when coaches offered

positive criticism (Dwyer & Fischer, 1990) and when they offered rewarding feedback and more social support (Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986). Sinclair and Vealey (1989) found that athletes associated self-confidence with immediate feedback from coaches. As can be seen from the aforementioned research, communication in general and feedback in particular are important facets of coach-athlete relationships.

### **Internal Responses to Feedback**

#### *Defensiveness*

Defensiveness is defined as a “somewhat hostile, emotional state which causes people to either partially or totally reject incoming messages and other stimuli which they perceive as being incorrect or contradictory to their point of view” (Baker, 1980, 33). According to Daly, Stamp and Vangelisti (1992), defensiveness can be examined from two distinct perspectives: defensiveness as “an inner emotional state which is reflected by one’s own perceptions of an internal flaw as well as a high level of sensitivity to that flaw and defensiveness as a response to a collection of communication behaviors” (178). First, we will discuss the emotional state; next we will look at communicators’ messages that are likely to arouse defensive reactions in others.

Messages (or communication) from others can generate a defensive emotional response. People make others defensive by the manner in which they communicate. In psychodynamic theory, defense mechanisms are viewed as “an adjustive reaction, typically habitual and unconscious, employed to protect one's self from anxiety, guilt, or loss of self-esteem” (Goldenson, 1975, 206). Friedlander and Schwartz (1985) assert that actors may act defensive in situations which are “identity threatening . . . (where) a real or imagined event casts aspersions on the lineage, character, conduct, skills, or motives of an actor. In other words, the social

identity of the actor is spoiled or placed in doubt” (488). Baker (1980) claims that defensiveness causes a listener to resist both speaker and message (33). In addition, defensiveness seems to be highly contagious and causes a deteriorating cycle between those communicating.

The second perspective, communication that is likely to arouse defensive reactions in others, is conceptualized by Gibbs (1961) in six behavioral categories: “(1) speech or tone that evaluates or judges the listener; (2) speech that is used to control the listener; (3) strategic communication or communication that is used to manipulate the listener in some undesired fashion; (4) neutral speech that indicates a lack of concern to the listener; (5) communication that implies superiority through position, power, or wealth; and (6) dogmatism or certainty in actions or speech” (179).

Feelings of defensiveness emerge in part as a result of face-threatening acts. When people feel judged or blamed for something they do not believe is accurate or true for them, their identity or self-esteem is challenged. Face-saving becomes the dominant interest of the party under attack (Gibbs, 1961). The subsequent communication of the defensive individual likely depends upon the intensity of attack, the extent of the flaw, and the demands placed on the individual to manage impressions (Gibbs, 1961). Although defensiveness is a result of perceived threat from difference in others, it affects all phases of communication, thus resulting in total communication deterioration (Baker, 1980). Once we sense defensiveness in our communicative counterpart, we will usually react with similar defensive behavior and perceptual distortion. Thus, defensiveness usually results in a cycle of communicative deterioration between persons. Baker claimed that defensiveness was generated in individuals who showed “(a) an unwillingness to acknowledge and tolerate difference in others, (b) a fear of change in ourselves, and (c) a desire to avoid mental imbalance” (Baker, 1980, 40). According to Baker (1980), the



best way to reduce defensiveness by being empathetic or understanding of people in contrast to judging or evaluating them and their comments; treating people as equals, as important and competent persons, as opposed to degrading them and their contributions; and being congruent or genuine in every way.

### *Self-Esteem*

Self-esteem refers to “the evaluative and affective aspects of the self, to how “good” or “bad” we feel about ourselves” (Gale Group, 2003). In terms of competent performance, high self-esteem individuals expect to perform well, whereas those with low self-esteem expect to do more poorly. The self-esteem literature generally indicates that low self-esteem individuals depend more on and are more influenced by external cues that provide self-relevant information about performance than high self-esteem individuals (Tice, 1993). However, it is important to note that people come to coaches with varying levels of self-esteem that they obtained from their upbringing and the kinds of messages they heard at home.

