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## Generation Z: Perceptions from Today's Collegiate Athlete on the Coach-Athlete Relationship and Its Impact on Success in Athletics

Mandy R. Vance

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7-2019

# Generation Z: Perceptions from Today's Collegiate Athlete on the Coach-Athlete Relationship and Its Impact on Success in Athletics

Mandy R. Vance

*Concordia University - Portland*

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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Generation Z: Perceptions from Today's Collegiate Athlete on the Coach-Athlete Relationship  
and Its Impact on Success in Athletics

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College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Higher Education

Bill Boozang, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Concordia University–Portland

2019

## **Abstract**

Members of Generation Z now fill not only the dorms of higher education institutions, but also the rosters of each collegiate athletic team. Dubbed by many as the tech generation, they are the digital natives that have—in many respects—grown up more connected than their predecessors, and yet self admittedly lack the relational connectedness that they desire. Coaches and athletic policymakers must recognize the defining relational characteristics and needs of this generation of athletes if they hope to maximize athletic success. Using a qualitative design, this study explored the coach-athlete dyadic relational needs of collegiate Generation Z athletes from various institutions across the Pacific Northwest. Through synchronous semistructured interviews, the relational best practices of coaches who were working with athletes, who had experienced athletic success in their team sport were identified. These relational best practices were preferred by Generation Z athletes and represent the coaching qualities that they believe most impacted their athletic success. Purposive sampling was used to identify the participants for this study, and 12 open-response questions provided the data that through thematic analysis, produced six themes that embody the desired relational coaching qualities of collegiate Generation Z athletes. This study offers relational recommendations for collegiate coaches and athletic policymakers who desire to maximize the athletic potential of their Generation Z athletes.

*Keywords:* Generation Z, collegiate athlete, team sport athlete, relational needs, coaching best practices, athletic success, coach-athlete dyad, higher education, qualitative, trust, communication, accountability, meaningful relationships, team synergy, motivation

## Dedication

The first assignment I submitted in this program was completed while my daughter Raeleigh slept on my chest. Less than a year later, my son Emmett joined the team, and our late-night study dates took on a new level of *unconventional*. With that said, words cannot express the gratitude I have for my husband, who has truly been my rock throughout this endeavor. You are my Superman, my number one fan, and the greatest blessing in my life. I dedicate this to you, and to the two babes that are our whole world; thank you for your unending love and support. I also dedicate this to all the Generation Z athletes I have had the privilege of working with these past ten years. You are our future; go change the world.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
List of Tables .....	xi
List of Figures .....	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework .....	2
Statement of the Problem .....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	6
Research Questions .....	6
Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study .....	6
Definition of Terms .....	7
Generation Z .....	7
Coach-athlete dyadic relationship .....	7
Athletic “success” .....	8
3+1Cs model .....	8
Collegiate team-sport athlete .....	8
Assumptions .....	8
Delimitations .....	8
Limitations .....	9
Summary .....	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	11



Introduction to the Literature Review .....	11
Conceptual Framework .....	12
Interdependence theory .....	13
3+1Cs model .....	14
Interdependence structures .....	15
Interdependence theory, 3+1 Cs model, and Generation Z .....	17
Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature .....	17
Generational analysis .....	17
Factors that define Generation Z .....	18
Generation Z characteristics .....	20
Best practices for nurturing the coach-athlete relationship .....	24
3+1Cs model .....	29
Limited findings on Generation Z perceptions .....	31
Synthesis of Research Findings .....	32
Trust and security .....	33
Meaningful relationships .....	33
Quality communication .....	35
Motivation .....	35
Review of Methodological Issues and Critique of Previous Research .....	36
Summary .....	41
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	43
Research Questions .....	43
Purpose and Design of the Study .....	44

Qualitative design .....	46
Research Population and Sampling Method .....	48
Instrumentation and Related Procedures .....	49
Data Collection .....	51
Identification of Attributes .....	53
Generation Z .....	53
Collegiate team-sport athlete .....	54
“Quality” coach-athlete relationship .....	54
Athletic success .....	55
Data Analysis Procedures .....	56
Approaching the interviews .....	56
Coding the data .....	57
Thematic analysis .....	57
Bracketing journal .....	58
Limitations to the Research Design .....	58
Validation, Credibility, and Dependability .....	59
Expected Findings .....	60
Ethical Issues .....	60
Conflict of interest assessment .....	60
Researcher positionality .....	61
Ethical issues .....	61
Chapter 3 Summary .....	62
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results .....	64

Description of the Sample .....	66
Description of Participants .....	67
Alice .....	67
Bobby .....	67
Cody .....	68
Donna .....	68
Eric .....	68
Fred .....	69
Greg .....	69
Holly .....	69
Isla .....	70
Jessica .....	70
Kelly .....	70
Larry .....	71
Research Methodology and Analysis .....	71
Semistructured interviews .....	71
Member checking and probing .....	72
Artifacts .....	73
Bracketing .....	73
Data analysis and procedures .....	74
Summary of the Findings: Phases of Analysis .....	74
Phase one: Familiarization .....	74
Phase two: Generating initial codes .....	75

Phase three: Seeking themes within the codes .....	75
Phase four: Reviewing themes within codes .....	78
Phase five: Defining and finalizing themes .....	81
Presentation of the Data and Results .....	82
Theme 1: Trust between coach and athlete .....	82
Theme 2: Healthy communication .....	85
Theme 3: Accountability in athletics and life .....	86
Theme 4: Ability to create meaningful relationships .....	88
Theme 5: Ability to create team synergy .....	89
Theme 6: Building motivation .....	90
Chapter 4 Summary .....	93
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion .....	95
Summary of the Results .....	95
New literature .....	96
Methodology .....	96
Discussion of the Results .....	97
Trust between the coach and athlete .....	97
Healthy communication .....	99
Accountability in athletics and life .....	101
The ability to create meaningful relationships .....	103
The ability to create team synergy .....	105
Building motivation .....	106
Research questions .....	108

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature .....	108
Limitations .....	112
Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory .....	113
Implications for coaching practice .....	113
Implications for athletic policy .....	114
Implications for theory .....	114
Recommendations for further research .....	115
Conclusion .....	116
References .....	119
Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions .....	127
Appendix B: Consent Form .....	130
Appendix C: Recruitment Email to Coaches .....	132
Appendix D: Recruitment Email to Participants .....	133
Appendix E: Screening Survey Questions .....	134
Appendix F: Statement of Original Work .....	135

**List of Tables**

Table 1 *Interdependence Structures, 3+1Cs Examples, and Generation Z Application*..... 16

Table 2 *Open Coding Results* ..... 77

## List of Figures

Figure 1 <i>RQ1: Pursuing Themes within Codes</i> .....	79
Figure 2 <i>RQ2: Pursuing Themes within Codes</i> .....	80
Figure 3 <i>Final Themes</i> .....	82

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Among time-honored sports traditions in the United States, most people would agree that the March Madness NCAA Basketball Tournament is one of the most celebrated. Be it the upsets, the passion, or the sheer will of the athletes, even non-basketball enthusiasts are drawn to their screens for this event, not wanting to miss out on the action. On March 16th, 2018 the tournament yet again lived up to its name, as madness unfolded for all to see. Never in the history of the tournament had a 16 seed upset a number one seed, but as the clock ran down, the UMBC Retrievers steadily increased their lead over the Virginia Cavaliers, finally clinching the win with a 74–54 victory and cementing their place in NCAA basketball history. In the post-game interview players and coaches were asked why they believed they were able to pull off one of the greatest college upsets of all time; in response, they answered, “We just believed in each other” (Tsuji, 2018, para. 5). Though the David and Goliath victory may have been a shock to much of the nation, when examining the dyadic relationship of UMBC’s head coach Ryan Odom and his players, it is easy to see how the relationship Odom had created with his players contributed to their success.

In an interview with forward Joe Sherburne, Odom was described as a “player’s coach,” whose demeanor and personality enabled his players to believe in themselves and to bounce back during moments of adversity (McGregor, 2018, para.17). Sherburne states, “even when we’re down 15 at halftime some games, or when we had 12 points at halftime, he’s not coming in there screaming. He knows what we need to hear and he’s really good at delivering the message” (McGregor, 2018, para.17). Guard Jourdan Grant adds, “As a coach he just instills confidence in us. I think it shows in the way we play . . . and when we step out on the court, he has complete confidence and he trusts us” (McGregor, 2018, para.17). Coach Odom understands the relational



needs of today's collegiate athlete, and with a new generation of athletes entering higher education, other coaches will need to follow suit if they hope to maximize the potential of the Generation Z collegiate team-sport athlete.

Generation Z, the iGeneration, the Net Generation, or post-millennials comprise the cohort of individuals born from 1995 to 2012 (Rosen, 2010; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Wiedmer, 2015). As the latest cohort to enter higher education, they bring with them new expectations, needs, and capabilities that will affect collegiate athletics. Varying factors have influenced Generation Z, which have resulted in characteristics that are unique to this cohort. Recognizing these characteristics and how they affect the relational needs of today's collegiate athlete is necessary if coaches hope to build healthy relationships with their players and achieve athletic success. Though there is ample research concerning the coach-athlete dyad, little is known about how Generation Z characteristics will impact the coach-athlete relationship, or the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perception of this relationship.

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework**

The silent generation, baby boomers, Generation X, and millennials: each generation is unique, but the range of factors that contribute to the identification of each cohort vary, as does consensus on where one generation ends, and another begins. For years researchers have relied on generational analysis to track age cohorts of people in order to distinguish one generation from another. This analysis involves observing and tracking the behaviors, issues, and characteristics that are unique to an age cohort—typically over a 15 to 20-year span—and observing how they compare to the preceding generations (Dimmock, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2015). Researchers understand that an individual's age in relation to their lifecycle will largely shape not only their view of the world, but also the views of those who grew up

undergoing similar formative experiences at the same point in time (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Take, for example, the baby boom generation that was largely defined by demography. As the name suggests, this generation is defined by the spike in fertility that occurred, starting in 1946, and ending in 1964 just before the birth control pill was introduced on the market, and total births in the United States dropped significantly (Pew Research Center, 2015). With the move from radio to television, boomers were the first generation to be reared by television, with most scheduled programs appearing live. Similarly, millennials, children of the baby boomers are those who ushered us into the new millennium and represent the digital hybrids that remember a “simpler life” before the Internet and smartphones, but at the same time have never been hesitant to accept the expanse of technology (Dimmock, 2018; Prensky, 2012). Recognizing generational differences in attitudes, and the factors that have shaped the thinking and behaviors of each generation, strengthens our understanding and helps us to identify the needs that are unique to each cohort. When looking at the latest generation to enter higher education, the formative experiences of this group will have shaped not only their attitudes and behaviors, but also their relational needs.

Members of Generation Z now fill not only the dorms of higher education institutions, but also the rosters of each collegiate athletic team. Shaped by formative experiences such as a global recession, a rise in terrorism, the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a rise in school shootings, and climate change; they are also tech-savvy-multi-taskers who have never known a world without the Internet and the cell phone (Rothman, 2014). Perhaps some of the more defining characteristics of this generation are their unique relational needs. Though they are more connected globally than ever before and predominantly rely on social media and

technology for communication, they still desire meaningful relationships, but lack the skills necessary to work through their conflicts—often preferring instead, to move on to something better (Rothman, 2014; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2016). They are motivated by others rather than achievement, and though they have fears surround the cost of higher education, they still believe that a college education is a worthy investment (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

When it comes to collegiate athletics, research continually points to the quality of the coach-athlete relationship as one predictor of success in athletic competition (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Poczwadowski, 2007). Jowett (2005) argued that “The coach-athlete relationship is not an add-on to, or by-product of, the coaching process . . . instead it is the foundation of coaching” (p. 412). This is because the interdependent nature of the relationship connects coaches and athletes emotionally, behaviorally and mentally (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). For these reasons it is essential that collegiate coaches recognize the preferred relational qualities of this generation, and best practices that are already occurring in collegiate athletics, so that they can maximize the athletic potential of their athletes.

This study was framed by Kelly and Thibaut’s (1978) interdependence theory and Jowett’s (2007) 3+1Cs model. Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) focuses on relationships and the interpersonal experiences that form interdependence between groups and individuals. In the coach-athlete relationship, interdependence is inherent, and the behaviors of each party will either positively or negatively affect this balance (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). The forms of these interactions will vary, as will the outcomes. In this way, the relationship matters—because the form of interaction will either lead to negative or positive

outcomes (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thibaut and Kelley (1959) described the interdependence that occurs in dyadic relationships, and this interdependence when applied to the coach-athlete relationships is the foundation for the conceptualization of Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model.

In applying the interdependence theory to athletics, Jowett (2007) created a framework to better understand the interdependence that occurs between coaches and athletes. To operationalize and measure the interpersonal aspects of the interdependent coach-athlete relationship, Jowett (2007) developed the 3+1Cs model to measure the constructs of closeness, commitment, and complementarity. These constructs were developed to measure the interdependent nature of the coach-athlete dyad, particularly regarding interpersonal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, which is reflected in the "+1Cs" co-orientation measure of how coaches and athletes view their relationship (Jowett, 2005; Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezelek, 2012). By examining the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of Generation Z collegiate athletes who were experiencing a quality dyadic relationship with their coach and had achieved success, relational best practices were identified that were both effective and preferred by this cohort of athletes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Generation Z has just recently entered higher education and understanding how their unique characteristics impact collegiate athletics is essential. Though some research exists in this area, little is known about how Generation Z characteristics will affect the coach-athlete relationship, or the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perception concerning this relationship, specifically, their preferred relational coaching practices. Additionally, no studies prior to this, had examined the relational qualities that coaches were already employing when working with this cohort, which had led to athletic success either for their athlete, or their team. Therefore,

identifying the relational needs of this new generation of collegiate athletes and their preferred coaching habits could help coaches to form relationships that lead to success in athletics, and more importantly, aid them in meeting the relational needs of their athletes so that they are able to maximize their athletic potential.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Using a qualitative design, this study was designed to investigate the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of collegiate Generation Z athletes to determine what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate sports. The study also investigated the preferred coaching qualities and habits of Generation Z athletes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyze Generation Z athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete dyadic relationship to determine best practices for building healthy coach-athlete relationships that lead to success in collegiate athletics.

### **Research Questions**

The principal research questions in this study were framed by Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model, as influenced by Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

RQ 1: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate athletics?

RQ 2: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what are best practices that coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

Recognizing the relational needs of this new generation of collegiate athletes and their preferred coaching habits could help coaches to form relationships that lead to success in

athletics, and more importantly, aid them in meeting the relational needs of their athletes so that they are able to maximize their athletic potential. The review of literature revealed that very little research has been conducted concerning the Generation Z coach-athlete relationship, and no research was found that focused specifically on the coaching preferences of collegiate Generation Z athletes. Since this generational cohort is new to higher education and will continue to fill the ranks of collegiate athletic teams for the next decade, data from this study could help current collegiate coaches and athletic directors to recognize the relational needs of this new cohort of athletes, build relationships that meet the needs of their athletes, and recognize the coaching relational qualities that have impacted the athletic successes of current Generation Z athletes. This study benefitted the participant in that it provided an opportunity for them to reflect on their own relational needs as a collegiate athlete, as well as gave them an opportunity to participate in a study that could improve the collegiate athletic experiences of other collegiate athletes in their generational cohort.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Generation Z.** The cohort of individuals born from 1995 to 2012. They are the first generation to grow up fully immersed in technology, are more connected globally than ever before, and have relational needs that have been shaped by their formative experiences (Pew Research Center, 2015; Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

**Coach-athlete dyadic relationship.** An interdependent relationship that connects coaches and athletes emotionally, behaviorally and mentally. There are costs (consequences) and rewards (positive results from interactions) associated with interpersonal relationships (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Quality coach-athlete dyads are those where

people inherently seek to maximize reward while minimizing cost; both the rewards and the costs that are generated in a relationship cannot be created independently (Jowett, 2007).

**Athletic “success”.** Athletic success was determined by awarded achievement on the part of the team, athlete, or a combination of the two. Individual accolades included awards such as athlete of the year, all-conference performance awards, national performance awards, and institutional records. Team successes included honors such as conference titles, championship victories, national titles, and institutional records.

**3+1Cs model.** A framework created by Sports Psychologist Dr. Sophia Jowett that was designed to help researchers better understand the interdependence that occurs between coaches and athletes. By measuring the constructs of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation, the quality of the coach-athlete dyadic relationship can be assessed (Jowett, 2007).

**Collegiate team-sport athlete.** Athletes who compete at the post-secondary education level in a sport that requires a team, such as soccer, track and field, basketball, ultimate frisbee, football, volleyball, and baseball.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions underlie the purposes of this study:

1. All participants had a full understanding of each interview question and answered each question truthfully.
2. All participants answered each interview question to the best of their ability.

### **Delimitations**

This qualitative study is delimited to:

1. Higher Education Institutions in the Pacific Northwest.
2. Collegiate team-sport student-athletes who were 18 years of age or older.

3. Participants were experiencing or had experienced a “quality” relationship with their coach and had been under the direction of the coach for at least one season.
4. Participants had achieved athletic “success” either individually or as part of their team while under the direction of their coach.

### **Limitations**

There were certain limitations inherent in conducting this research study. The limitations are as follows:

1. Though precautions were taken to eliminate all biases and preconceptions that could impact the findings, eliminating all bias is impossible.
2. Generational analysis has limitations in that we are often unaware of all the factors and characteristics of a generation until a successive generation has emerged (Dimmock, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2015). As more and more from the Generation Z cohort enter higher education and adulthood, further research will be necessary to assess the perceptions and needs of the youngest in the cohort, to see if they differ from the oldest.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the perspectives of Generation Z collegiate team-sport athletes, to identify best practices for building quality coach-athlete dyadic relationships, and to discover the preferred coaching relational qualities of Generation Z collegiate athletes. Results from this study will help coaches to recognize the unique relational needs of this new cohort of athletes and improve the dyadic relationships that they form with their athletes. Furthermore, by identifying and implementing athlete-preferred relational best practices, coaches could positively impact the success of their athletes.



