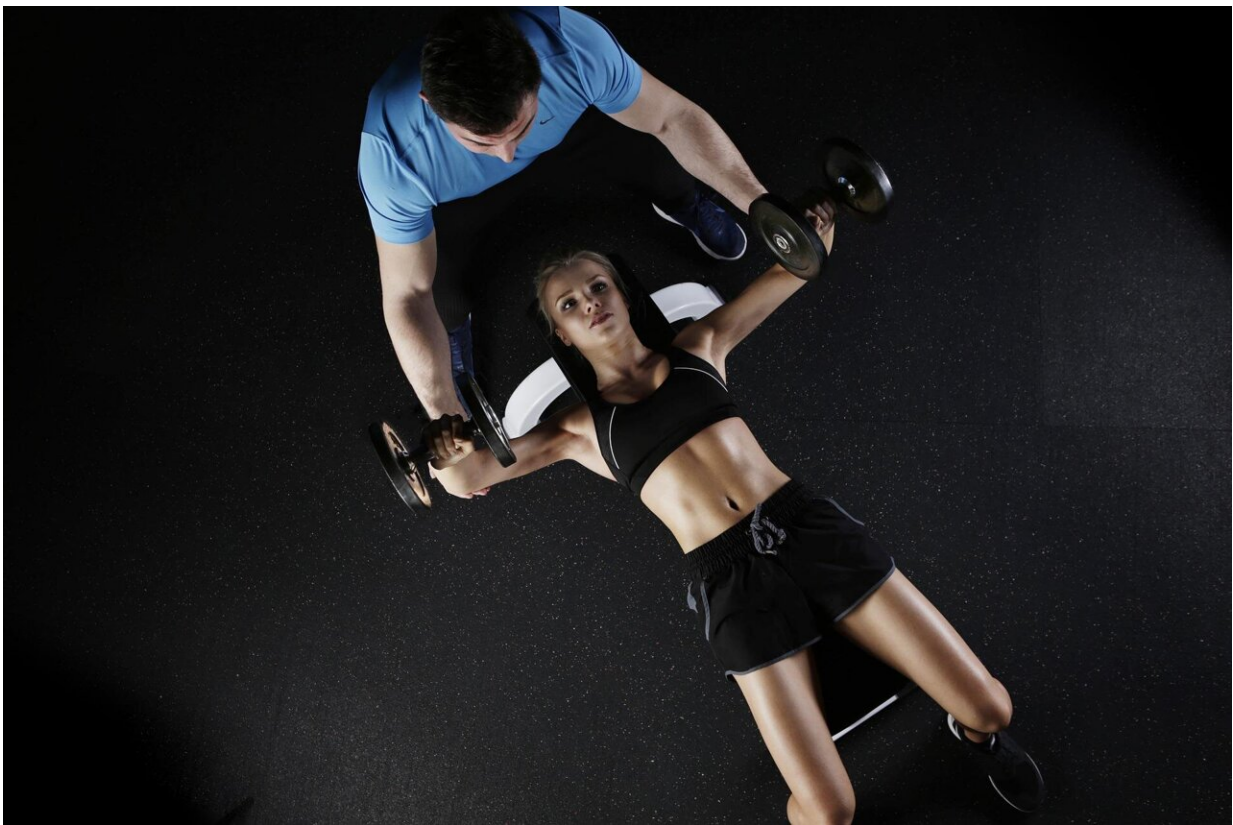


Quantitative study assesses how gender and race impact young athletes' perceptions of their coaches

April 29 2024



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Across the U.S., there are over 8 million student-athletes in high school and college. Engaging in sports can contribute to physical, mental, and

social benefits, and coaches can play a key role in student-athletes' continued participation in sports.

A [study](#) led by UNC Greensboro's Dr. Tsz Lun (Alan) Chu, published in *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, examines how multiple aspects of a young athlete's identity, including [gender](#) and race, may relate to their perceptions of their coaches and [mental health](#).

"There have been quite a few studies on this topic looking at gender and [cultural differences](#) from a qualitative standpoint, but they have not looked at the combination of these factors using a quantitative approach, which is crucial," says Chu, who conducts research in applied sport psychology.

His recent study takes steps to fill that gap by surveying 846 athletes, about half in [high school](#) and half in college, with the first analysis assessing two gender categories—male and female—and three race/ethnicity categories—White, Hispanic/Latino, and Black.

"About one-third of young athletes drop out within a year of participation, so it's really important we understand how coaches can support them," Chu says.

Athletes were asked to rate the degree to which their coach created a supportive or unsupportive environment, including their coach's controlling, empowering, and inclusive behavior. The researchers also asked athletes about the degree to which they felt their psychological needs, including a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, were met in the sporting environment.

"Psychological needs are the factors that make you feel satisfied mentally in your life and are the things that every person would need in order to feel motivated and do their best," says Chu, who is a certified

mental performance consultant and an associate professor in the UNCG Kinesiology Department.

In their preliminary study, the authors were surprised to find that, as a group, Black female athletes reported the most positive perceptions of the coaching climate and satisfaction with their psychological needs compared to other races by gender subgroups.

"When individuals have more than one marginalized identity, they tend to feel isolated and less supported," Chu says "So, it was surprising that Black females had the most positive perceptions of their sports environments, which were mostly male-dominated spaces in this study. We're interested to see if these findings hold in a larger sample involving more diverse schools."

Consistent with past literature, the authors found that Black male athletes perceived more disempowering coaching climates compared to other races by gender subgroups. In light of these findings, Chu suggests coaches take a nuanced approach to ensure athletes from all backgrounds feel supported in sports.

"Even though your coaching approach may work for 80 percent of your athletes, it doesn't mean you should just stick with that approach," he said. "There may be some athletes that need a different method, and you have to adapt."

In future studies, Chu plans to explore how athletes from more backgrounds, including Asian, Indigenous and Native American athletes, perceive their coaches. He also hopes to examine how a coach's identity may relate to player's perceptions of them and impact the athlete-coach relationship.

More information: Tsz Lun (Alan) Chu et al, Intersectionality matters: Gender, race/ethnicity, and sport level differentiate perceived coach-created motivational climates and psychological needs., *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1037/spy0000331](https://doi.org/10.1037/spy0000331)

Provided by University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Citation: Quantitative study assesses how gender and race impact young athletes' perceptions of their coaches (2024, April 29) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-04-quantitative-gender-impact-young-athletes.html>

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