Coaches’ messages are powerful predictors of how athletes (and particularly young athletes) feel and perceive themselves, and their sporting experiences. For instance, regular positive feedback builds self-esteem, giving athletes the courage to push themselves harder and attempt new challenges (Mack, 2011). Athletes have reported that coaches’ expression of negative emotions had detrimental effects on them both at interpersonal (i.e., made them feel that they had failed to meet coaches’ expectations) and intrapersonal levels (i.e., made them feel as less competent and skillful sport performers) (Jowett, & Sagar). Barnett, Smoll, & Smith, (1992) also found that players with low self-esteem who also have supportive and instructive coaches showed the greatest amount of attraction to the coaches. The same study found that players who exhibited low self-esteem and interacted with coaches who had less supportive and instructional approaches expressed the least amount of attraction to the coach. Additionally this study found

that players with high self-esteem were not as affected by coaching behaviors. Therefore, those who have higher levels of self-esteem may be better able to deal with and recover from hostile-controlling coaching behaviors.

### *Motivation*

Motivation is thought to be a combination of the drive within us to achieve our aims and the outside factors which affect it (Allen and Howe, 1998). Using punishment to motivate athletes reduces the internal or intrinsic motivation to work hard to succeed (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). Athletes who engage in self-blame and self-attack may lose motivation and their negative outlooks could affect performance. Black and Weiss (1992) found that young athletes who believed that their coaches offered positive feedback, perceived themselves as more highly motivated and confident. Allen and Howe (1998) found that athletes' perceptions of encouraging coaching behaviors were predictive of athletes' levels of competence motivation, which was correlated with positive performance effects. Athletes can like, respect, cooperate, and commit to their coaches less, and be less motivated to participate when their coaches criticize, misunderstand, disagree, argue, shout, intimidate, and insult them for making mistakes (Jowett, 2009; Martin, Rocca, Cayanus, & Weber, 2009). Coaches can implement positive or negative practices in order to motivate their athletes (Weinberg & Gould, 2007). These approaches have different methods and outcomes. Coaches can help athletes to become intrinsically motivated and set achievement goals rather than focusing on winning and losing (Martens, 1997). These factors can help provide the athlete with optimal arousal states during competition and may reduce anxiety that may lead to increased experiences of flow or peak performances (Martens, 1997).

## **External Behavioral Response to Feedback**

### *Perception of Performance*

Coach-athlete interactions have been shown to influence athletes' perceptions of their sport satisfaction and enjoyment (Blanchard, Amiot, Perrault, Vallerand, & Provencher, 2009; Smith & Smoll, 1997; Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1978). Athlete satisfaction is crucial for performance and self-determined behaviors and highly influenced by the perceived behaviors of the coach (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978; Rieke, Hammermeister, & Chase, 2008). Although this is internal and not behavioral, athletes' satisfaction levels have been correlated with supportive behaviors, training and instruction, and positive feedback from coaches (Blanchard et al., 2009; Reinboth et al., 2004; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986). Athletes who consistently receive more positive and instructional feedback from a coach will show more effort, improvement, and enjoyment in their sport (Rieke, Hammermeister, & Chase, 2008). Athletes' sport enjoyment is also influenced by the nature of the coach-athlete relationship, with up to 58% explained by athletes' perceptions of the quality of the relationship (Martin, Dale, & Jackson, 2001). The coach-athlete relationship is an integral part of sport, and anecdotal evidence from many athletes indicates that this relationship and coach feedback are essential to the ultimate quality and perceived success of their competitive sport careers (Vealey, Armstrong, Comar, & Greenleaf, 1998).

### *Burnout*

When individuals encounter dissatisfaction with their performance, are emotionally drained from the stress of their job, and eventually distance themselves from their clients or colleagues, they are considered to be professionally burned out (Arlotto, 2002). Athletes can feel dissatisfied with their sporting experiences and drop out of sport when coaches focus too much

on winning (Seefeldt & Ewing, 2000). The nature of sport competition emphasizes winning as an outcome, and the win-lose characteristic of sport can elicit painful feelings of regret, sorrow, and shortcomings in the athletes. Such feelings are often linked to the messages they receive from their coaches about their performance mistakes and the importance of winning (Turman, 2005). Athletes have identified their interactions with coaches as one potential source of feelings of burnout (Gould, Udry, Tuffey, & Loehr, 1996; Price & Weiss, 2000; Udry, Gould, Bridges, & Tuffey, 1997; Vealey, et al., 1998). Consistent patterns of hostile-controlling behavior from coaches reduce the likelihood of continued athletic involvement of the athlete. Results from the Price and Weiss (2000) study revealed that burnout was associated with coaches who exhibited less frequent training and instruction, social support, and positive feedback. Thus, it is apparent that negative feedback leads to burnout in athletes.