Following this introduction to the study is a review of literature that outlines the theoretical framework for this study, identifies Generation Z characteristics, and reviews studies concerning the coach-athlete dyadic relationship and best practices in coaching. In Chapter 3, an outline for the qualitative design of this study is presented, which used semistructured interviews for data collection. From the purposive sample that was selected for this study, themes were discovered and presented in Chapter 4, that reflect what coaches are already doing in higher education athletics to meet the relational needs of today's Generation Z athlete, and other athlete-preferred relational best practices that could improve athletic performance. In Chapter 5, a summary and discussion of the results are presented, as are the implications of the findings. Finally, avenues for further research are recommended.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction to the Literature Review**

Generation Z collegiate athletes have just recently entered higher education, and with them come new expectations, needs, and capabilities that are impacting collegiate athletics. Generation Z, the iGeneration, the Net Generation, or post-millennials comprise the cohort of individuals born from 1995 to 2012 (Rosen, 2010; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Wiedmer, 2015). Varying factors have affected Generation Z, which have resulted in characteristics that are unique to this cohort. Though there is ample research concerning the coach-athlete dyad utilizing Jowett's (2007) 3+1 Cs model, little is known about how Generation Z characteristics will impact the coach-athlete relationship, or the athlete's perception concerning this relationship.

Throughout the course of their partnership, collegiate coaches and athletes develop relationships that directly affect both their individual and mutual success in the context of their sport. As such, the coach-athlete relationship is interdependent; the athlete's achievement requires the guidance, encouragement, and expertise of the coach, and in turn, the coach's success is dependent upon the hard work, motivation, and skill of the athlete (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978; Jowett, 2007). At the same time, due to societal, social, technological, political, and economic factors, Generation Z athletes—the newest cohort to join the ranks of all higher education athletic teams—arrive with new expectations and relational needs that have strong implications for the ever-evolving coach-athlete dyadic relationship (Jowett, 2005; Parker, Czech, Burdette, Stewart, Biber, Easton, & McDaniel, 2012). Understanding how the characteristics of Generation Z athletes will impact their perceptions and needs in the coach-athlete dyadic relationship is imperative for mutual success in collegiate athletic competition.

The purpose of this study was to analyze Generation Z athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete dyadic relationship to determine best practices for building healthy coach-athlete relationships that lead to success in collegiate athletics. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate athletics?

RQ 2: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what are best practices that coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players?

Following Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model as influenced by Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory, this study adds the variable *Generation Z collegiate athlete perceptions* to the coach-athlete relationship.

This literature review begins with an overview of the conceptual framework, followed by an examination of generational analysis, including factors that define Generation Z, and an overview of specific Generation Z characteristics. Next, a review of research concerning best practices in the coach-athlete relationship is presented, followed by a review of studies that specifically utilized the 3+1 Cs method. This is followed by a critique of the literature, which includes an identification of methodological issues, limitations, and a synthesis of research findings. To conclude, a summary of the literature review's most salient points and an argument of advocacy are presented.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study is framed by Kelly and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory and Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model. The theoretical framework of Kelly and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory best explains the interdependent nature of human relationships. Similarly, Jowett's

(2007) 3+1Cs model demonstrates how interdependence theory can be directly applied to the coach-athlete dyadic relationship.

**Interdependence theory.** Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) focuses on relationships and the interpersonal experiences that form interdependence between groups and individuals. This social exchange theory—which was influenced by both exchange theory and game theory—illustrates how there are costs and rewards associated with interpersonal relationships and explains why in healthy interdependent relationships people inherently seek to maximize reward while minimizing cost (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). In the coach-athlete relationship, interdependence is inherent, and the behaviors of each party will either positively or negatively affect this balance (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). According to Kelley and Thibaut (1978), *rewards* refer to positive results from interaction (motivation, work ethic, success) while *costs* are the negative consequences from these interactions (low self-confidence, conflict, poor performance). Rewards and costs are categorized as emotional, social, instrumental and opportunistic (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

The forms of these interactions will vary, as will the outcomes. In this way, the relationship matters—because the form of interaction will either lead to negative or positive outcomes (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). For example, an athlete may seek guidance from a coach on a game strategy, which would immediately benefit both parties. In contrast, a coach could verbally reprimand a player for making a mistake during competition, which could result in an emotional cost for the athlete (Jowett, 2007). Kelley (1979) posited that an essential element of the interdependence theory is the belief that both the rewards and the costs that are generated in a

relationship cannot be created independently. Though coaches and athletes may gain individual rewards from their interdependence, this does not mean that the relationship is built purely on self-interest. The principle of transformation, or “what people make of a situation” is guided by goals that are both personal and mutually beneficial for all parties (Kruglanski & Stroebe as cited in Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). According to Jowett (2007) the transformational process that occurs is part of the reason why athletes and coaches can set aside their own interests for the benefit of all members. The theory proposed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) describes the interdependence that occurs in dyadic relationships, and this interdependence when applied to the coach-athlete relationships is the foundation for the conceptualization of Jowett’s (2007) 3+1Cs model.

**3+1Cs model.** In applying the interdependence theory to athletics, Jowett (2007) sought to create a framework to better understand the interdependence that occurs between coaches and athletes. To operationalize and measure the interpersonal aspects of the interdependent coach-athlete relationship, Jowett (2007) developed the 3+1Cs model to measure the constructs of closeness, commitment, and complementarity. These constructs were developed to measure the interdependent nature of the coach-athlete dyad, particularly regarding interpersonal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, which is reflected in the “+1Cs” co-orientation measure of how coaches and athletes view their relationship (Jowett, 2005, 2007; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezelek, 2012).

The construct *closeness* describes the affective connectedness that occurs between the coach and athlete, which includes qualities of trust, respect, and the “like that results from the appraisals of coaches’ and athletes’ relationship experiences” (Jowett, 2007, p. 17). *Commitment* reflects the cognitive desire of both members to remain in the relationship and the degree of

long-term commitment for each member (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). *Complementarity* reflects the cooperation between coach and athlete, which includes the reciprocal behavioral elements of the dyadic relationship (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). Jowett and Kanakoglou (2012) posited that “corresponding cooperation is reflected in interactions that are similar in type and intensity such as being mutually friendly, responsive, and relaxed” (p. 186).

Finally, Co-orientation “+1C” reflects the interdependence of the coach and athlete’s closeness, commitment, and complementarity, particularly in how both members view their relationship (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). By examining a combination of direct perspective “I respect my coach” and metaperspective “My coach trusts me,” Jowett (2007) proposed that an assessment of the coach and athlete’s actual and assumed similarities and their empathetic understanding will determine the quality of interdependence in the dyadic relationship (p. 18). Understanding the degree of accuracy in the athlete’s perspective of the relationship will illuminate the perceptions of Generation Z collegiate athletes and how they define a healthy interdependent coach-athlete relationship.

**Interdependence structures.** When examining the strength of relationship in the coach-athlete dyad, Jowett (2007) posited that four interdependence structures from Kelly and Thibaut’s (1978) interdependence theory—degree of dependence, mutuality of dependence, basis of dependence, and correspondence of interests—can assess behaviors and outcomes in the relationship. As such, the 3+1Cs model represents these properties. The relationship between interdependence structures, the use of 3+1Cs model to assess the coach-athlete relationship, and its connection to Generation Z characteristics are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

*Interdependence Structures, 3+1Cs Examples, and Generation Z Application.* Adapted from Jowett (2007).

Interdependence Structures	3+1Cs Example	Connection to Generation Z Characteristics
<i>Degree of dependence.</i> The extent to which the athlete and coach depend on each other (dependent outcomes).	High levels of dependence in affective <i>closeness</i> —trust and respect—tend to promote healthy communication between the coach and athlete.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Desire for trusting relationships</li> <li>▶ Connected technologically, but lack face-to-face social skills</li> <li>▶ Need mentorship, teaching, and partnership</li> </ul>
<i>Mutuality of dependence.</i> Reflects the extent to which the coach and athlete are mutually dependent on each other for mutually beneficial outcomes.	High and medium levels of the 3Cs reflect mutually dependent interactions in terms of decision making, power differentials, and give-and-take interactions with instruction and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Desire for democratic coaching</li> <li>▶ Desire for connection and meaningful relationships</li> <li>▶ Desire for individualized instruction</li> <li>▶ Are autonomous learners</li> </ul>
<i>Basis of dependence.</i> The ways that the coach and athlete influence each other’s outcomes (coach control vs. joint control).	High levels of <i>complementarity</i> indicate coordinated forms of interaction (i.e. the athlete is injured so the coach and athlete determining the intensity of the workout together).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Desire for mentorship</li> <li>▶ Desire for cooperation</li> <li>▶ Need for affirmation and encouragement</li> <li>▶ Desire for open communication</li> </ul>
<i>Correspondence of interest.</i> Reflects the extent to which both the coach and athlete’s actions benefit (reward) both members in a corresponding fashion.	High corresponding levels of the 3+1Cs have been linked to open channels of communication, where both athlete and coach are able to build cooperative interdependence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Desire for democratic coaching</li> <li>▶ Desire for open communication</li> <li>▶ Desire for cooperation</li> <li>▶ Desire for collaboration</li> </ul>

**Interdependence theory, 3+1Cs model, and Generation Z.** By identifying relational characteristics of Generation Z athletes and applying this knowledge in the context of coach-athlete dyadic relationships, best practices for building healthy interdependent relationships that lead to success in collegiate athletics can be established. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) presented the theory of interdependence, which when paired with Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model provides a complimentary theoretical framework that best describes the coach-athlete relationship. Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory proposes that interdependence occurs when the mutual rewards in the relationship outweigh the costs. Similarly, Jowett (2007) maintained that a coach-athlete dyad is interdependent if both experience high levels of trust and respect, are committed to and wish to remain in partnership, and behave in a friendly and cooperative manner. Recent studies indicate that the strength of the coach-athlete relationship is linked to success in collegiate athletics, therefore it is imperative that coaches recognize the unique characteristics of Generation Z athletes as well as their perspectives of and desires pertaining to the coach-athlete dyadic relationship, so that mutual success in collegiate competition is achieved (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). Given the research on both Generation Z and their characteristics, and the coach-athlete dyad, the following is a survey of what is presently known.

### **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

**Generational analysis.** According to the Pew Research Center (2015) one of the most common predictors of differences in attitudes and behaviors is an individual's age. "Age cohorts give researchers a tool to analyze changes in views over time; they can provide a way to understand how different formative experiences interact with the life-cycle and aging process to shape people's views of the world" (para. 2). As such, the Pew Research Center typically refers



to groups of people born over a 15-to-20-year span as a “generation,” and generational analysis involves tracking the behaviors, issues, and characteristics that are unique to an age cohort (Dimmock, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2015). Factors included in generation analysis may include “demographics, attitudes, historical events, popular culture, and prevailing consensus among researchers” (Pew Research Center, 2015, para. 5). According to generational cohort theory, generations repeat every four cycles, which suggests that members of Generation Z will be like the Silent Generation (born from 1928-1945), which was "oversimple, overslowed, and overprotected" (Ricks, 2016, p. 27). As children who lived during the Great Depression and World War II, they are remembered for their conformity and civic mindedness (Pew Research Center, 2015; Ricks, 2016). Though the official starting date for Generation Z is still unclear, several sources identify 1995 as the starting year of Generation Z, and the cutoff for the Millennial cohort. The oldest members of Generation Z are turning 24 this year (Rosen, 2010; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Wiedmer, 2015).

**Factors that define Generation Z.** In reviewing the varying factors that have impacted the Generation Z cohort, several themes were present in the literature. Gen Zers are the children of Gen Xers and early Millennials who were shaped by 9/11, an economic recession, the election of the first African American president, and the birth of the Internet (Dimmock, 2018; Rickes, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2017). Due to these experiences, Gen Zers are raised by caregivers who are disconnected, risk averse, overscheduled, and more openminded than prior generations (Dimmock, 2018; Moore, Jones & Frazier, 2017; Ricks, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Additionally, their childhoods were oversimplified and overprotected due to their Generation X and Millennial parents’ attempts to correct their own childhood experiences, particularly concerning terrorism, the recession, and a lack of security (Dimmock, 2018; Straus & Howe as

cited in Ricks, 2016). As such, they are risk averse, and though collaborative—due to connectivity—desire to participate on their own terms (Ricks, 2016; Rosen, 2010; Shatto & Erwin, 2017).

As the first post-9/11 generation, Generation Z has grown up surrounded by global terrorism, a dramatic rise in mass-shootings, a poor economy, and civil unrest surrounding elections, women’s rights, marriage rights, police violence, gun legislation, and immigration (Moore, Jones & Frazier, 2017). Edmunds and Turner (2005) argued that the global connection experienced by Generation Z has created “generational consciousness” (p. 537). Now that people from all over the world are affected by the same advertisements, are fans of the same celebrities, and are receiving the same news feeds, they are more connected than past generations (Edmunds & Turner, 2005). Seemiller and Grace (2016) argued that trust is imperative to this cohort which will require straight-forward intentions and clear expectation from authority figures. They have also concluded that their awareness of global activity is one of the reasons why, as a generation, they are we-centered, activists, and show great concern for the wellbeing of others (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

As the first generation to grow up fully immersed in technology, members of this cohort do not know life without the Internet (Dimmock, 2010; Rosen, 2010). Prensky (2001) used the metaphor “digital native” and “digital immigrant” to explain the generational gap that exists because of technological advancements, and how the implications of these changes impact today’s learning environment. Digital natives are defined as those who have grown up surrounded by technology such as the Internet, music, television, and video games, and digital immigrants are those who were alive before these new technologies and have had to adapt to the new way of “speaking digitally” (Prensky, 2001, p. 69). Where digital natives have always

spoken this digital language, it is a second language for digital immigrants who have had to integrate technology into their lives (Prensky, 2001). Prensky (2012) labeled Generation Z as the first cohort of digital natives, who since birth have known computers, the Internet, and for the oldest of the cohort, by age ten, the smartphone (Dimock, 2018; Meers, 2012; Moore, Jones & Frazier, 2017; Rickes, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2017). Where Millennials used a different technological device for each task, Gen Zers can do almost anything from one device—their smartphone. Additionally, because of the connectivity that today's technology provides, Ricks (2016) argued that "communication will be one of the greatest strengths of their generation, as will an emphasis on fairness and cooperation" (p. 41). These factors provide both a generational frame-of-reference, and justification for the characteristics that make Generation Z distinct.

**Generation Z characteristics.** Recognizing the defining characteristics of the next generation of collegiate athletes is necessary for building interdependent coach-athlete relationships that lead to success. According to research conducted by Northeastern University (2014) where more than 1,000 Generation Z teenagers were polled, survey results indicated that 60% of participants were wary about their financial future and though they felt that attending a higher education institution was important, 67% were concerned about student loan debt and affordability. This, paired with the political and global unease to which they are daily exposed, had led to their cautious nature and desire for trusting relationships (Fry, 2017; Marron, 2015). Consistent with generational cohort theory, like the children of the 1930s, today's teens are thinking about their economic future. Due to the upbringing of their protective caregivers, Generation Z has inherited their parents' aversion to risk as well as their values and individual responsibility (Moore, Jones, & Frazier, 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). This positive

relationship with their parents and caregivers has also given them a high trust in authority (Moore, Jones, & Frazier, 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

**Technology.** In a quantitative study conducted by Seemiller and Grace (2016), Generation Z teens described themselves as loyal, thoughtful, compassionate, open-minded, and responsible. Many of these traits can be attributed to growing up in real-time and being both globally and constantly connected via the World Wide Web and social media (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Wiedmer, 2015). Much of the literature described positive effects that technology has had on Generation Z such as open-mindedness, being both cooperative and autonomous learners, possessing both social and environment awareness, being tolerant, possessing the ability to multitask, possessing a desire to reform, and desiring meaningful connections (Fry, 2017; Marron, 2015; Meers, 2012; Moore, Jones & Frazier, 2017; Rickes, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Wiedmer, 2015). Negative characteristics mentioned included a need for instant gratification and feedback, lack of social skills—particularly relating to conflict resolution, a greater academic skill gap than past generations, short attention spans, lack of criticality towards information and knowledge, and a lack of depth in social relationships (Dimock, 2018; Loveland, 2017; Meers, 2012; Moore, Jones & Frazier, 2017; Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Van Oord & Corn, 2013; Wiedmer, 2015).

**Motivation.** A survey analysis of college-aged Generation Z members revealed that more than 70% of Gen Z students are motivated by making a difference for others, achievements—such as earning credit or advancement, not wanting to let others down, and advocating for their beliefs (Seemiller & Grace, 2012). Their desire for meaningful connections explains why they are motivated on a relational level to make a difference in other people’s lives and do not want to let others down (Seemiller & Grace, 2012). Generation Z students are also responsible; having

grown up in an economy that has steadily improved over the course of their lives, they value security, so the achievements that they view as motivation are not to be viewed as shallow extrinsic rewards, but rather, motivation towards their goals and a commitment to stability in their future (Seemiller & Grace, 2012). This study also found that gender played a prominent role in motivation. Where males were more motivated by competition and reputation, females were motivated by making a difference and strengthening relationships (Seemiller & Grace, 2012).

Data was also gathered pertaining to unmotivators of Generation Z collegiate students, which indicated that more than 25% of Gen Zers surveyed are not motivated by public recognition, competition, or acceptance from others (Seemiller & Grace, 2012). The study also found that though they care for the wellbeing and needs of others, they are not motivated by validation, acceptance or a want to “fit in.” Financial gain was also not a motivator for Generation Z students. Though concerned about financial stability, specifically, when it comes to college debt and career stability, monetary gain was not a motivator as compared to relationships and working towards goals that they feel will ultimately make a difference in the lives of others (Seemiller & Grace, 2012).

***College fears.*** Though access to higher education continues to grow, so too has the cost of education, which has left many from Generation Z fearful of attending college altogether (Seemiller & Grace, 2012). Unable to afford the cost of tuition, the divide has continued to grow between the poor and the wealthy (Wildavsky, Kelly, & Carey, 2012). The cost of tuition in the United States has gradually increased since the 1980s (Altbach, Bastedo, & Gumport, 2016), and with state appropriations declining at a significant rate, the burden to account for this cost has fallen on the student (Altbach et al., 2016; Wildavsky et al., 2012). After graduating from

college, Pell recipients carry more loan debt than non-Pell graduates, which suggests that the financial burdens of those who need aid is greater than the financial support they are receiving (Altbach et al., 2016). In the public sector, rising tuition due to declining appropriations has caused more and more low-income families to opt their children out of college entirely, or to attend weakening community colleges, or for-profit institutions (Altbach et al., 2016; Wildavsky et al., 2012). Unable to afford the rising cost, many Gen Zers are choosing to forego college entirely. Even so, Generation Z students still feel that a college education is important (Northeastern University, 2014; Seemiller & Grace, 2012).

***Expectations.*** Knowing how Generation Z athletes perceive the role of the coach is imperative for relationship building and ultimately, success in the sport. Rosen (2010) pointed out that due to the instantaneous feedback on social media—comments on posts, tweets, and videos put online—Generation Z is used to and expects continuous praise. From an instructional perspective, Gen Zers have short attention spans but will absorb information instantly; as such, they expect quick explanations and hands-on learning experiences (Rosen, 2010; Shatto & Erwin, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Williams, 2010). Experiences are important to them in terms of overall enjoyment and pleasure. A study conducted by Cseh-Papp, Varga, Szabo, Szira, and Hajos (2017) which used survey analysis, found that Generation Z college students rated working with a "cheerful team" as an important factor in their future job. Data also indicated that they have higher than realistic self-esteem and high trust in themselves (Cseh-Papp et al., 2017).

***Relational needs.*** Understanding how Generation Z athletes define a healthy coach-athlete relationship will inform coaching practices. In a study conducted by Parker et al. (2012) which focused on the preferred coaching styles of Generation Z teenage athletes, four themes

emerged from the research: desire for calm communication, care and encouragement, knowledge and expertise, and the coach possessing a democratic coaching style. Because of their desire for connection, Gen Zers seek out meaningful relationships (Ricks, 2016). Shatto and Erwin (2017) contend that generational differences that could lead to conflict—such as views on appearance (tattoos and piercings), authority, and multitasking—could be avoided if mentorship support is provided and the authority figure has a willingness to bridge the generational differences. Marron (2015) argued that mentorship will be increasingly important for this cohort, due to social media acting as a supplantation for face-to-face interaction. This decline in face-to-face interactions has led to a rise in issues surrounding social interaction and conflict (Marron, 2015). Furthermore, though they need customized experiences and intentional individualized instruction, Gen Zers are highly collaborative and autonomous learners, due to their connectivity (Wiedmer, 2015). Finally, a desire for a democratic leadership style, where Gen Zers are involved in the decision-making process is essential for building interdependence in the coach-athlete relationship (Parker et al., 2012).

**Best practices for nurturing the coach-athlete relationship.** Though little is known about the Generation Z collegiate coach-athlete relationship, or how these characteristics will impact the dyad, surveying the literature to examine what other best practices already occur in successful dyadic coach-athlete relationships informed this study. The themes of motivation, coaching behavior, integrity, trust, and teaching were prominent in the literature.

**Motivation and behavior.** Three similar studies applied self-determination theory to determine the effects that varying coaching behaviors have on athlete motivation. Self-determination theory focuses on three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Amorose & Horn, 2000). Each study was quantitative and used surveys to gather

data from varying participants. Blanchard, Amiot, Perreault, Vallerand, and Provencher (2009) used the Sports Motivation Scale to survey 207 participant regarding coaching behaviors that affected their self-determination. Findings indicated that athlete perceptions of coaching behaviors, particularly controlling interpersonal behaviors had a negative effect on the athlete's self-determination. Similar findings from a study conducted by Amorose and Horn (2000) specifically looked at how certain coaching behaviors are positively and negatively related to player motivation. In surveying 386 Division I athletes from various sports, findings indicated that athletes who perceived their coach as more autonomy-oriented than controlling, felt more committed and intrinsically motivated in their sport. Autonomous behaviors included: high levels of positive and informative feedback to athletes, acknowledging rather than ignoring both successes and failures, and a democratic coaching style (Amorose & Horn, 2000). Lastly, in a related study conducted by Hollembeak and Amorose (2005) results supported the idea that a strong correlation exists between intrinsic motivation in athletes and player perceived autocratic coaching behaviors.

In their quantitative study which surveyed 143 female, secondary-level, basketball players, Smith, Fry, Ethington, and Li (2005) applied McClelland and Atkinson's theory of achievement motivation. The purpose of the study was to investigate the hypothesis that motivation can be maximized in players when coaches implement an achievement-based setting, and where success is based on individual efforts that are task-oriented. This theory is based on the premise that when athletes define success based on their own efforts, rather than how their abilities compare to others, they are more motivated in their sport (Smith et al., 2005). Data indicated that coaching behaviors, particularly pertaining to positive feedback, punishment, and



ignoring mistakes greatly affected the participant's perceptions of the motivational climate (Smith et al., 2005).

***Integrity and trust.*** One common theme in the literature was the importance of building trust between coaches and athletes and creating an organizational climate that operates with integrity and instills this value in their athletes (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). According to Palmer (2009), integrity is “the state or quality of being entire, complete, and unbroken” (p. 8). Similarly, Josephson (2010) echoed the themes of wholeness and constancy of character. Paine (1994) maintained that, much like personal integrity, an organization's values must be the driving force. Guiding principles help to create a team environment that supports ethical behaviors, fosters accountability, and promotes trust in one another (Paine, 1994). Unlike a code of conduct, athletes instead are united behind a common mission, vision, purpose, or belief; as a result, the desire to act with integrity becomes part of the very fabric of the team (Paine, 1994). Even so, none of this is possible without leadership to model and exemplify this value.

Building an organizational culture that is grounded in integrity begins with the leadership of the organization. Good managers know how to treat others because of their understanding of people, who they are personally, and the world around them (Fullan, 2011). When leaders or coaches operate without integrity, it creates an atmosphere that benefits the strong (Fullan, 2011). Athletic strengths may be as basic as physical strength and ability, or based on other circumstances such as wealth, privilege, or connection. This inequity advantages a few while hindering or eliminating the achievement of others who may better serve the team (Fullan, 2011). Coaches who manage with integrity, provide those with ability, not just the advantaged, an environment where they can emerge and flourish to best serve the needs of the whole. Once

again, this requires trust and a vision-oriented organization; both are necessary for the success of the athletic program.

*Relational needs.* Though not specific to Generation Z athletes, several studies addressed the relational needs of athletes, which included components such as communication and the coach taking on the role of a teacher. In their short-term longitudinal study of 55 coach-athlete dyads from five youth volleyball programs, Erickson and Côté (2016) relied on systematic observation to examine behaviors of coaches and athletes, specifically, how tone in communication effects the developmental trajectories of athletes throughout the sports season. At the end of the observation process, all coaches and athletes also completed a questionnaire which measured competence, confidence, connection, and character. As data was person-centered rather than variable-centered, the experiences of individual athletes yielded different results, so behaviors were coded to compare varying interactions—the intervention tone of the coach, and athlete’s interactive behavior towards the coach (Erickson & Côté, 2016). Data was divided into three cluster samples based on athlete developmental trajectories: high and increasing, low and decreasing, and moderate and maintaining.

The results of this study suggested that the interactive experiences between coaches and athletes were associated with developmental trajectories, even with players who participated on the same team. The individual coach-athlete dyads affected other coach-athlete dyads within the team. For example, athletes from the “low and decreasing” developmental trajectory group whose coach exercised a controlling tone and offered individualized help targeting athlete inadequacies, were more aware of their inadequacies, and the extra attention perpetuated the belief in the athlete that their skills were not adequate compared to their teammates, which correlated with their negative developmental trajectory. These findings have strong implications

for Gen Z athletes, who desire individual attention, but also respond better to positive communication.

*Coach as teacher.* Other studies highlighted the importance of the coach knowing their athletes as well as they know their sport. In a 12-year longitudinal study, 338 undergraduate female athletes were surveyed on preferred coaching behaviors (Stewart, 2016). Athletes were asked to rank 10 characteristics in coaches from most important to least. Data indicated that the top three preferred coaching characteristics were: ability to teach, being honest and fair, and possessing a commitment to the development of sportsmanship (Stewart, 2016). Least important to female athletes were the coach having experience as a player, possessing an individual commitment to winning, and the ability to prepare athletes to play at a higher level (Stewart, 2016).

Other studies applied humanistic learning theory to coaching, arguing that coaching is a teaching opportunity. Humanistic thinkers argue for athlete-centered rather than coaching-centered instruction (Nelson, Cushion, Potrac, & Groom, 2014). This approach to coaching recognizes the athlete holistically, by focusing on developing the total individual. Connolly (2016) contended that coaching is just as much an art as it is a skill and that the most successful coaches are those who are in tune to the needs of their athletes, particularly regarding motivation, self-worth, emotions, expectations, mentorship, and the coach-athlete relationship. In applying humanistic principles such as communication, self-concept, affect, and personal values, coaches take on the role of a teacher who creates a learning environment that grows players, builds player confidence through care, and develops thinking players (Jones, 2009).

As the teacher and coach, Connolly (2016) argued that strategies for optimizing player growth pertaining to communication should include honesty, listening to players, helping

athletes to set goals, and really getting to know each athlete. To develop self-concept, coaches should be positive both verbally and in action, promote success, maintain positive expectations, be genuine, and invite rather than disinvite (Connolly, 2016). Strategies for creating a healthy affective environment included being attentive and sensitive to the feelings of athletes and helping them to be aware of the feelings of others, teaching athletes how to learn and how to think for themselves, and goal setting. Finally, teaching values, fostering personal responsibility, and helping athletes to become critical thinkers were also strategies for humanistic coaching (Connolly, 2016; Nelson et al., 2014).

**3+1Cs model.** In surveying various studies by Jowett and associates, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed. According to Sagar and Jowett (2007), utilizing the 3+1Cs model allows researchers to assess the “quality of the relationship or the degree to which members are interdependent, and postulates that the quality of the relationship can function in ways that encourage (or discourage) athletes and coaches to express their needs and satisfy their goals” (p. 149). This study was framed in part by Jowett’s (2007) 3+1Cs model; as such, it was essential to conduct a survey of recent coach-athlete studies that employed this methodology to assess the credibility of the method and the research findings.

***Coach-athlete relationship.*** Research consistently supported the argument that the coach-athlete relationship is a fundamental contributor to success in athletics (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Jowett (2005) argued that “The coach-athlete relationship is not an add-on to, or by-product of, the coaching process . . . instead it is the foundation of coaching” (p. 412). This is because the interdependent nature of the relationship connects coaches and athletes emotionally, behaviorally and mentally (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). Recent empirical research suggests that attributes such as honesty,

empathy, integrity, respect, acceptance, cooperation, democratic coaching, positive regard, open-communication, the ability to create team cohesion, and motivation were all associated with effective coach-athlete dyadic relationships (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). In contrast, poor communication, a lack of professional balance, emotional isolation, lack of respect, and a lack of connectedness were consistently found to be indications of an unsuccessful coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2003, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Sagar & Jowett, 2012).

***Motivation and environment.*** In a quantitative study, questionnaires were used to survey 591 athletes on their perceptions of the quality of the coach-athlete relationship and its impact on their motivation in team sports (Olympiou, Jowett, & Duda, 2008). Data indicated that correlations between player motivation and perceived closeness, commitment, and complementarity with the coach, were dependent on the coaching environment. Higher levels of the 3Cs were associated with coaching environments that emphasized role importance, cooperation, and improvement, while lower levels were linked to rivalry, unequal recognition, and punishment for mistakes (Olympiou, et al., 2008). Jowett and Cockerill (2002) argued that negative coaching styles betray the trust that is implicit within the dyadic relationship.

***Team cohesion and leadership.*** Findings also indicated that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship had strong correlations with both team cohesion and coaches' leadership. In a quantitative study which employed questionnaires, Jowett and Chaundy (2004) found that there is a link between sports cohesion and performance; they argued that leadership and relational variables must be considered together when assessing cohesion, and that data indicated that the coach-athlete relationship was a strong predictor of team cohesion. The success of leadership is dependent upon the quality of the relationship in that the relationship between leaders and

followers is important when one considers that leadership is shared and interdependent in that neither the coach or athlete can achieve success independently (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004). In a similar study, collective efficacy was examined, and findings indicated that group confidence was linked to both the coach-athlete relationship and player satisfaction (Jowett, Shanmugam, & Caccoulis, 2012). Similarly, in their survey analysis of 150 soccer players, Hampson and Jowett (2012) found that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship was a stronger predictor of player-perceived collective efficacy than coaches' leadership.

**Communication.** In addition to leadership and team cohesiveness, communication was also a common theme in the literature. Sagar and Jowett (2012) utilized a quantitative survey analysis to assess the communicative acts that occur in potentially negative situations, such as when losing in competitions and making mistakes in training. Their data indicated that player perceptions of both positive and negative communicative acts significantly affected their motivation, affect, learning, and self-concept pertaining to physical ability. In a qualitative case study, which relied on player and coach interviews, Jowett (2003) found that lack of communication significantly attributed to interpersonal conflict in the coach-athlete dyad. Using survey analysis, Jowett and Nezelek (2012) found that the strength of interdependence in the coach-athlete dyad was linked to relationship-length and satisfaction. These findings are significant, particularly for 2-year and 4-year institutions, where the length of the relationship is limited by the athlete's eligibility. The quality of the relationship has strong implications for both the coach-athlete relationship, and success in collegiate team athletics (Jowett & Cocherill, 2003; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004; Rhind, Jowett, & Yang, 2012).

**Limited findings on Gen Z athlete perceptions.** Though the focus was on early teenagers, data collected from a 2012 qualitative study of Generation Z athletes, could shed light

on the preferences of the now potential Gen Z collegiate athletes who were interviewed. Parker et al. (2012) conducted semistructured interviews with male and female club sport athletes to determine their preferred coaching style. Data indicated that athletes preferred coaches who exercised calm communication, care and encouragement, knowledge and expertise, and who utilized a democratic coaching style (Parker et al., 2012). Though not specific to athletes, in their nationwide quantitative and qualitative study of more than 1,100 college students, Seemiller and Grace (2016) found that Generation Z is grounded in their sense of reality, due to their relationship with their parents, who they view as role models. They note that this positive view of authority could aid higher education counselors, educators, advisors, coaches, and mentors as they form relationship with these students (Seemiller & Grace, 2012). Minimal research exists that specifically focuses on Generation Z collegiate athletes; consequently, this study sought to fill a gap in the literature regarding their perspective on the coach-athlete dyad and its relationship to success in their sport, and their preferred coaching style.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

Understanding how the characteristics of Generation Z athletes will affect their perception of and needs in the coach-athlete dyadic relationship is imperative for mutual success in collegiate athletic competition. From the literature surveyed, four prominent themes emerged that characterize the relational needs of collegiate Generation Z athletes. These are a desire for trust and security, meaningful relationships, quality communication, and an understanding of what motivates Generation Z collegiate athletes. Literature pertaining to the coach-athlete dyad indicated that these best practices were associated with effective coach-athlete relationships and success in collegiate athletics.

**Trust and security.** Much of the literature surrounding the characteristics of Generation Z indicated that trust and security were important to this cohort. Factors that contribute to these needs such as global terrorism, a rise in school shootings, financial instability, rising tuition, overprotective parents, and their collaborative and connective nature due in part to technological advancements are still present today (Altbach et al., 2016; Dimmock, 2018; Edmunds & Turner, 2005; Marron, 2015; Ricks, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Wiedmer, 2015). In addition to their desire for trusting relationships, is an instilled trust in authority, due to their positive relationship with their parents and caregivers (Moore et al., 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Generation Z also desires security, particularly when it comes to college affordability (Altbach et al., 2016; Northeastern University, 2014; Seemiller & Grace, 2012; Wildavsky et al., 2012). As trust in higher education and its value continues to decline for other generations, Generation Z still believes that a college education is important (Altbach et al., 2016; Wildavsky et al., 2012). Collegiate coaches must continue to work with political leaders, university heads, businesses, and athletic directors, to make higher education affordable for this generation of collegiate athletes (Wildavsky et al., 2012). Regarding the collegiate coach-athlete relationship, trust, honesty, and integrity were prominent characteristics that were present in quality coach-athlete dyads and contributed to both coach and athlete satisfaction (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Pocwardowski, 2007). In contrast, studies that focused on incompatibility in the coach-athlete dyad often cited a lack of honesty and a breakdown of trust as central to the negative nature of the relationship (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002).

**Meaningful relationships.** Several factors contribute to Generation Z's desire for meaningful relationships. Though technological advancements have contributed to Generation



Z's connectivity, global awareness, and increased compassion and care, it had also left them longing for real face-to-face connections and relational depth (Edmunds & Turner, 2005; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). For this reason, coaches must be aware of the potential impact they can have on their athletes when they take on the roles of mentor, teacher, and collaborator, in addition to that of coach. If mentorship is provided, many of the generational conflicts and differences that are commonplace in athletics can be avoided, and skills that are lacking with this generation—such as conflict resolution and assertive communication—can be learned (Marron, 2015; Shatto & Erwin, 2017).