Past research has explored the impact of feedback and influence coaches have on their athletes. After delving into the different types of feedback and the resulting internal responses and external behaviors, studies reveal that coaching feedback has a direct effect on an athlete's defensiveness, self-esteem, motivation, perceptions of performance, and burnout. Research found that although it is normally perceived as positive, feedback can "become detrimental when it affects a person's self-esteem and when a person becomes so fearful of future critical feedback that they become unmotivated or avoidant of risks and challenges" (Pollard-Jarrell, 1). In the cases where coach feedback was negative, research showed that athletes experienced higher levels of defensiveness that resulted in total communication deterioration, lower levels of self-esteem that resulted in poor performance, and decreased motivation (Baker, 1980; Pollard-Jarrell, 2007; Tice, 1993). Price and Weiss (2000) study revealed that burnout was associated with coaches who exhibited negative feedback. Finally, in relation to perception of performance,

the studies found that when coaches' feedback was positive, athlete's showed more effort, improvement, and enjoyment in their sport (Rieke, Hammermeister, & Chase, 2008). While all this research is valuable to coaches and athletes alike, it would be useful to explore more real world examples of athletes' perception of coaching behavior and its impact on taking conflict personally. In order to find answers to the aforementioned areas, I devised the following hypothesizes.

Hypothesis 1: Athlete perception of coaching behavior will be correlated with direct personalization of conflict.

Hypothesis 2: Athlete perception of coaching behavior is associated with persecution feelings.

Hypothesis 3: Athlete perception of coaching behavior will be correlated with relational effects with the coach.

Hypothesis 4: Athlete perception of coaching behavior will be correlated with a like/dislike valence.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were college student-athletes enrolled in undergraduate universities throughout the United States. The total number of participants was 83 (50 females and 33 males). The following is a table listing the number of student- athletes from each sport.

Baseball	Basketball	Crew	Cross Country	Football	Golf
10	3	7	17	1	1
Lacrosse	Soccer	Softball	Tennis	Track and Field	Volleyball
2	8	1	16	28	3

Participants accessed the survey through one of three methods: Facebook, Career Athletes, or their student email accounts.

### *Materials*

For this study, we utilized a survey, Coaching Behavior in Relation to Athletes Perception of Performance and Response to Criticism. There were several measures used in the survey: Taking Conflict Personally Scale (TCP) which comprised of 4 subscales— direct personalization, persecution feelings, relational effects, and like/dislike valence and Hemphill Coach Behavior Scale. Formulated by Dale Hample, the TCP scale measured the tendency to perceive the self as being personally attacked even if criticisms are issue-oriented. A few examples from this scale include: Direct Personalization “I have a strong emotional reaction to being criticized,” Persecution Feelings “Conflict situations leave me feeling victimized,” Relational Effects “Conflicts have a negative impact on a coach/athlete relationship,” and Like/Dislike Valence “I like being in conflict situations.” It allowed individuals to get a snapshot about how they react to conflict and opened up opportunities to strengthen communication skills in areas that may damage interactions with others. The Hemphill Coach Behavior Scale was devised by University of Portland scholar Benjamin Hemphill. It measured the effects of coaching behavior on athletes and their perception of performance. The following are a few examples from this scale: “I perform better when my coach takes me aside for feedback that would embarrass me,” “I perform better when my coach is overly critical of me when he/she provides me with feedback,” and “I perform better when my coach evaluates me negatively if I perform badly.” In addition to answering closed ended questions that used a 5-point Likert format, which ranged from strongly agree to agree to neutral to disagree to strongly

disagree, I added two open-ended questions that allowed the participants to articulate their feelings on the communication of the most effective coach they had and the communication of the least effective coach they had. Both the TCP and Hemphill Coach Behavior Scale have been proven as reliable and valid over several previous studies.