Similarly, the most successful coaches are those who are in tune to the needs of their athletes, and who acknowledge their role as a teacher who is responsible for being a content expert, creating a learning environment that grows players, building player confidence through care, and developing thinking players (Connolly, 2016; Jones, 2009). As the teacher, coaches should utilize strategies for creating a healthy environment, such as exercising attentiveness and sensitivity to the feeling of athletes, teaching athletes how to learn and think for themselves, offering individualized learning opportunities, helping athletes to set team and personal goals, and helping athletes to become critical thinkers (Connolly, 2016; Erickson & Côté, 2016; Nelson et al., 2014). Though they need individualized opportunities to grow and receive feedback, Generation Z athletes also desire a team environment and an opportunity to be part of the decision-making process (Parker et al., 2012). Many researchers argued that coaches should employ a democratic coaching style, as data indicated that open-communication, cooperation, collaboration, and team cohesion were essential elements of successful and quality interdependent coach-athlete relationships (Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Meek, 2000;

Jowett & Pocwardowski, 2007; Parker et al., 2012). This democratic coaching will require quality communication, another theme that was prevalent in the literature.

**Quality communication.** Opinions on Generation Z's communication skills varied. Ricks (2016) argued that technology and the connectivity it provides is one of the reasons why communication will be one of the greatest strengths of this generation. Others are not so sure. Though technology has helped to increase connection, it has also contributed to the decline in face-to-face interactions that this cohort desperately desires (Dimock, 2018; Loveland, 2017; Van Oord & Corn, 2013; Wiedmer, 2015). As a result, many lack basic conflict resolution and social skills that are needed for achieving depth in quality relationships (Dimock, 2018; Loveland, 2017; Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Van Oord & Corn, 2013; Wiedmer, 2015). Their need for instant and affirming feedback can be contributed to social media, and their desire for assertive and open communication to the positive relationships they have formed with their parents and caregivers (Dimock, 2018; Moore et al., 2017; Rosen, 2010; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Wiedmer, 2015). Central to the success of the coach-athlete relationship was communication. Numerous studies indicated that athlete perceptions of the coach's communication contributed to satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the relationships, particularly concerning affirmation and encouragement, constructive feedback, responsiveness, friendliness, respect, tone, open channels, assertiveness, and lack of communication (Jowett, 2003; Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Sagar & Jowett, 2012). Communication also contributed to cooperative engagement, particularly concerning democratic coaching.

**Motivation.** Finally, a prominent theme in research pertaining to the coach-athlete dyad is player motivation and understanding how to motivate Generation Z athletes will be an

essential ingredient for success in collegiate athletics. There were several theories of motivation, but all seemed to emphasize the affect that coaching behaviors have on player motivation. Controlling behaviors were associated with a decrease in motivation, while autonomy-oriented behaviors contributed to player self-determination (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Blanchard et al., 2009). Coaching behaviors pertaining to healthy communication, positive and informative feedback, acknowledgement of both success and failure, and democratic decision-making were all perceived by players to increase motivation in their sport (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Blanchard et al., 2009; Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005; Smith et al., 2005).

In general, Generation Z is motivated by both relationships and goals, however, research indicated that gender contributed to different motivators. Where females were motivated by relationships and a desire to make a difference, males were more inclined to be motivated by competition and reputation (Seemiller & Grace, 2012). Even so, most Generation Z college students surveyed indicated that aspects of relationships, such as making a difference in another person's life, and not wanting to let people down were the strongest motivators in their life, with achieving their goals as a close second (Seemiller & Grace, 2012). To increase player motivation for Generation Z athletes, coaches should focus on building relationships—both coach-athlete and athlete-athlete, team cohesiveness, and creating opportunities for setting personal and team goals.

### **Review of Methodological Issues and Critique of Previous Research**

To support the methodology for the research conducted in this study, an examination of research methodologies within the relevant literature and a critique of previous research was conducted. Various research methods were employed in these studies. The most prevalent form of analysis for both the coach-athlete dyad and Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model was qualitative

survey data collection using questionnaires and personal interviews. Finally, only one study was found that specifically focused on Generation Z perspectives of the coach-athlete dyad, which demonstrates the need for more research to fill this gap in the literature.

In their qualitative case study, which assessed incompatibility in the coach-athlete relationship, Jowett and Cockerill (2002) initiated three separate case studies of coach-athlete dyads that focused on incompatibility in the relationship. Data was collected through individual interviews. In a similar case study of a single coach-athlete dyad, Jowett (2003) asked 75 open-ended questions using the Cs (closeness, coorientation, complementarity) to form general categories. This study revealed marked differences between the perceptions of the coach and athlete concerning interpersonal conflict. The interview method allowed Jowett to also analyze the emotional responses of the participants which would not have been possible had she relied on a quantitative survey analysis using questionnaires. Even so, an argument for transferability for this case study would be stronger if more than one dyad was interviewed, or if a mixed methods approach incorporating quantitative questionnaires were employed. This highlights one of the drawbacks to case study analysis—the lack of comparative data due to a small sample population, and the inability to make generalizations that contribute to the population as a whole (Creswell, 2014).

Studies by Jowett and associates which sought to examine variables that positively and negatively affect the coach-athlete relationship—such as motivational climate (Olympiou et al., 2006), team cohesion (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004), and gender and satisfaction (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004)—were prevalent in the literature. The quantitative research was conducted using two instruments, the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q), which contains 22 items (11 for each instrument) and measures the coach and athlete's levels of closeness,

commitment, and complementarity from both a direct perspective and metaperspective—coorientation (Jowett, 2007). Many of Jowett’s quantitative studies relied on means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations to calculate the main variables from questionnaire responses (Hampson & Jowett, 2012; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett, Shanmugam, & Caccoulis, 2011; Olympiou et al., 2006). The use of questionnaires is a commonly used methodology in quantitative research because it enables researchers to generalize from a sample about trends, attitudes, and behaviors that represent a larger population (Creswell, 2014). Researchers often choose to use this method because of the anonymity it provides for participants, which helps to ensure that responses are accurate (Creswell, 2014). When using questionnaires, sample size, randomization, and breadth of population are essential for reaching accurate generalizations.

A quantitative study conducted by Northwestern University (2014) on Generation Z attitudes and trends surveyed more than 1,000 collegiate students using randomized sampling; similarly, Amorose and Horn (2000) used questionnaires to survey 386 Division I athletes from various sports, and Blanchard et al. (2009), used a randomly selected population of 207 participants to reach conclusions surrounding the effect that social factors have on player self-determination. For their quantitative study, Hampson and Jowett (2012) surveyed 150 British soccer players—112 males and 38 females—using the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) to assess the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. Though the sample size is sufficient for research purposes, many of the findings from this survey of the literature indicated that male and female perceptions varied concerning the coach athlete relationship and Generation Z motivation (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Smith et al., 2005; Stewart, 2016). With research

pertaining to Generation Z, divergences in gender perceptions may need to be considered for certain aspects of the coach-athlete relationship, particularly concerning player motivation.

Several of Jowett's studies were qualitative and relied predominantly on personal interviews. Personal interviews allow the researcher to assess responses that questionnaires cannot provide, due to their informal nature. During quantitative (structured) and qualitative (semistructured, and open-ended) response interviews, researchers can clarify questions for respondents to ensure understanding, ask follow-up questions, and assess the emotional responses of participants (Creswell, 2014). In the only study found that specially focuses on Generation Z perceptions of the coach-athlete dyad, Parker et al. (2012) interviewed 10 middle school athletes—five males and five females. Because of the age of participants, a parent was present as the interviewer asked questions and transcribed responses. After conducting the interviews, responses were coded, and themes were discovered (Parker et al., 2012).

From this example it is apparent that there are disadvantages to this method. For example, participants may feel uncomfortable with the formal nature of the interview due to the lack of personal connection between the researcher and participant (Creswell, 2014). This could impact the responses of the participants, by causing them to withhold information or to deceive the interviewer. Similarly, audio or video recordings could have the same effect on the comfort and openness of participants, who may feel that their anonymity has been jeopardized (Creswell, 2014). In the study conducted by Parker et al. (2012), the presence of the parent during the interview may have also affected the responses of the child, who could have felt uncomfortable being honest with their parent present.

Studies which focused on how negative coaching behaviors affect athletes were also prevalent in the literature. Sagar and Jowett (2012) conducted a qualitative survey which

focused on the athlete's perception of the coach's reactions to mistakes made during practice, and when losing in competition. Athletes were given space to write open-ended responses to seven questions in a private setting, and then data was analyzed deductively and inductively to identify patterns using the principles of thematic analysis (Smith as cited in Sagar & Jowett, 2012). When conducting this form of analysis, one must minimize interpretive bias; for this reason, Sagar and Jowett (2012) used a collaborative approach which consisted of peer debriefing and maintaining a bracketing journal throughout the process to reflect on their personal biases during analysis (Sagar & Jowett, 2012). Finally, data triangulation was achieved through individual coding efforts on the part of both researchers to ensure that themes were reached independently prior to peer collaboration. Jowett, Kanakoglou, and Passmore (2012) relied on recorded interviews that were later transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. Though there are benefits and drawbacks to using this method, as the researcher, the needs of the study's participants must be considered. The survey of literature revealed that one prominent characteristic of Generation Z was their need for trust (Moore et al., 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). It also revealed that though they are used to a lack of face-to-face interaction because of technology, they still prefer personal connection (Marron, 2015; Ricks, 2016).

It was clear from the literature review that further research is needed regarding Generation Z, specifically collegiate athletes and their coaching preferences. One limitation to generational analysis is that we are often unaware of all the factors and characteristics of a generation until a successive generation has emerged (Dimmock, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2015). As more and more from the Generation Z cohort enter higher education and adulthood, further research will be necessary to assess the perceptions and needs of the youngest in the cohort, to see if they differ from the oldest. Additionally, minimal research has been conducted

that focuses on Generation Z collegiate athletes. The qualitative study conducted by Parker et al. (2012) was the only study found that specifically focuses on Generation Z athletes and their preferred coaching style. Even so, the interviewees from the study were middle school club athletes, and it is likely that for many, age, maturity, and experience, will affect and alter their perceptions and coaching needs by the time they are competing at the collegiate level. Extending the research to include “Generation Z collegiate athlete perspectives” of the coach-athlete dyad helped to fill the gap in the literature.

### **Summary**

This study sought to extend the research of the collegiate coach-athlete dyad by adding the construct “perceptions of Generation Z collegiate athletes” on preferred coaching qualities and relational best practices that impact athletic success. The conceptual framework for this study included Kelly and Thibaut’s (1978) interdependence theory, and Jowett’s (2003) 3+1Cs model to better understand the interdependent nature of the coach-athlete relationship—specifically from the athlete’s perspective, and what factors contributed to the quality of the relationship. The review of literature highlighted the importance of generational analysis by specifically addressing the factors that have contributed to characteristics that set Generation Z apart from other generations. Once the needs of Generation Z were identified, a review of literature pertaining to the coach-athlete dyad and the coaching qualities that both positively and negatively affect the coach-athlete dyad was conducted, which led to a congruent review of coach-athlete dyads that were assessed using Jowett’s (2007) 3+1Cs model. From this review of the literature, four prominent themes emerged that characterize the relational needs of Generation Z athletes which are, a desire for trust and security, a desire for meaningful relationships, quality communication, and an understanding of what motivates Generation Z



collegiate athletes. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed during these studies, and after considering the needs of Generation Z athletes as revealed in the literature, such as a desire for personal connections and trust in relationships (Marron, 2015; Moore et al., 2017; Ricks, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016), a qualitative study design was selected for this research endeavor, which relied on synchronous (participants and researcher conversing in real time), semistructured, interviews for data collection. Minimal research exists that specifically focuses on Generation Z collegiate athletes; therefore, this study sought to fill a gap in the literature regarding their perspective on the coach-athlete dyad and its relationship to success in their sport, and their preferred coaching relational qualities.

Prominent authorities in the field of sports psychology propose that the quality of the relationship has strong implications for both the coach-athlete dyad, and success in collegiate team athletics (Jowett & Cocherill, 2003; Rhind, Jowett, & Yang, 2012). This review of literature, which develops a unique conceptual framework using Kelly and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory, and Jowett's (2003) 3+1Cs model, focused on the characteristics of Generation Z, best practices in coaching, and the interdependent nature of the coach-athlete relationship. Based on the limited findings of Generation Z collegiate athlete perceptions, there was sufficient reason for believing that an investigation that specifically examined the perspective of Generation Z collegiate athletes toward the coach-athlete relationship would yield important findings. The literature review provided strong support for pursuing a research project to answer the following two-part research question: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate athletics, and what are best practices that collegiate coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players?

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This study was designed to investigate the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of collegiate Generation Z athletes to determine what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate sports. The study also investigated the coaching qualities and habits preferred by Generation Z collegiate athletes. The literature indicated that the coach-athlete dyadic relationship is paramount to success in athletics; therefore, considering the interdependent nature of the relationship, this study was framed by Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model, as influenced by Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory. Based on these considerations and what is known from the literature about the relational needs of Generation Z athletes, a qualitative research design was necessary to explore the research questions. The study provided insight as to Generation Z athlete's preferred coaching qualities and habits, and this information could help collegiate coaches to better understand and meet the relational needs of their athletes. Included in this chapter are the research questions and the purpose and design of the study, which include the research population, setting, and sample method. Instrumentation, data collection, analysis, and procedures are also addressed, with concluding thoughts on the limitations to the research design and ethical issues that were considered throughout the course of this study.

#### **Research Questions**

The principal research questions in this study are framed by Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model, as influenced by Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory. The following research questions were used to guide the study:

RQ 1: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate athletics?

RQ 2: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what are best practices that coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players?

RQ 1 focused on general "success" in collegiate athletics, and the relational qualities that positively impact success, as seen from the perspective of Generation Z collegiate team-sport athletes who have achieved a level of collegiate athletic success and are currently experiencing a quality coach-athlete relationship. RQ 2 focused on the athlete's perspective of effective best practices that coaches currently use and should use to build relationships with Generation Z athletes; not necessarily for success, but to meet the needs of their athletes. In summation, this study was designed to identify what relational qualities effect success at the collegiate level, what Generation Z athletes believe are best practices that coaches can utilize to build healthy dyadic relationships with their athletes, and if there are transferable themes that could be useful to collegiate coaches who work with Generation Z athletes.

### **Purpose and Design of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine Generation Z collegiate athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete dyadic relationship to determine best practices for building healthy coach-athlete relationships that lead to success in team-sport athletics. Generation Z has just recently entered higher education and understanding how their unique characteristics will impact higher education is essential. Though some research exists in this area, little is known about how the needs of Gen Z will affect collegiate athletics, specifically regarding the relational needs of the athlete. What is known is that the coach-athlete relationship matters, and it is linked to success in athletics (Jowett, 2005; Jowett, 2007). Therefore, recognizing the relational needs of this new generation of collegiate athletes and their preferred coaching habits could help coaches to form

relationships that lead to success in athletics, and more importantly, aid them in meeting the relational needs of their athletes so that they are able to maximize their athletic potential.

From the survey of literature, four prominent themes emerged that characterize the relational needs of collegiate Generation Z athletes. These are: a desire for meaningful relationships, quality communication, an understanding of what motivates Generation Z, and trust and security (Dimmock, 2018; Edmunds & Turner, 2005; Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005; Jowett, 2003, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Loveland, 2017; Ricks, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Smith et al., 2005; Van Oord & Corn, 2013). In reviewing the coach-athlete dyad, much of the research established a link between communication and the quality of the relationship (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Meek, 2000). Literature pertaining to Generation Z indicated that because of the effect that technology has had on communication and connection, this cohort desires meaningful relationships and face-to-face connections that replace the screen time to which they are accustomed (Edmunds & Turner, 2005; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Motivation was a common theme in literature pertaining to the coach-athlete dyad, and findings indicated that coaching behaviors greatly impact player motivation (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Blanchard et al., 2009; Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005; Smith et al., 2005). Finally, the relational need of Generation Z that was most prominent in the literature was their necessity for trust (Moore et al., 2017; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Due to their desire for trust in relationships and for personal connection, the qualitative research design for this study was synchronous semistructured interview.

In the review of literature, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed; much of the literature surveyed specifically addressed the nature of the coach-athlete dyad, and how varying constructs affect the quality of the relationship. Studies pertaining to the

coach-athlete dyad predominantly relied on both quantitative and qualitative survey data collection and synchronous interviews, with the distinction being dependent on the aims of the study at hand (Jowett, Kanakoglou, & Passmore, 2012; Sagar & Jowett, 2012). Jowett and Sagar's (2012) study of how negative coaching behaviors impact athletes, addressed sensitive topics in the world of athletics. One of the reasons why they chose to employ a more personal methodological approach was to give athletes an opportunity to elaborate on their experience through open-ended written response. For similar reasons, Jowett, Kanakoglou, and Passmore (2012) used recorded interviews to gather data, that was later transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. In each of these studies, researchers minimized interpretive bias through collaboration, independently coding prior to peer debriefing, and by maintaining a reflexive journal throughout the process to reflect on their personal biases during analysis (Jowett, Kanakoglou, & Passmore 2012; Sagar & Jowett, 2012).

Finally, in the only study found that specifically focused on Generation Z athletes, researchers used a qualitative interview design to gather data from pre-teen athletes on their preferred coaching style (Parker et al., 2012). Ten athletes (five male and five female) were interviewed onsite and asked the same questions in a one-on-one interview with a parent present. Probing questions were asked when needed, and all responses were later transcribed; thematic coding was used to identify transferable themes (Parker et al., 2012). In each of these studies, the researchers considered the needs of their participants when selecting a research design; the same is true for this study.

**Qualitative design.** Using a qualitative design, synchronous semistructured interviews were conducted with 12 collegiate team sport athletes from various higher education institutions in the Pacific Northwest (public, private, and community college). Qualitative research focuses

on the meaning that the participants hold about the topic under study (Creswell, 2014). Unlike quantitative data collection, which relies on statistical analysis to form conclusions, in focusing on the participants experiences, preferences, and relational needs, qualitative researchers generate themes from the responses of the participants (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, the formal and distant aspects of quantitative survey could have affected the comfort and openness of the participants in the study, therefore, a less formal approach was warranted to ensure that data was accurate. Rather than reaching generalizations, qualitative researchers seek transferability; in the case of this study, transferable themes gathered from Generation Z athletes could be useful to collegiate coaches who seek to employ relational best practices with their athletes. In order to gather accurate data, the relational needs of Generation Z were considered.

During qualitative (semistructured, and open-ended) response interviews, researchers can clarify questions for respondents to ensure understanding, ask follow-up questions, and assess the emotional responses of participants (Creswell, 2014; Galletta, 2013; Patton; 2015).

Qualitative research allows for the researcher to be a key instrument in data collection, which includes gathering data at the site where participants are engaged in the activity or relationship under observation (Creswell, 2014; Galletta, 2013; Patton; 2015). Finally, though this study is framed by Kelly and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory, and Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model, the exploratory nature of this study warranted the use of thematic analysis, which relies on the data to speak. Inductive and deductive data analysis was necessary to discover themes from the study pertaining to the preferences and beliefs of Generation Z athletes. Reflexivity and reflection were necessary for accurate interpretation and to minimize researcher bias (Creswell, 2014), and after reviewing the methodological literature and considering the needs of Generation Z athletes as revealed in the literature, it was apparent that conducting synchronous

semistructured interviews was the most reliable form of data collection for answering the research questions and for discovering transferrable themes from the target population.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

The target population for this study was collegiate team sport athletes who had played for the same coach for a minimum of one season and had experienced “success” in their sport (athlete of the year, all-conference accolades, team conference titles, etc.). In choosing athletes that had been successful under the direction of their current coach, and had developed a positive relationship, the study sought to determine if participants desire the same relational coaching qualities, what they believe are the relational best practices coaches should employ, and what relational coaching qualities they believe impacted their own personal athletic success. To qualify as a member of Generation Z, each participant needed to have been born after 1995. The oldest members of the cohort turned 24 this year, which means that all traditional collegiate athletes are members of Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Wiedmer, 2015). In several of the reviewed qualitative studies, researchers relied on “intensity sampling” because the athletes under study “manifested the phenomenon intensely” (Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Frost, 2007, p. 446). For this study, a purposive sampling technique was used to select participants because “they [could] purposefully inform the understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 156).

To gain a balanced perspective and increase transferability, participants included two male and two female student athletes from various public, private, and community college higher education institutions in the Pacific Northwest. In total, six male and six female athletes were interviewed from various team sports, which included: volleyball, basketball, football, soccer, ultimate frisbee, track and field, baseball, and softball. The recruitment targeted the same

ethnicity and gender demographics as the average for Pacific Northwest institutions. Information for each population was obtained from the National Center for Educational Statistics. Because this study sought to determine the relational qualities of coaches that are preferred by Generation Z athletes and lead to athletic success, participants in some way had experienced either individual or team athletic success under the direction of their collegiate coach (athlete of the year, all-conference accolades, team conference titles, etc.). Though the purpose of the study was discovery-based, the researcher was seeking participants who were currently or had experienced a quality coach-athlete dyadic relationship and had achieved athletic success. The goal of the purposive sampling was to generate themes that reflect what coaches are already doing in higher education athletics to meet the needs of today's Generation Z athlete, and to discover other athlete-preferred coaching qualities that could improve athletic performance and ultimately, lead to success in their sport.

According to Charmaz as cited in Creswell (2014), saturation is used in qualitative studies to determine the necessary sample size for the study. Saturation is the practice of gathering data until the researcher has sufficiently "saturated" the categories or "themes" needed to inform the study (Charmaz as cited in Creswell, 2014). The proposed number of participants provided the necessary data for thematic analysis; therefore, the researcher did not need to expand the interview pool since additional data were not needed.

### **Instrumentation and Related Procedures**

To accurately determine the relational needs and desired coaching qualities of collegiate Generation Z athletes, synchronous semistructured interviews were conducted with each participant. Interviews were conducted at various locations across the Portland metropolitan area at the convenience of the participants. Locations included coffee shops, the athletes' institutions,



and their homes. Due to location and availability, two interviews were conducted over the phone. The Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) has been utilized by researchers to determine the quality of the coach-athlete relationship from the athlete's perspective, by specifically focusing on the constructs of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. Using the CART-Q as a framework, qualitative questions were generated by the researcher and were piloted and reviewed by external parties to assist in approaching validity (see Appendix A). Prior to the interview, all participants were required to sign a consent form, which was reviewed with each participant before beginning the interviews (see Appendix B). The interview schedule included a protocol that was read to all participants throughout the interview, and 12 open-ended questions. The first section included four questions pertaining to the athlete's relationship with their coach (CART-Q), the second section contained four questions concerning the elements of the coach-athlete relationship that the participant believed are essential for success (RQ 1), and the third section contained four questions concerning best practices that coaches should utilize to build healthy and quality relationships with athletes (RQ 2).

Section one was primarily used to determine the quality of the coach-athlete dyadic relationship as multiple studies have indicated that high scores in the 3Cs dimensions are associated with relational fulfillment, treatment, player performance, team cohesion, and athletic enjoyment (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Don Carolis, 2003; Olympiou et al., 2005). For the purpose of this study, it was essential that participants perceived their coach-athlete relationship as "quality," so that participants could reflect on the positive aspects of the relationship and share about their experiences. In some instances, the athlete chose to focus on their relationship with an assistant coach rather than their head coach because they felt that the

relationship was healthier. Questions from section one focused on the participant's relationship with their coach and how their perception of the relationship had been shaped by the behaviors and characteristics of their coach.

Sections two targeted the participant's general perspective of the coach-athlete relationship and its connection to success, while section three focused on the athlete's perception of coaching relational best practices. The themes that were present in the review of literature were explored in these two sections. Questions pertaining to the participant's desire for meaningful relationships, quality communication, motivation, and trust and security were explored as they related to success and the collegiate athlete's needs. Where section one focused on the athlete's personal experiences, section two and three required a more general response, as the athlete was asked to reflect on their own needs and general collegiate athlete needs. After receiving approval from Concordia University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and the athletic gatekeepers of each higher education institution, an email was sent to 60 potential participants that met the criteria for the study (see Appendix D). Volunteers completed a screening survey (see Appendix E), and once participants were selected, interview times were scheduled at the participant's convenience.

### **Data Collection**

Working with each institution's gatekeeper, an email was sent to coaches to identify athletes who met the requirements for the study (see Appendix C). Once potential recruits were identified, an email invitation to participate in the study was sent to all potential candidates from each institution. Those who expressed interest completed a screening survey, and from that pool, the researcher selected participants that satisfied the targeted enrollment quota (see Appendix D). Once participants were selected, individual semistructured interviews were scheduled to identify

the relational needs and desired coaching qualities of Generation Z collegiate athletes. The intent of the interview was to establish a rapport with the participant, listen to their responses and personal opinions in order to gather data about their perspective, and allow for the participant to reflect on their own needs as a collegiate athlete. The date and time of the semistructured interviews were determined by the participant and took place during February and March of 2019. All participants were provided information about the study prior to the interview and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B). Since qualitative researchers seek to form a repository of data to generate themes and answer their research questions, interviews ensued until the categories were saturated; in total, 12 interviews took place.

Data for the study was obtained through a combination of modified questions from the CART-Q questionnaire that were rewritten for the purpose of the interview, and researcher-created open-ended response questions. Using a series of open-ended questions, qualitative researchers gather data that is necessary for answering their research problem (Galletta, 2013; Patton, 2015). The simultaneous structure and flexibility of this data collection tool allows researcher to direct their questioning while leaving room for clarification, deviation, and probing for depth in participant response (Galletta, 2013). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Because the participant can only describe the phenomenon of interest, member checking was employed after each response during the interview, and again once the interview was transcribed. This was done to ensure that the transcript accurately reflected the subjects' feelings and perceptions, and to provide participants an opportunity to amend or add to any responses. Probing was used as needed to help the participant with clarification and elaboration.

## Identification of Attributes

This study focused on the preferred coaching qualities of Generation Z collegiate athletes, and the coach-athlete relational needs of Generation Z. Attributes such as Generation Z, collegiate team-sport athlete, “quality,” and athletic “success” were explored in this study. In a study examining the perceptions of Generation Z athletes, it was first necessary to recognize the attributes of Generation Z that make them distinct.

**Generation Z.** The review of literature revealed that Generation Z’s need for security and risk-averse nature can be attributed to the formative experiences of their parents, and their overprotective caregiving (Dimock, 2018; Rickes, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2017). Gen Zers were raised by Generation X and Millennial parents who, though risk averse and disconnected, are also more openminded than prior generations and have passed this attribute on to their Generation Z children (Dimmock, 2018; Moore, Jones & Frazier, 2017; Ricks, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The factor that has most profoundly impacted this cohort is technology. Generation Z does not know life without the Internet, and for most of the cohort, the smartphone (Dimmock, 2010; Rosen, 2010). The ability to complete almost every task from their phone, constant connectivity, information at their fingertips, and screen-time connections are all factors that justify the attributes that define Generation Z, such as their desire for connection, short attention spans, intelligence, collaborative nature, motivation to help others, lack of interpersonal-communication skills, and need for instant gratification and feedback (Northeastern University, 2014; Ricks, 2016; Rosen, 2010; Seemiller & Grace, 2012; Shatto & Erwin, 2016; Wiedmer, 2015; Williams, 2010). These attributes contribute to the relational needs of Generation Z athletes that were present in the literature, which are, a desire for trust and security,

a desire for meaningful relationships, quality communication, and an understanding of what motivates Generation Z collegiate athletes.

**Collegiate team-sport athlete.** This study included collegiate team-sport athletes from public, private, and community colleges, and varying sports, so it was essential to understand both the lifestyle and setting that distinguishes this athletic experience from others, and from their non-collegiate-athlete peers. Though expectations for collegiate athletes vary from institution to institution and conference to conference, all collegiate athletes have standards and expectations that they are required to follow. Maintaining a determined GPA, upholding a code of conduct, and abiding by all institutional and athletic regulations are just some of the expectations for collegiate athletes. In their *Guide for the College-Bound Student Athlete* the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provides potential athletes information on time-management and a realistic blueprint of what the athlete can expect a typical college week to look like for a Division I athlete. According to the guide, athletes should expect to spend 38.5 hours on athletics, 34 hours on academics, 17.1 hours socializing and relaxing, and 78.4 hours performing other activities such as sleeping, eating, and employment (*Guide for the College-Bound Student Athlete*, 2018). Though this will vary from institution to institution, and athlete to athlete, Generation Z collegiate athletes have more expectations than the non-collegiate-athlete counterparts in their cohort, particularly regarding what is expected of them academically, behaviorally, and concerning their time management.

**“Quality” coach-athlete relationship.** The dyadic and interdependent nature of the coach-athlete relationship will be unique for each participant. This study focused on “quality” coach-athlete relationships, and though each relationship differed, using the 3+1 Cs model as a measure for quality helped to aid the researcher in assessing this attribute. According to Jowett

(2007), the quality of the coach-athlete relationship can be operationalized and assessed by examining the coach and athlete's perceptions of closeness, commitment, and complementarity in the relationship. *Closeness* refers to the affective connectedness that occurs between the coach and athlete, which includes qualities such as trust and respect (Jowett, 2007, p. 17). *Commitment* reflects the degree of long-term commitment for each member and the desire of both members to remain in the relationship (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). Finally, *Complementarity* reflects the cooperation between coach and athlete (Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). These constructs were developed to measure the quality of the interdependent nature of the coach-athlete dyad, specifically the member's interpersonal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. This is reflected in the "+1Cs" co-orientation interdependence measure of how coaches and athletes view their relationship (Jowett, 2005; Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). The participants for this study were athletes who had been part of a quality coach-athlete dyad that had experienced athletic *success*; therefore, defining *quality* in terms of the coach-athlete dyad, helped the researcher to assess the relationship from the athlete's perspective.

**Athletic "success."** Athletic success is subjective to the personal and team experiences of each athlete. What may be deemed "successful" in one context, could hold a different meaning in another. For the purpose of this study, athletic *success* was determined by awarded achievement on the part of the team, athlete, or a combination of the two. Individual accolades included awards such as all-conference performance awards, national performance awards, and institutional records. Team success includes honors such as conference titles, championship victories, national titles, and institutional records. Though success as a characteristic differed for

each participant, the standard of “awarded success” helped the researcher to form generalizations and to identify the target population for the study.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Though the path to discovery was not clearly marked, Patton (2015) argued that the primary role of the researcher during qualitative analysis is to transform data into findings by making meaning, identifying patterns, and synthesizing details that will eventually describe themes. The data analysis procedures for this study involved a compilation of methodological recommendations made by Braun and Clarke (2006), Patton (2015), Saldaña (2009), Tufford (2010), Creswell (2014), and Galletta (2015). The exploratory nature of this study warranted the use of thematic analysis, which relied on the data to speak. Using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis recommendations, the data went through six phases of analysis, which were: familiarization, generating initial codes, seeking themes within the codes, uncovering themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This six-phase approach to thematic analysis is recommended for novice researchers as a step-by-step tool and checks and balances aid for qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Approaching the interviews.** Raw data included field notes taken during the interviews and audio recordings of the interviews. The audio recordings of the participants were transcribed verbatim for analysis. During the interviews and after transcription, member checking was instituted and once all statements had been affirmed by the participants, data analysis began. Once the interviews had been thoroughly reviewed, organized, and categorized, the researcher began hand coding in order to focus the data (Creswell, 2014; Galletta, 2015; Patton, 2015).

**Coding the data.** To answer both research questions, a combination of predetermined and emergent coding was used to organize the data. Predetermined codes such as

communication, meaningful relationship, trust, security, and motivation were used as these themes were present in the literature; all other codes were determined as they emerged. Braun and Clarke (2006) maintain that familiarization occurs as the researcher immerses themselves in the data; through active repeated reading, the researcher seeks to identify patterns and to make meaning of the data. Once familiar with the data, the researcher conducted a first cycle analysis using open coding (Saldaña, 2009). During this phase, the researcher reflected on the data to discover meaning. During the second cycle of analysis, the researcher specifically looked for patterns using process coding, to link ideas and form categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2009). As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Saldaña (2009), the researcher created an organizer to collate data together within each code. The coding was organized by categorizing statements according to the predetermined codes of *trust and security*, *meaningful relationships*, *communication*, and *motivation*. Emergent codes were categorized as well, and notes were taken as inconsistencies across the data also emerged. Finally, during the third cycle, axial coding was used to recode and refine the categories (Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2009). During this phase reduction occurred, as irrelevant data was eliminated, overlapping data was condensed, and first cycle codes and second cycle patterns were compiled into final categories to produce themes. Finally, cross-checking was employed during this phase to ensure credibility.

**Thematic analysis.** Like many of the qualitative studies present in the review of literature, this study relied on deductive and inductive analysis to identify patterns and form themes (Creswell, 2014; Smith as cited in Sagar & Jowett, 2012). Deductive analysis was used to determine if the themes from the literature review concerning Generation Z's relational desires were consistent with the findings from the study, while inductive analysis was used to determine



if new concepts and theories arose from the data (Galletta, 2015; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2009). By aggregating the data and analyzing the patterns, the researcher identified six themes; descriptions and interpretations on the data are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Bracketing journal.** Finally, to minimize interpretive bias throughout the analysis process, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the process to reflect on personal biases during analysis, monitor the decision-making process, and to ensure confirmability (Sagar & Jowett, 2012; Tufford, 2010). Because of the personal and judgmental nature of qualitative research, this journal was used as a tool throughout the research process for reflection, for accountability, as a tool to recognize and set aside preconceptions and biases, to review previous knowledge, and to document analysis decisions. Ultimately, the journal was used to record all that was learned throughout the course of the study (Patton, 2015; Tufford, 2010).

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

In qualitative research there are inherent limitations. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative interviews limit the perspective of the researcher because they are unable to observe the participant in their natural setting and must rely only on indirect information provided by the participant. He also points out that the presence of the researcher may bias responses, and that not all participants will necessarily be equal in their perceptibility and articulation (Creswell, 2014). A final limitation to the study was that there were only 12 participants, which could affect the transferability of the findings. It is for these reasons that Galletta (2015) argued that being purposeful in the design of the interview protocol will help researchers to overcome these limitations.

For this study, in addition to outlining the purpose of the study and receiving consent from each participant, the opening segment of the interview was used as an opportunity to establish a level of comfort and rapport with the participants. Conducting the interview at a location that was selected by the participant also helped to establish comfort. The interview questions were intentionally broad, in order to create space for participants to share their opinions and experiences with breadth and depth, so that saturation was reached for analysis, and to avoid researcher bias (Galletta, 2015). For participants who were less articulate, the researcher relied on probing not only as a tool for clarification, but also to allow participants to extend and deepen their narrative (Galletta, 2015).

### **Validation, Credibility, and Dependability**

In qualitative studies, credibility reflects the trustworthiness of the data and the measures that were taken by the researcher to ensure that the findings are both transferable and accurate (Creswell, 2014). For transferability to occur, the researcher must be able to trust both the data and the transformation of that data into concrete findings. To improve the validity of the study, research was conducted at multiple sites, and included a diverse population of participants from three different types of institutions (public, private, and community college). Creswell (2014) acknowledged that qualitative studies typically have a smaller participant pool; he recommends eight to ten participants to achieve transferability, so this study's use of 12 participants for the sample was sufficient for the research design. As a clarification precaution and to ensure credibility, member checking was employed to ensure that data accurately reflected the beliefs of the participants.