### *Procedure*

Approval was obtained from the University of Portland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this study. Participants were recruited through their University of Portland emails, a Facebook posting linking to surveygizmo.com, and a Career Athletes posting linking to surveygizmo.com. The participants then completed the survey that dealt with athletes' feelings of defensiveness, perception of performance and coach behavior. The online survey maintained the anonymity of the participants and the results were shredded after the data was coded and analyzed. The data was analyzed using an independent t-test and bivariate correlation analyses. The t-test was used to compare gender with the Taking Conflict Personally scale. Bivariate correlation tests were run to determine if there was a correlation between athlete perception of coaching behavior and elements of the Taking Conflict Personally scale.

### **Results**

Given that defensiveness is multi-dimensional, we used four out of five of the subscales from the Taking Conflict Personally scale (TCP). We did not utilize the fifth scale, stress reaction, because it seemed inapplicable to the coach-athlete relationship. Reliability for the overall TCP scale was .654. Reliabilities for the subscales were .216 for Direct Personalization, .735 for Persecution Feelings, -.761 for Relational Effects, and .854 for Like/Dislike Valence. Given that reliability for Direct Personalization was low, it was eliminated from the study. We think this occurred because of items that were eliminated in adapting the scale for athletes.

Hypothesis one predicted that athlete perception of coaching behavior's effect on performance would be correlated with direct personalization of conflict. A Pearson bivariate correlation did not show a significant relationship between the two variables.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that persecution feelings would be associated with the athlete's perception of coaching behavior on performance and it was supported. A small but significant correlation was found,  $r=.272$   $p<.05$ .

Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 was supported. Athletic perception of coaching behavior was slightly though significantly correlated with the like/dislike valence  $r=.366$ ,  $P<.01$ .

#### *Additional Findings*

For exploratory purposes, we tested whether Taking Conflict Personally overall might be correlated with an athlete's perception of coaching behavior on performance. In fact, a small but significant correlation was found,  $r=.368$ ,  $p<.002$ . We were also interested in whether male athletes and female athletes differed in their perception of effects of coaching behavior on performance. To test this out, an independent t-test was run. This hypothesis was not supported, but results approached significance:  $t=1.75$ ,  $p<.08$ . Men and women were compared as to whether they differed significantly in their total scores of taking conflict personally. There was a significant difference ( $M= 49.7$ ;  $F=46.0$ ):  $t= 2.6$ ,  $p<.01$ .

## **Discussion**

The results of the Pearson correlation analyses provided partial support for the hypothesized association that athlete perception of coaching behavior and elements of the Taking Conflict Personally scale were related. Feelings of persecution and the like/dislike valence both



correlated positively with athletes' perception of coaching behavior's effect on performance. However, athlete perception of coaching behavior was not correlated with direct personalization of conflict or with relational effects with the coach. First, we will discuss the hypotheses that were supported. Then, we will talk about the hypotheses that were not supported. Next, we will delve into additional findings. Finally, we will discuss the limitations of this study and future research.

### *Supported Hypotheses*

The study found that feelings of persecution were correlated with athletes' perceptions of coaching behavior. It is not the coaches' criticism that affects the athlete, but rather it is the way the coach presents the criticism that makes the athlete take it personally. For example, when a coach singles out an athlete and criticizes them in front of their teammates, it will affect the athlete more than if the coach had pulled the athlete aside and discussed it in private (Rogers, 1961). Facework theory "involves the enactment of face strategies, verbal and nonverbal moves, self-presentation acts, and impression management interaction" (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2003). When for example an athlete's face is threatened by being criticized in public or negatively judged in front of peers, it is human nature to not only defend one's image against the incoming criticism, but to feel persecuted by this criticism (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006). In addition, many people are "thin skinned" when it comes to receiving feedback and as a result, they often misinterpret sincere criticism as a form of personal attack (Vealey, Armstrong, Comar, & Greenleaf, 1998). It is typical for people to become overly defensive and a bit argumentative whenever their personal flaws and shortcomings are held up to the glaring spotlight of criticism. The study also found that the like/dislike valence correlated positively with athletes' perception of coaching behavior. Not surprisingly, the more athletes perceived that the coach liked them, the

more positively they thought they performed. When athletes felt disliked by their coach, they perceived themselves as performing more poorly. This finding is very consistent with leader-member exchange theory which discusses the relationship between leadership, perceptions of liking, and organizational outcomes (Campbell, White, and Johnson, 2003).