The researcher also maintained a bracketing journal throughout the course of the study for reflexivity, reflection and to further establish credibility of the data and the researcher. By

clarifying biases, identifying preconceptions, and reflecting on the findings, daily reflection was practiced to ensure that none of these affected the trustworthiness of the data. Finally, the coding process include six phases of analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis recommendations. Data was thoroughly examined, and memos were kept and catalogued electronically to ensure that there were no drifts in the code definitions. During the fourth phase of analysis, cross-checking was employed to validate the dependability of the themes and patterns that the researcher identified. According to Miles and Huberman as cited in Creswell (2014) coders should agree 80% of the time for good reliability; this was the standard for the study.

### **Expected Findings**

It was expected that new knowledge from this study could be used to aid collegiate coaches in meeting the relational needs of the Generation Z cohort. The review of literatures revealed that, members of Generation Z desire trust and security, meaningful relationships, quality communication, and effective motivation. It was believed that Generation Z collegiate athletes would desire to have coaches who possess these qualities, and that they would believe these attributes contributed to their collegiate athletic success. The researcher expected that trust and security, communication, and effective motivation would be present in the "quality" dyadic coach-athlete relationships of each participant. Finally, the researcher expected new themes to emerge that would fill some of the gaps in the literature.

### **Ethical Issues**

**Conflict of interest assessment.** I am a former collegiate athlete who, like many athletes, had both positive and negative experiences concerning the coach-athlete relationship. I am now a coach and educator who works with members of Generation Z daily and recognizes

firsthand that the needs of this cohort, concerning the coach-athlete relationship will differ from generations past. To abate researcher bias, I had no coaching affiliation with the participants. Additionally, because I work with Generation Z both as a coach and instructor, reflexivity and reflection were used to ensure that my personal experiences did not bias the research.

**Researcher positionality.** I was aware of the possibility that my own experiences as a collegiate athlete, and my daily encounters with Generation Z athletes could influence my perceptions when conducting interviews and analyzing data. I therefore needed to identify my own beliefs on this topic to enhance the objectivity of the results. Personally, I believe that the relational needs of Generation Z collegiate athletes must be met by the coach to achieve interdependent success in collegiate athletics. It is therefore imperative that collegiate coaches have an accurate understanding of the characteristics of the Generation Z cohort, so they can form quality relationships with athletes that ultimately lead to mutual success in their sport. While collecting data, these reflections were performed all throughout data collection to ensure that I was evaluating data accurately. It was for these reasons that I used a reflexivity journal throughout the process—to reflect on my position and its relation to the data.

**Ethical issues.** When human subjects are central to a research study, ethical issues must be considered (Creswell, 2014). Patton (2015) urged researchers to remember that interviews by their very nature will affect people. Good interviews evoke feeling and thoughts that participants will not be expecting, and the reflective aspects of the interview will leave the participant with a new understanding of themselves (Patton, 2015). For all these reasons and to ensure that this study was conducted in an ethical manner, the Belmont Report (1978)—which emphasizes the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice for all research participants—was observed. This study only used voluntary participants, who were thoroughly informed about the objectives of

the study and their role as a participant. Though the qualitative nature of the study allowed the researcher opportunities to ask probing questions to guide the interview, the semistructured format aided in ensuring that all participants received the same care, treatment, and consideration while participating in the study. Finally, confidentiality was maintained throughout the study. All participants were given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality, and all data was securely stored in a locked safe.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of collegiate Generation Z athletes to determine what relational elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate sports. The use of Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model, as influenced by Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) interdependence theory as a frame to guide the study led to the conclusion that qualitative research was appropriate for the study because of the relational needs of Generation Z that were discovered during the review of literatures, and because statistical analyses would not supply the data needed to answer the research questions. From the purposive sample that was selected for this study, themes were discovered that reflect what coaches are already doing in higher education athletics to meet the relational needs of today's Generation Z athlete, and other athlete-preferred relational best practices that could improve athletic performance.

A qualitative design using synchronous semistructured interviews was the most appropriate instrumentation for gathering data, and for discovering transferable themes that could be useful to collegiate coaches. Coding and thematic analysis was the primary tools used for interpreting the data, as were the multiple steps taken to ensure the validity of the findings, such as reflexivity, cross-checking, and member checking. In order to gather accurate data, the

relational needs of Generation Z were considered, which included ethical care and consideration throughout the process. The results from this study are presented in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Using a qualitative design, this study investigated the preferred coaching relational qualities of Generation Z collegiate team sport athletes, to identify which coaching qualities this cohort believes most impacted their collegiate athletic success. Generation Z, the iGeneration, the Net Generation, or post-millennials comprise the cohort of individuals born from 1995 to 2012 (Rosen, 2010; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Wiedmer, 2015). As the latest cohort to enter higher education, they bring with them new expectations and needs that will affect collegiate athletics. Varying factors have influenced Generation Z, which have resulted in characteristics that are unique to this cohort. Recognizing these characteristics and how they affect the relational needs of today's collegiate athlete is necessary if coaches hope to build healthy relationships with their players and achieve athletic success.

From the review of literature, four prominent themes emerged that characterize the relational needs of Generation Z athletes which are a desire for trust and security, meaningful relationships, quality communication, and an understanding of what motivates Generation Z collegiate athletes. This study sought to explore these themes as they specifically pertain to collegiate Generation Z athletes, and to determine what emergent themes characterize their relational needs.

This study was guided by the following questions:

RQ 1: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate athletics?

RQ 2: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what are best practices that coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players?

In summation, this study sought to identify what relational qualities impact success at the collegiate level, what Generation Z athletes believe are best practices that coaches can utilize to build healthy dyadic relationships with their athletes, and if there are transferable themes that could be useful to collegiate coaches and athletic policymakers who work with Generation Z athletes.

Using a qualitative design, this study relied on synchronous semistructured interviews for data collection. Qualitative research focuses on the meaning that the participants hold about the topic under study (Creswell, 2014). The researcher explored the quality of the coach-athlete relationship through an interdependence theory lens (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model. Twelve collegiate team-sport athletes from various institutions in the Pacific Northwest were interviewed for this study. Member checking occurred to cross-check the precision of the responses given by each participant, and to ensure that the statements accurately reflected the athlete's beliefs. Checking for accuracy of transcription was done both during the interview and within a week of the interview, as multiple opportunities for review improve credibility (Creswell, 2014).

Patton (2015) argued that the primary role of the researcher during qualitative analysis is to transform data into findings by making meaning, identifying patterns, and synthesizing details that will eventually describe themes. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis recommendations, the data went through six phases of analysis, which are: familiarization, generating initial codes, seeking themes within the codes, uncovering themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Data analysis began with a primary readthrough of the transcripts in order to form initial impressions and familiarization with the data (Creswell, 2014). To answer both research questions, a combination of predetermined and emergent coding was



used to organize the data. Predetermined codes such as communication, meaningful relationship, trust, and motivation were used as these themes were present in the literature; all other codes were determined as they emerged. Results from the data analysis were developed into six main themes:

Theme 1: Trust Between the Coach and Athlete

Theme 2: Healthy Communication

Theme 3: Accountability in Athletics and Life

Theme 4: Ability to Create Meaningful Relationships

Theme 5: Ability to Create Team Synergy

Theme 6: Building Motivation

Each theme includes several sub-themes that will be discussed later in this chapter.

The origins of this study can be attributed to many of my formative experiences. I am a former collegiate athlete, and am now a coach, mentor, and educator working with Generation Z athletes. I had no collegiate coaching relationship with these athletes prior to the study. All participation in the study was voluntary, and proper steps were taken to ensure confidentiality on the part of the athletes. My interests in this study stemmed from many years of observation and experience working with this cohort of athletes, and a desire to see them succeed as collegiate athletes. What follows is a description of the sample that was used for this study and a discussion of the research methodology and analysis of the data by means of semistructured interview. Finally, a summary of the research findings and data results are presented.

### **Description of the Sample**

The study took place in the Pacific Northwest and included 12 team sport collegiate Generation Z athletes from various sports. More than 60 athletes were invited via email to

participate in the study, from which six male and six female athletes were selected. Four of the athletes played at the community college level, four were from private institutions, and four were from public institutions. Team sports represented included basketball, volleyball, soccer, football, ultimate frisbee, baseball, softball, and track and field. All athletes had played for their coach for a minimum of one season, with the average time being two to three years, and each had experienced some form of awarded success (all-conference accolades, player of the year, conference champions, best school record in history, etc.). Each participant also indicated that they felt they had a positive relationship with at least one of their coaches. Prior to conducting each interview, participants were provided with an in-depth description of the study (see Appendix A), consent form (see Appendix B), an IRB approval letter, and permission to conduct the research. Each participant has been given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

### **Description of Participants**

**Alice.** Alice was a 22-year-old Hispanic female who had just completed her fourth season of soccer at a private NAIA Division II institution in the Pacific Northwest. Alice was the team's starting goalkeeper and was considered a leader on the team. While playing, Alice was part of a team that finished with the best record in the school's history; her coach also won various awards during that season. She described her relationship with her coach as mostly positive, particularly in her first two years of play when the team experienced much of their success.

**Bobby.** Bobby was a 20-year-old, White male who was entering his third season of football at a public NCAA Division I institution in the Pacific Northwest. He was the team's starting quarterback, an offensive team leader, and set several individual game records for his institution. He described his relationship with his head coach as positive, though he believed that

for football at the Division I level, politics and competition will always have some effect on the coach-athlete relationship, particularly when the athlete plays the quarterback position.

**Cody.** Cody was a 19-year-old, White male who had just completed his first season of ultimate frisbee at a public NCAA Division I institution in the Pacific Northwest. As a freshman, Cody was a starter on a team that set several new school records and defeated several competitors for the first time in the school's history. Cody was experiencing a positive relationship with his coach, who he described as a "positive yeller" whose energy "fueled the team."

**Donna.** Donna was a 22-year-old, White female who had played two years of softball at a community college in the Pacific Northwest. As an athlete, Donna was a starter for her team and was awarded all-league honors. Her team finished as the regional and conference champions both years Donna played. Donna describes her coach as "amazing" because of her relational abilities, her winning record, and the way she was able to get her players to "play for each other."

**Eric.** Eric was a 22-year-old, White male who was in the process of completing his fourth and final season of baseball at a private NCAA Division III institution in the Pacific Northwest. Eric was a starting outfielder, and during his sophomore season his team finished as Conference Champions. During that season, Eric played for coaches who had built the program for more than 30 years; he described his relationship with both coaches as positive, particularly with his out-fielding coach who was a storyteller with an "old school baseball methodology."

**Fred.** Fred was a 21-year-old, Black, male who had competed for two years at a community college in the Pacific Northwest and was waiting to transfer to a 4-year institution for the remainder of his collegiate basketball career. He was a starter who led his team in scoring

and assists and had earned all-region accolades. His relationship with his assistant coach (now the head coach) had a profound impact on his life, both as a player and as a person. He considered this coach to be both a mentor and a friend.

**Greg.** Greg was a 21-year-old, Black male who had competed for two years at a community college in the Pacific Northwest and was waiting to transfer to a 4-year institution for the remainder of his collegiate basketball career. He was a starter who led his team in rebounding, was a leading scorer much of the time, and earned all-region accolades. Though his relationship with his head coach was not positive, he described his assistant coach as the one who motivated him and mentored him throughout his two seasons. He admired his assistant coach and described their relationship as positive.

**Holly.** Holly was a 19-year-old, White, female volleyball player who had just completed her sophomore season at an NCAA Division I public institution in the Pacific Northwest. As a sophomore, she was a starter who led her team in assists and kills. Though her team was struggling to rebuild after losing several seniors, Holly was a top athlete in her conference, ranking near the top in several athletic categories. She described her relationship with her coach as positive, though much of the verbal affirmation she received came from the assistant coach. She also described the relationship as markedly stronger than it had been her freshman year and believed it would only grow in the upcoming seasons.

**Isla.** Isla was a 20-year-old, Asian, female volleyball and track athlete who had just completed her junior season at an NAIA Division II private institution in the Pacific Northwest. Isla was a starter on her volleyball team and a captain for both teams. She had set several school records in track for javelin, high jump, 4x100, 4x400, and had won conference accolades on several occasions; she also led her team in multiple volleyball categories. While Isla described

her relationship with her volleyball coach as “toxic”, her relationship with her track coach was both “healthy” and “rewarding.”

**Jessica.** Jessica was a 22-year-old, White female who had played two years of softball at a community college in the Pacific Northwest. As an athlete, Jessica was a starter for her team, was awarded all-conference accolades both in athletics and academics. Her team also finished as the regional and conference champions both years. Donna described her relationship with her coach as “very healthy” and said that her coach was “always pushing her to reach her goals as both an athlete and a student.”

**Kelly.** Kelly was a 21-year-old, White female who was competing in her junior season of track and field at a public NCAA Division II institution in the Pacific Northwest. As a javelin thrower, Kelly was a First Team All-American, and had received numerous honors in her event, including national rankings. She described her relationship with her coach as uplifting, and as someone who was incredibly knowledgeable and “makes you recognize the value in every training activity.”

**Larry.** Larry was a 19-year-old, Black, male basketball player who had just completed his freshman season at an NAIA Division II private institution in the Pacific Northwest. As a starter, Larry was a leader in scoring and steals, and his team was ranked first in their division in several categories and had this past season set several school record. Larry described his relationship with his coach as “very positive.” His coach used faith-based analogies to motivate players and was described as a coach who “builds trust with each athlete.”

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

In the coach-athlete relationship, interdependence is inherent, and the behaviors of each party will either positively or negatively affect this balance (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult &

Van Lange, 2008; Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). Similarly, Jowett (2007) maintained that a coach-athlete dyad is interdependent if both experience high levels of trust and respect, are committed to and wish to remain in partnership, and behave in a friendly and cooperative manner. Recent studies indicate that the strength of the coach-athlete relationship is linked to success in collegiate athletics, therefore it is imperative that coaches recognize the unique characteristics of Generation Z athletes as well as their perspectives of and desires pertaining to the coach-athlete dyadic relationship, so that mutual success in collegiate competition is achieved (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012). It is within this framework that the data collection instruments for this qualitative study were implemented, which were semistructured interviews (see Appendix A), artifacts, and bracketing.

**Semistructured interviews.** After reviewing the methodological literature and considering the needs of Generation Z athletes as revealed in the literature, synchronous semistructured interviews were used to collect data. Interviews were prearranged and conducted at various locations all over the Portland metropolitan area at the convenience of the participants. Locations included coffee shops, the athletes' institution, and their homes. Due to location and availability, two interviews were conducted over the phone. All interviews lasted between 40 to 60 minutes, were audio recorded, transcribed, and member checked both during the interview and after transcription. During the interviews, notes were taken in a research journal in order to clarify and process meaning, summarize responses, and for reflexivity. Each participant in the study is identified by a pseudonym; the interviews were conducted in February and March of 2019.

The semistructured interviews consisted of 12 questions which were divided into three sections: The Participant's Relationship with Their Coach, The Coach-Athlete Relationship and Success, and Relational Best Practices. The purpose of section one was to assess the strength of the athlete's relationship with their coach from the athlete's perspective following Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model, and to identify relational best practices that their coaches currently employ, focusing specifically on communication, motivation, preferred relational qualities, and relational qualities as they contribute to athletic success. In section two, participants were asked to describe their ideal coach in terms of communication style, motivational techniques, ideal relational qualities, and the impact of these relational qualities on their athletic success. Finally, in section three participants were asked to speak on behalf of their generation, by describing how coaches can create meaningful relationships, motivate, should communicate, and can build trust and security with today's Generation Z collegiate athletes (see Appendix A).

**Member checking and probing.** Member checking was conducted both during the interview and within two weeks following the interview, once transcripts were completed. The flexibility of the semistructured method allowed freedom for probing when more explanation and clarification was needed for certain responses (Creswell, 2014). During the interview, a summary review of each response was provided for the participant, and each was asked to verify that the summary accurately reflected their beliefs, and to expand their initial responses if they felt that additional clarification was needed. Participants were emailed a copy of the full transcription from their interview and were asked to confirm all the information they provided; all institutional security protocols were followed. In member checking, accuracy of ideas and information was confirmed, particularly concerning the participant's beliefs and opinions.

**Artifacts.** In order to verify the awarded success for each athlete, artifacts were recovered via an Internet search of each athlete. Awards were verified on institutional websites, on news websites, and in archives on conference webpages. Athlete profiles also provided much of the statistical verification that was necessary to ensure that these participants had experienced awarded collegiate athletic success in their sport.

**Bracketing.** Reflexivity and reflection were necessary for accurate interpretation and to minimize researcher bias (Creswell, 2014). Neutrality was maintained through the practice of bracketing presuppositions and through reflection. Because of my own personal experiences when working with Generation Z athletes, and my own collegiate athletic experiences, the time spent reflecting allowed for illumination of my biases. After bracketing, it was realized that some of the responses that were more relatable, were being considered and put forth as data without consideration for the other responses. After returning to the thematic analysis outline provided by Braun and Clarke (2006), a fresh analysis was conducted, and transcripts were recoded for accuracy.

**Data analysis and procedures.** Prior to the interview, participants signed an IRB approved consent form, and agreed to an audio recording of the interview (see Appendix B). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by hand. During the interviews, Microsoft Word “dictation” was used for initial transcription. A separate audio recorder was also used to record the interview and was used to transcribe verbatim the responses of each participant. The interviews were transcribed and an initial read through was performed immediately.

The exploratory nature of this study warranted the use of thematic analysis, which relied on the data to speak. Inductive and deductive data analysis was necessary to generate themes from the study that identify the preferences and beliefs of Generation Z athletes. Using Braun



and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis recommendations, the data went through six phases of analysis, which are: familiarization, generating initial codes, seeking themes within the codes, uncovering themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This six-phase approach to thematic analysis is recommended for novice researchers as a step-by-step tool and checks and balances aid for qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To answer both research questions, a combination of predetermined and emergent coding was used to organize the data. Predetermined codes such as *communication*, *meaningful relationship*, *trust*, and *motivation* were used as these themes were present in the literature; all other codes were determined as they emerged. Consent forms, interview transcriptions, and researcher notes will be stored for the required three years in an encrypted, software protected folder. All participants are described by their pseudonyms: Alice, Bobby, Cody, Donna, Eric, Fred, Greg, Holly, Isla, Jessica, Kelly, and Larry.

### **Summary of the Findings: Phases of Analysis**

**Phase one: Familiarization.** Braun and Clarke (2006) maintain that familiarization occurs as the researcher immerses themselves in the data; through active repeated reading, the researcher seeks to identify patterns and to make meaning of the data. Initial reactions were recorded during transcription, as close reading was a natural part of the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While reading, notes were taken and initial ideas for coding were made in the margins, which were then compared to notes taken during the initial interviews. Bracketing also played a crucial role during this phase of analysis, particularly concerning the tendency to only focus on predetermined themes. Once realized, a second readthrough occurred and additional notes and observations were gleaned.

The notes indicated that *trust* was a prominent theme among the participants, as was a desire for *meaningful relationships*. Varying strategies for *healthy communication* were consistent, specifically regarding a need for both technological and face-to-face interactions. Finally, in the second readthrough, emergent patterns were apparent, particularly concerning a desire for *accountability* and the coach's ability to create *team unity*. Once familiar with both the initial reactions from the interview notes and the interview transcripts, the research progressed to open coding.

**Phase two: Generating initial codes.** Hand coding was used to organize categories systematically into meaningful groups (Creswell, 2014). As words began to take on meaning, repetitive words and the frequency with which each were used were catalogued. From this, categories began to emerge, both into predetermined categories, and emergent. While reading, repetitive and meaningful patterns were highlighted, and notes were made in the margins to identify segments of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2009). In total, the open coding process produced 63 codes. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Saldaña (2009), an organizer was used to collate data together within each code. The coding was organized by categorizing statements according to the predetermined codes of *trust and security*, *meaningful relationships*, *communication*, and *motivation*. Emergent codes were categorized as well, and notes were taken as inconsistencies across the data also emerged. *Accountability*, *Synergy/Teamwork*, and *Meaningful Relationships* were emergent codes that were frequently mentioned in the interviews.

**Phase three: Seeking themes within the codes.** The 63 codes that emerged from the data were organized in a table and were reduced to 36 clear codes as data was collapsed and context was considered. During this phase, irrelevant data was eliminated, and conflicting

statements were acknowledged; this was particularly evident with the codes *motivation* and *tone*, which during phase five would contribute to the axial code *differentiation* (Creswell, 2014). Codes were then categorized by research question, with some codes specifically addressing RQ1 and relational practices that impact player success, and RQ2 which addresses relational best practices. For RQ1, codes from section two of the interview protocol most affected that data collection, where codes from section one and three of the interview protocol provided the evidence necessary to generate overarching themes (see Appendix A). Words with common meanings were clustered, and codes were created (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Open Coding Results*

Code	Pertains to RQ1 only, RQ2 only, or both
C1: Care	Both
C2: Know My Story	RQ2
C3: Open/Approachable	RQ2
C4: Consistent	Both
C5: Differentiate	RQ2
C6: Integrity/Authentic	Both
C7: Confidence	RQ2
C8: Enthusiastic	Both
C9: Success/Proof	Both
C10: Validate/Affirm	Both
C11: Growth Mindset	Both
C12: Explanation	Both
C13: Visual	RQ2
C14: Reframing Critical Feedback	Both
C15: Accountability	Both
C16: Straightforward	Both
C17: Clear	Both
C18: Technology	RQ2
C19: Firm	RQ2
C20: Trust	Both
C21: Honesty	Both
C22: Communication	Both
C23: Tone	RQ2
C24: Humor	RQ2
C25: Face-to-Face	RQ2
C26: High Expectations	Both
C27: Punishment	RQ2
C28: Mentorship/Guidance	Both
C29: Synergy	RQ1
C30: Teamwork	RQ2
C31: Play for Each Other	Both
C32: Engagement	Both
C33: Family	RQ2
C34: Investment Beyond the Sport	Both
C35: Goal Setting	Both
C36: Financial	RQ1

Once organized, themes began to emerge, and data was again collated within the identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2009). Initial themes began to take shape, which were refined during phase four of analysis, where open codes formed sub-themes, and axial coding was used to identify overarching themes (Creswell, 2014).

**Phase four: Reviewing themes.** During phase four, codes were considered and categorized within the context of each research question. Where some codes were relevant to both research questions, some only pertained to one of the two research questions. Initial themes began to emerge, as data was analyzed and collated according to each theme. During this phase, some themes were abandoned as insufficient evidence was available to support the theme, while other themes were joined together to form one overarching theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). Two levels of review and refining were conducted, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006); level one involved reviewing collated data extracts for each theme, while level two focused on reworking themes to ensure that coherent patterns were supported by data. Winnowing also was used during level two to discard irrelevant extracts (Creswell, 2014). Figures 1 and 2 illustrates the thematic mapping that was done to explain how themes were pursued within the codes for each research question.

RQ1: Pursuing Themes within Codes

***RQ 1: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate athletics?***

**Theme 1: Trust**

C1: Care  
C4: Consistent  
C6: Authentic/Integrity  
C9: Success/Proof  
C20: Trust  
C21: Honesty  
C36: Financial

**Theme 2: Communication**

C8: Enthusiastic  
C10: Validate/Affirm  
C12: Explanation  
C14: Reframing Critical Feedback  
C16: Straightforward  
C17: Clear Expectations  
C22: Communication

**Theme 3: Accountability**

C11: Growth Mindset  
C15: Accountability  
C26: High Expectations  
C28: Mentorship/Guidance  
C32: Engagement  
C35: Goal Setting

**Theme 4: Ability to Create Synergy**

C29: Synergy  
C30: Teamwork  
C31: Play For Each Other  
C33: Family

*Figure 1. RQ1: Pursuing themes within codes.*

RQ2: Pursuing Themes within Codes

**RQ 2: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what are best practices that coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players?**

**Theme 1: Meaningful Relationships**

- C1: Care
- C2: Know My Story
- C3: Open/Approachable
- C5: Differentiate
- C6: Integrity/Authentic
- C20: Trust
- C21: Honesty
- C28: Mentorship/Guidance
- C34: Investment Beyond the Sport

**Theme 2: Motivation**

- C5: Differentiate
- C7: Confidence
- C8: Enthusiastic
- C9: Success/Proof
- C11: Growth Mindset
- C14: Reframing Critical Feedback
- C27: Punishment
- C31: Play for Each Other
- C32: Engagement
- C35: Goal Setting

**Theme 3: Communication**

- C4: Consistent
- C5: Differentiate
- C8: Enthusiastic
- C10: Validate/Affirm
- C21: Honesty
- C12: Explanation
- C13: Visual
- C14: Reframing Critical Feedback
- C16: Straightforward
- C17: Clear
- C18: Technology
- C19: Firm
- C22: Communication
- C23: Tone
- C24: Humor
- C25: Face-to-Face

**Theme 4: Trust**

- C1: Care
- C4: Consistent
- C6: Integrity/Authentic
- C9: Success/Proof
- C20: Trust
- C21: Honesty

**Theme 5: Accountability**

- C4: Consistent
- C11: Growth Mindset
- C15: Accountability
- C19: Firm
- C26: High Expectations
- C27: Punishment
- C28: Mentorship/Guidance

Figure 2. RQ2: Pursuing themes within codes.

**Phase five: Defining and finalizing themes.** During phase five of analysis, themes were refined, and codes were condensed to form sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). Again, data extracts for each theme were collated, as careful attention was given to context, consistency and frequency among respondents, and similarities in coding. Data was recoded three times to ensure definite codes, and cross-checking was employed to validate the dependability of the themes and patterns that were identified. According to Miles and Huberman as cited in Creswell (2014) coders should agree 80% of the time for good reliability, which was the standard for this study. The extracted statements shaped the themes that emerged from the study as each statement was considered within the context of the research questions, and sub-themes were condensed to further define the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2009). For RQ1, axial coding produced four overarching themes which were: *Trust, Healthy Communication, Accountability, and the Ability to Create Team Synergy*. RQ2 overarching themes included: *Creating Meaningful Relationships, Motivation, Healthy Communication, Trust, and Accountability*. Themes and sub-themes are illustrated in Figure 3 and further explanation and participant responses are provided in the final section.



**Generation Z Preferred Relational Coaching Qualities That Impact Success**

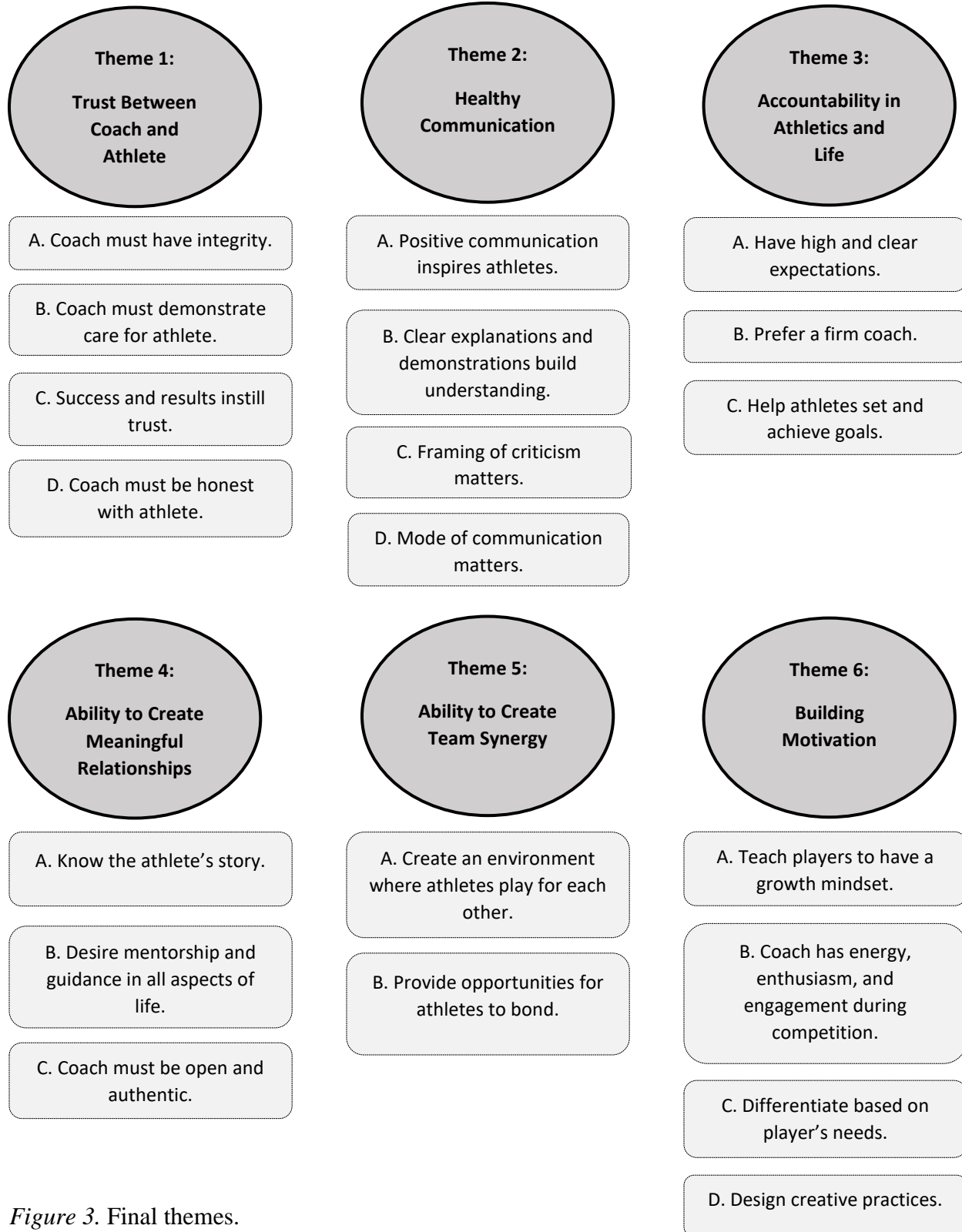


Figure 3. Final themes.

## **Presentation of the Data and Results**

Six key themes emerged which were: trust between the coach and athlete, healthy communication, accountability in athletics and life, ability to create meaningful relationships, ability to create team synergy, and building motivation. Each interview passed through each phase of analysis; what follows is a summary of the findings for each theme with specific examples of rich and thick description from the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2009).

### **Theme 1: Trust between coach and athlete.**

*Coach must have integrity.* Palmer (2009) and Josephson (2010) define integrity as a person's constancy of character, which is their ability to be entire, complete, and unbroken. Words such as *authentic*, *moral character*, and *trust* helped to shape this sub-theme as different participants described integrity in their own words. Kelly stated "For me, integrity is huge. I need to know I can trust you, trust your character, know that you're honest, and your actions demonstrate that you have my best interest at heart." Other participants mentioned *consistency*, *approachability*, and being able to *confide in their coach* as aspects of integrity (Bobby, Jessica, Cody, Larry, Isla, Donna, and Kelly).

*Coach must demonstrate care for athlete.* There was a clear connection between trust and motivation among participants, but each stemmed from care given to the athlete by the coach. Participants explained that this investment led to trust, which led to motivation. Donna explained:

We weren't playing to win or to keep our win record up, we were playing because we loved her and respected her, and we wanted to give her 100% each time we stepped onto the field because she was giving us 100% on and off the field as a coach and as a friend.

*More than a roster spot and investment in more than just athletic growth* were mentioned in some way by all participants. “I think to build trust, you need to know your coach has your back, not just as an athlete but as a person too. They want what’s best for you and are invested because you’re more than a roster spot” (Holly). Finally, one aspect of care concerned financial care both for scholarships and other expenditures. Two athletes shared that they did not know what they were going to eat that night because they did not have money to buy groceries.

I want my coach to recognize that I’m here, away from my family, giving my time to play this sport, so I need him to be concerned for my wellbeing, even if it’s just giving me P.B. and J. for dinner. (Fred)

Others mentioned scholarship support as a form of care that builds security. “Security and trust are so important to me because I need to know I can trust a coach with my personal life, especially when we sign contracts for our scholarships” (Larry).

***Success and results instill trust.*** Several athletes shared that a solid resume of success, and seeing actual results builds trust that leads to motivation. Kelly stated that she wants a coach with “a good resume of education and research of the sport, and having some successful athletes come from it . . . I think the best coaches can get the best out of athletes.” Greg shared that “as long as we all buy into something and we see results, we’re sold. ‘Cause if I’m buying into what he says and it’s not working, I can’t really trust him.” Other athletes echoed their desire to have a coach who has built a successful program (Bobby & Cody).

***Coach must be honest with athlete.*** Several participants stated that their ideal coach is someone who does not *beat around the bush, keeps it real, and is straight with them.* Greg shared “I want my coach to be straightforward because if I’m messing up or I can improve I want to know so I can fix it.” Similarly, Fred stated, “When giving feedback, my ideal coach is gonna

be honest with me, like blunt.” Another participant stated “Say what you mean and prove it, otherwise don’t say it at all. We want them to really believe in us, and not just say it.

Reassurance builds security, but only when it’s genuine” (Bobby).

## **Theme 2: Healthy communication.**

*Positive communication inspires athletes.* Participants described their ideal coach as someone who uses positive communication to create quality relationships with their athletes. One participant said, “I respond well to a positive tone, no aggression, no judgement” (Alice). Several athletes mentioned how encouragement during practices and games was motivating. Body language also communicated positivity to the participants. Isla explained “I think a coach’s communication can come a lot through body language. Are they crossing their arms, are they standing, are they cheering for us, are they present in the moment with us?” Others mentioned wanting coaches to celebrate with them and point out their strengths (Fred, Greg, Isla, Donna, Cody, Bobby, Larry).

*Clear explanations and demonstrations build understanding.* Several participants commented on their desire to have less talk, and more visual examples; this also included the coach or assistant coaches being able to model how something should be done, particularly in practice and during drills (Donna, Kelly, Greg, Larry, Isla, Eric). Participants wanted coaches to be clear about their expectations and expressed that much of the clarity stemmed from modeling. Cody explained “My generation does not like to listen a lot, so I think we prefer you to demonstrate how something can be done so we can apply it to our game.”

*Framing of criticism matters.* When it comes to the framing of criticism, several participants mentioned their need to turn criticism into a positive. Kelly explained that rather than tearing her down for a mistake she had made, she wants her coach to say, “I know you can

do this, so go out and do it.” This was echoed by multiple athletes, with one explaining that criticism should be framed in terms of how you can improve “I saw that this is what you did wrong, but this is how you can fix it” (Alice). Another participant stated that rather than hearing “why do you keep making the same error” she wants to hear “we did practice this, so I KNOW you can do it” (Isla).

***Mode of communication matters.*** All 12 participants shared that when it comes to team communication and general information, technology—specifically their smartphone—is the preferred mode of delivery. Where some athletes prefer group messaging (Cody, Kelly, Larry, Alice) others want a text sent to the team (Bobby, Fred, Greg, Isla, Jessica, Donna, Eric, Holly). Most stated that email is fine for monthly schedules and general team information, but for day-to-day communication they prefer instant notifications on their phone via text or group messaging (Alice, Cody, Kelly, Larry, Jessica, Holly, Fred, Eric). For serious and personal conversations, all athlete’s shared that they prefer face-to-face conversations, and several mentioned that the conversation be had in privacy (Larry, Jessica, Holly, Kelly, Isla, Donna).

### **Theme 3: Accountability in athletics and life.**

***Have high and clear expectations.*** Both male and female athletes consistently mentioned their need for a coach to set high expectations that athletes can rise to, and to also hold athletes accountable to these expectations. To give clear expectations, several participants mentioned needing to know the *why* behind what they do. Eric explained,

My generation needs to know ‘why’ because we are science-driven. We can look up anything on Google and find a solution for anything, so coaches need to understand that if you ask us to do something, it should mean something, it should have proven credibility, and we need to know why it works in order to buy into whatever it is.