### *Unsupported Hypotheses*

A possible reason athlete perception of coaching behavior is not related to direct personalization is that most athletes know not to take negative coaching behavior/criticism personally. Coaches have their athletes' best interest in mind when they direct critical comments their way (Hanson, 2012). According to Melody Davidson, national women's hockey coach, "Coaches can be blunt, honest, and critical, but they really do care. They want each player to get better" (Hanson, 2012). Gilbert and Trudel (2004) state that athletic coaches who maintain strict rules, highly demanding training regimens, and are often critical of their players, but who still care about their players, are practicing tough love. Athletes perceive a coach's tough love as his way of showing that he cares (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004).

A probable reason for relational effects with the coach not being connected with athletes' perception of performance is that athletes understand the importance of separating a professional relationship with a personal relationship. For example, Coach Bobby Knight is recognized as a master teacher and tactician of the sport who is "known for his pugnacity when disciplining his players. He insists that they follow his commands and is sometimes ruthless about leaning on them until they do" (Martens, 2004, pg. 31). Although his players have not always liked him, they have respected him because they know that he cares about them and wants them to succeed (Martens, 2004). Most athletes experience relationships with their coaches that are professional, but also personal: "She was my coach on the court, but also knew how to be my friend off the

court” (Becker, 2009). Becker (2009) declared that the best coaches are those who develop a great relationship with their players off the court, but know how to be strict and demanding on the court.

### *Additional Findings*

We also compared men and women to see whether they differed significantly in their total scores of taking conflict personally. Results showed that the men in this study scored higher on taking conflict more personally than women. This was a surprising result as we had predicted it being either equal or that women would be slightly more prone to taking conflict personally. This assumption is based on research and popular belief. Some physiological research, however, has shown that male cardiovascular response to stress from defensiveness is actually higher than women’s responses (Helmets & Krantz, 1996). Tannen (2001) states that “Women lack experience defending themselves and are more inclined to misinterpret challenges as personal attacks” (33). However, men are better equipped at defending themselves and are much less inclined to misinterpret challenges as personal attacks (Tannen, 2001).

### **Conclusion**

This study looked at athletes’ perception of coaching behavior and its impact on taking conflict personally. Although coaches will always tell their athletes not to take conflict personally, it is a two way street. Coaches need to understand that the way they sometimes deliver the conflict makes it personal! While it is necessary for athletes to learn to not take criticism personally, it is also reasonable to expect coaches to learn how to frame the conflict in a way that makes it descriptive rather than evaluative.

The results of this study have the potential to influence the coach-athlete relationship, coach communication, and athlete satisfaction genres of communication study. The research can be utilized to explain certain perceptions athletes have of coaching behaviors and how they react towards criticism. Further research on coaching behavior, defensive-invoking communication and performance outcomes can also be used to instruct coaches how to best communicate with their players.

#### *Study Limitations*

Due to some problems in adapting the TCP scale for this study, we were not able to fully explore the TCP scale. Moreover, we cannot be sure of the “at rest” state of defensiveness in our sample vs. defensiveness that is the product of coach behavior. Replicating this study using scenarios might be useful here.

The sample size used for the study was small. It would be helpful to survey a larger number of athletes and better yet if we had had more representation from more sports. This would have given us a wider range of data which could have altered or enhanced results.

#### *Future Research*

One of the limitations of the study was the lack of coaches’ perspective on coaching behavior and taking conflict personally. Therefore, future research could be done to study the coaches’ perspective of how they give and perceive their feedback. Do they have a rule of thumb about giving feedback to players and how do they think their coaching behavior impacts their athletes? It would have been great to include a survey for coaches to find out how they think they are behaving and the effects they believe their behavior has on the athletes. In addition, this study focused solely on college level athletes. It would be interesting to test whether this study’s results hold true for professional athletes or if their perception of coaching behavior and its

impact on taking conflict personally is different from the college level athletes. In the future, it would also be helpful to get a better handle on actual performance, actual coach behavior, and defensiveness.

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## Appendix 1

### Feelings of defensiveness, perception of performance and coach behavior survey

1. Please describe the communication of the most effective coach you have had.
2. Please describe the communication of the least effective coach you have had.

Please mark the response that best describes your perception of your coach's behavior and its effect on your performance.

3. I perform best when my coach gives me behavioral versus judgmental feedback.

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree**



4. I perform better when my coach intimidates me into doing the things that he/she wants me to do

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree**



5. I perform better when my coach shouts at me in front of others to make me do certain things

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree**



6. I perform better when my coach undervalues my contributions to the team

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree**



7. I perform better when my coach is very judgmental if I am not competing well

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree**



8. I perform better when my coach is less friendly with me if I don't make the effort to see things his/her way

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree**



9. I perform better when my coach gives me descriptive feedback.

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree**



10. I perform better when my coach expects me to put my sport before all other important parts of my life

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree**



11. I perform better when my coach tries to control what I do during my free time

**Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree**

● ● ● ● ●

12. I perform better when my coach asks my opinion about how we can improve my skill set.

**Strongly Disagree** **Disagree** **Neutral** **Agree** **Strongly Agree**

● ● ● ● ●

13. I perform better when my coach tries to interfere in aspects of my life outside of my sport

**Strongly Disagree** **Disagree** **Neutral** **Agree** **Strongly Agree**

● ● ● ● ●

14. I perform better when my coach evaluates me negatively if I perform badly \***This question is required.**

**Strongly Disagree** **Disagree** **Neutral** **Agree** **Strongly Agree**

● ● ● ● ●

15. I perform better when my coach uses positive encouragement.

**Strongly Disagree** **Disagree** **Neutral** **Agree** **Strongly Agree**

● ● ● ● ●

16. I perform better when my coach is overly critical of me when he/she provides me with feedback

**Strongly Disagree** **Disagree** **Neutral** **Agree** **Strongly Agree**

● ● ● ● ●

17. I perform better when my coach uses the threat of punishment to keep me in line during training

**Strongly Disagree** **Disagree** **Neutral** **Agree** **Strongly Agree**

● ● ● ● ●

18. I perform better when my coach takes me aside for feedback that would embarrass me.

**Strongly Disagree** **Disagree** **Neutral** **Agree** **Strongly Agree**

● ● ● ● ●

19. Conflict can really hurt a relationship

- ● Strongly Agree
- ● Agree
- ● Neutral
- ● Disagree
- ● Strongly Disagree

20. I usually don't take criticisms personally.

- ● Strongly Agree
- ● Agree
- ● Neutral
- ● Disagree

- Strongly Disagree

21. Conflict can really help a relationship

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

22. Conflict is a very personal thing for me.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

23. When coaches criticize something I do, I don't take it personally.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

24. It doesn't hurt my feelings to be criticized by my coach.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

25. I think the coaches I have conflict discussions with really like to pick on me.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

26. Conflict is an intensely enjoyable kind of interaction.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

27. I think that my coach often attacks me personally.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

28. Conflict with a coach has a positive impact on the relationship.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

29. Conflict situations leave me feeling victimized.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree

- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

30. I have a strong emotional reaction to being criticized.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

31. I like to be in conflict situations.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

32. Conflict situations make me feel persecuted.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

33. I often enjoy conflicts with my coach.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral

- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

34. Conflicts have a negative impact on a coach/athlete relationship.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

35. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

36. What year are you?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Super Senior

37. What sport do you play?

- Baseball 10
- Basketball 3
- Crew 7
- Cross country 17
- Field hockey
- Football 1
- Golf 1
- Hockey
- Lacrosse 2

- Soccer 8
- Softball 1
- Swimming
- Tennis 16
- Track and field 28
- Volleyball 3
- Water polo
- Wrestling

38. How many years have you been playing your sport?

- 0-4 years
- 5-8 years
- 9-12 years
- More than 12 years

39. How many coaches have you had in your sport?

- 0-1 coaches
- 2-4 coaches
- 5-6 coaches
- More than 6 coaches