Donna mentioned wanting her coach to set expectations “and then when I don’t meet them on or off the field, hold me accountable, have a conversation with me, and remind me of the goals I set for myself.” High expectations were linked to team goal setting, but in terms of accountability, also contributed to player conduct. Several athletes mentioned that if a coach asks them to condition and workout in their off time, or to live by a particular code of conduct, they need to make sure all players are doing so, because when some do not follow through, it impacts team unity (Fred, Greg, Larry, Kelly, Bobby).

***Prefer a firm coach.*** Though participants admitted needing affirmation and encouragement, this was not at the expense of having a coach who was *soft* (Bobby, Larry, Jessica). Every participant in some way explained that being yelled at, or being firm was acceptable if it was coming from a place of accountability and was framed in a way that helped the athlete to grow. “It’s important that coaches are strict in what they expect from you, but in a positive way” (Holly). Jessica added, “I want my coach to be strict, have a firm tone, almost a tough love mentality.” Similarly, Isla shared “It’s okay for someone to yell at me and be stern, but keep it skills-related, don’t hold anything against me, and show me how to get better.” Several of the male athletes mentioned not wanting a coach who let them horse around during practice, but instead pushed them and came prepared (Larry, Cody, Fred, Greg).

***Help athletes set and achieve goals.*** A few participants mentioned their desire to have coaches help them set goals both at the start of the season, and for their total time spent at the institution (Donna, Holly, Alice, Bobby).

I think I would like my coach to have a conversation with me at the beginning of the season to ask me what my goals are, both personally and for the team. The goals should be specific, like wanting to hit above 300, or getting an A in each class, so I know when

I've reached them. If my coach checks in with me throughout the season and helps me to get there, that motivates me. (Donna)

Goals were not just limited to athletics, but also included academics and opportunities beyond graduation.

**Theme 4: Ability to create meaningful relationships.**

*Know the athlete's story.* I want my coach to *know my story* was a shared desire among many of the participants and was frequently mentioned as the most important best practice coaches should use to build meaningful relationships with athletes.

Coaches should get to know their players, not just how they play, or their strengths and weaknesses as a player, but what their interests are off the court, and getting to know their family, and who they are as a person. They can't help you succeed if they don't know where you've been. (Holly)

Larry stated "I think my coach needs to know me as more than a basketball player. They should know my whole life, and I think if they can take the time to get to know each player individually this can help a lot."

*Desire mentorship and guidance in all aspects of life.* Mentorship was a common sub-theme among participants. Several mentioned their need for having someone to *look up to*, who *had made it*. Several of the male athletes mentioned wanting a coach who could guide them as they decide where they would play beyond college, and as they enter the next phases of their lives. Fred stated, "You're a leader, showing players what's right and what's wrong. Your players look up to you, so as a player, I want to be able to come to you for guidance and advice about more than just basketball." Larry added "you need that guidance and when your coach is able to mentor you it just builds security and trust." In several instances it was not the head

coach that took on the role of mentor, but rather younger assistant coaches who had competed at the next level, who players admired and could look up to (Fred, Greg, Bobby, Larry, Kelly, Donna). Several also mentioned that age did affect this form of admiration (Fred, Greg, Bobby, Eric).

***Coach must be open and authentic.*** Though authenticity also contributed to integrity, a surprising number of athletes mentioned authenticity in term of recruitment. One athlete commented, “you see that’s the thing with recruiting, it’s such a messed-up thing, you’ll say anything to get an athlete to come, and then the moment they sign, the whole attitude switches and you’re just another player” (Bobby). Isla captured the opinions of many of the participants when she said,

Being real, authentic, and humble is a big factor for me with my coaches. I really do look up to them as an athlete, and I want to be inspired by them, and learn from them, and grow from them, and I can only do that if they are real with me. (Isla)

Other participants mentioned the need for coaches to *admit when they’re wrong*, and to be equally *open* about their lives, especially if they expect players to be open (Donna, Isla, Holly, Greg).

#### **Theme 5: Ability to create team synergy.**

***Create an environment where athletes play for each other.*** One common response concerning team sports was that a coach’s ability to get their team to *work together and play for each other* made all the difference in terms of teams who produce good athletes, verses teams that win championships. Eric referred to this as *synergy*. He explained, “You have to have everyone pulling in the same direction, you can’t have any outliers going the opposite way. The talent can do something, but you know those bonds do way more than the talent ever will.”



Kelly adds, “I think something that is really important is someone who can make us better teammates and makes you work together. My track coach makes certain we’re friend, and that we treat each other like a family.” Finally, some athletes mentioned the need for coaches to help players to appreciate each other’s differences. “A coach needs to harness each person’s unique talents and help players to appreciate the strengths of others, rather than comparing themselves to others” (Isla).

***Provide opportunities for athletes to bond.*** Opportunities to bond both during athletics and outside of the sport were frequently mentioned. Alice mentioned how one time her coach surprised them and took them all to the beach for *fun team conditioning*, and then afterwards allowed the soccer players to play sand volleyball as a team. Other athletes mentioned non-practice team competitions geared more towards *having fun with each other and bonding* (Donna, Fred, Isla, Larry). Several athletes mentioned that team dinners and activities outside of athletics helped bonds to form (Fred, Greg, Alice, Jessica, Donna). “I think focusing on bonding, just having team dinners and team events where you have time for players to build relationships helps the chemistry to form on and off of the court” (Fred).

#### **Theme 6: Building motivation.**

***Teach players to have a growth mindset.*** It was apparent that some of the participants were more intrinsically motivated than others, but even those that weren’t, shared that they desired a coach that helped players to build resilience in defeat, to view failure as a learning opportunity, and to never be fully satisfied with success, because you can always improve. Fred shared that his ideal coach would motivate him by *humbling* him. This was common among participants, particularly the idea that there is always *room to improve* in victory and in defeat. “My coach would say, ‘we have to get better; we have to work harder, it’s fine to be happy and

enjoy this win but we need to get ready for the next game” (Larry). Bobby echoed, “when a coach humbles you it helps to instill the mindset that you should never be satisfied.” Finally, Greg stated, “It’s not like *Space Jam*. You can’t just touch a ball and be good. You got to work for it all the time. You can never be too good . . . I’m pretty sure even LeBron still works on his game.”

***Coach has energy, enthusiasm, and engagement during competition.*** *Energy* and *enthusiasm* were mentioned by all participants. Kelly shared that she likes “coaches that move, I like a coach that’s up, engaged, walking up and down the sideline, saying things to me constantly. Your coach needs to be there with the same energy level you’re having.” Cody explained, “I know my generation likes to get hyped up, they are all about getting crazy, getting excited, so when you see that the coach gets excited too, that energy kind of floods into us.” Some athletes shared that though their head coaches were not energetic, their assistant coaches were. Fred, Greg, Isla, and Holly all recognized that this was not how their coach operated, and though they would have preferred an enthusiastic head coach, the assistant coaches helped to fill this void on their team. Several participants mentioned their need for their coach to remain *engaged* in the game, both when winning and losing (Holly, Donna, Isla, Fred, Larry). Others mentioned the need for their coach to remain *steady emotionally* (Holly, Isla, Fred, and Greg). Finally, several mentioned needing a coach who encourages you to keep going, even when you’ve made a mistake. “In a game when you miss a shot or turn it over and your coach says, ‘keep going,’ that builds security for me and motivates me because it shows that my coach trusts me” (Larry).

***Differentiate based on player’s needs.*** *Differentiation* was mentioned all throughout the interview responses, but particularly concerning both *tone* and *motivation*. Nearly all

participants mentioned that because no two athletes are the same, it is essential that coaches *get to know each athlete* on a personal level so that they know how to *motivate* them. Some players are self-motivated. Bobby, Cody, Greg, and Kelly commented on the *intrinsic drive* that fuels their motivation and that their coaches recognize this, while others need coaches to *affirm* their efforts (Larry, Fred, Isla, Donna). “I think coaches have to adapt to what their players need and learn how to work with you. I also think that my needs change from year to year.” Several participants also mentioned that their needs changed from their freshman year to their senior year; where verbal *encouragement* and *validation* was needed during their early years, opportunities for *leadership* were more necessary as they matured (Isla, Eric, Greg, Fred, Donna).

***Design creative practices.*** Most of the participants commented on the need for *variety* and *creativity*, particularly in the practice setting. Bobby stated, “I don’t want the same thing every day, I want it mixed up, different workouts, different competitions, creativity.” Jessica shared that every Monday her coach had them do a team “Championship Run” to train for the Monday later in the season where they would be competing for their conference championship.

No matter the weather or circumstance, we always did our Monday team runs and afterwards we’d talk about how we were feeling that Monday, cause in a few Monday’s we’d be putting everything on the line in the championship. Our coach had no doubt in her mind we would make it, which helped us to believe that we would make it. (Jessica)

Finally, several participants mentioned *game-within-a-game* activities, where athletes build skills through mini competitions (Bobby, Cody, Eric, Greg, Holly).

## Chapter 4 Summary

From the review of literature, four prominent themes emerged that characterize the relational needs of Generation Z athletes, which were a desire for trust and security, a desire for meaningful relationships, quality communication, and an understanding of what motivates Generation Z collegiate athletes. This study sought to explore these themes as they specifically pertain to collegiate Generation Z athletes, and to determine what emergent themes characterize their relational needs. Using a qualitative design, this study investigated the following research questions:

RQ 1: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate athletics?

RQ 2: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete's perspective, what are best practices that coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players?

This study sought to identify what relational qualities impact success at the collegiate level, what Generation Z athletes believe are best practices that coaches can utilize to build healthy dyadic relationships with their athletes, and if there are transferable themes that could be useful to collegiate coaches who work with Generation Z athletes.

Research methodologies were selected with Generation Z in mind, which was why synchronous semistructured interviews were the primary mode of data collection.

Once data was gathered, six phases of thematic analysis were used to identify codes which led to the discovery of the themes that were revealed in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2009). In total, six themes were identified that characterize the Generation Z collegiate athlete's preferred relational coaching qualities that impact athletic success. These themes are: trust between the coach and athlete, healthy communication, accountability in

athletics and life, the ability to create meaningful relationships, the ability to create team synergy, and building motivation. The implications of these themes will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand—from Generation Z’s perspective—the relational needs of today’s collegiate athletes, and what relational coaching qualities most impact their success. Though the literature pertaining to the coach-athlete dyad is substantial, limited research has been conducted concerning Generation Z athletes, and none which focuses specifically on collegiate Generation Z athletes and their relational needs. The methodology that was used for this study was amply supported by the literature, and the themes and best practices which are discussed in this chapter, could help coaches to form quality relationships with their athletes and improve athletic success. What follows is a summary and discussion of the results from this study, and their relationship to the literature presented in Chapter 2. The limitations of the study will also be discussed, as will the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory. Finally, recommendations for further research will be offered.

### **Summary of the Results**

Using a qualitative design, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete’s perspective, what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate athletics?

RQ 2: From the Generation Z collegiate athlete’s perspective, what are best practices that coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players?

The quality of the coach-athlete relationship was examined through an interdependence theory lens (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and within the framework of Jowett’s (2007) 3+1Cs model. The literature review explored the factors that have contributed to the characteristics of Generation Z, and their relational needs in the coach-athlete dyad. From the review of literature, four prominent themes emerged that characterize the relational needs of Generation Z athletes, which

were a desire for trust and security, a desire for meaningful relationships, quality communication, and an understanding of what motivates Generation Z collegiate athletes (Marron, 2015; Moore et al., 2017; Ricks, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). This study sought to explore these themes as they specifically pertain to collegiate Generation Z athletes, and to determine what emergent themes characterize their relational needs.

**New literature.** Since beginning this study, new findings have been published, particularly concerning the impact that screen time is having on Generation Z brain development. First findings from the largest longitudinal study of brain development and child health that has ever been conducted were published in late 2018 and early 2019. Known as the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) study, one of the guiding questions for this research endeavor is: What is the relationship between screen time and brain and social development? (Paulus & Thompson, 2018). This study is ongoing, and though initial findings indicate that excess screen media activity affects the structural composition of the brain, as these children are followed into their teen years, findings will hopefully shed light on the impact that excess screen time has on Generation Z's social development and relational needs (Paulus & Thompson, 2018).

**Methodology.** Research methodologies were selected with Generation Z in mind, which was why synchronous semistructured interviews were the primary mode of data collection. Twelve collegiate team-sport athletes from various institutions in the Pacific Northwest were interviewed for this study. Once data was gathered, five phases of thematic analysis were used to identify codes that were vital to the discovery of the themes revealed in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2009). In total, six themes were identified that characterize the Generation Z collegiate athlete's preferred relational coaching qualities that

impact athletic success. These themes are: trust between the coach and athlete, healthy communication, accountability in athletics and life, the ability to create meaningful relationships, the ability to create team synergy, and building motivation. The results of this study indicate that the methods coaches are using to meet the relational needs of Generation Z, are the relational best practices of coaches who are experiencing some form of team or athlete success in collegiate athletics.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The guiding research questions for this study centered on the relational qualities in the coach-athlete dyad that are essential for success in collegiate athletics, and best practices for building relationships with Generation Z athletes. The study focused on the perspectives of Generation Z collegiate athletes, by giving them an opportunity to reflection on their own experiences as collegiate athletes who were experiencing or had experienced a quality coach-athlete dyad. From this reflection, participants were asked to identify best practices that their coaches used to build relationships with their athletes. They were also asked to identify which relational qualities and best practices they believe most affected their personal or team athletic success (see Appendix A). Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to speak on behalf of their generation, by identifying best relational practices that coaches should use to build quality relationships with their athletes. Finally, they were asked to identify which relational practices they believe would most impact the athletic success of Generation Z athletes, and how coaches should implement the best practices that were identified (see Appendix A). What follows is a discussion of the themes that emerged from this study.

**Trust between the coach and athlete.** When participants were asked which relational quality, they believe most contributed to their personal and team athletic success, *trust* was the most frequently given response. Though the idea of trust was prevalent, the subthemes help to



explain the different needs associated with trust that were expressed by each participant. The idea of *integrity* or constancy of character was mentioned often, particularly by female athletes working with a male coach. Setting appropriate boundaries led to participant responses such as *security* and *safety* which contributed to their *trust* in their coach, and in the authenticity of his or her character (Alice, Holly, Kelly, Isla). *Trust* also applied to *demonstrating care* for the athlete. The idea of being *more than a roster spot* was in some way expressed by each participant, who both in their coach-athlete dyad and in the *best practices that they believe most impact trust*, shared that this feeling of the coach caring for their whole wellbeing was instrumental in their growth and success as an athlete.

*Financial* trust was a commonly shared response, particularly among the male athletes and the NCAA Division I athletes (Bobby, Holly, Fred, Greg, Larry). Several shared that the fact that their financial stability was tied to their athletic performance added stress that sometimes affected their ability to perform. This was most common among the freshman and sophomore athletes who still had two to three years of eligibility remaining (Bobby, Holly, Fred, Greg, Larry). The idea of financial trust also extended to food and shelter. One athlete shared that as an out-of-state athlete, he had no local family to support him, and since he was not on scholarship, there were nights where he would go home to his apartment and not have food to eat. As an in-season athlete, he did not have time to work so he

would call [his] teammates and ask them if [he] could eat with their family on those nights. I just want a coach who cares enough to buy me some P.B. and J., or at least asks if I'm getting a meal in. (Fred)

This desire was shared by three of the four community college athletes (Fred, Greg, and Donna).

One common unanticipated response was the idea that trust is linked to *results*. More than half of the participants mentioned in some way that their trust was results-driven. For some, this manifested itself in personal results, such as drawing up a play that worked in real-time or performing strength training activities that led to success later in the season (Fred, Greg, Kelly, Bobby, Larry, Alice, Eric). For others, a coach's resume helped them to *buy in* to the program, whether they enjoyed the experience or not (Eric, Kelly, Alice, Donna, Jessica, Fred, Greg). Knowing that the coach had a record of success contributed to both *trust* and *motivation*. Finally, all athletes expressed that straightforward communication builds trust. Phrases like *blunt*, *keeps it real*, and *straight up* were in some way expressed by all participants, both in terms of building trust and in how coaches should communicate with their athletes. Though athletes do want coaches to be honest and straightforward, they also had much to say about how coaches should communicate with their athletes, both generally and personally.

**Healthy communication.** As digital natives, connectivity is the norm for Generation Z collegiate athletes. All 12 participants shared that when it comes to team communication and general information, technology—specifically their smartphone—is the preferred mode of delivery. Participants shared the different modes that coaches are currently using to communicate with their teams. Bobby shared that his team used an app that allowed all coaches to send a mass text to every athlete on their team. Cody's team used a group chat for practicality and entertainment, and most athlete's shared that their coaches emailed weekly, monthly, and in some cases, season-long schedules. All athletes expressed that though they prefer instant notifications via text, what is most important is having advanced notice on practices, workouts, and game schedules. Since many athletes have work and personal obligations in addition to their

athletic and academic responsibilities, being able to plan is a must for the Generation Z collegiate athlete.

Their need for personal connection, care, and trust impacted communication, particularly concerning their desire for face-to-face interactions. For serious and personal conversations, all athlete's shared that they prefer face-to-face conversations, and several mentioned that the conversation be had in privacy (Larry, Jessica, Holly, Kelly, Isla, Donna). Some participants shared that their coach schedules time with each player on their team to talk about athletic and personal topics (Jessica, Kelly, Bobby, Donna). Others mentioned that their coach has an open-door policy, and that they feel comfortable going and talking to their coach during their office hours about anything they need (Kelly, Donna, Jessica, Eric). One coach used journals to write back and forth with their athletes about anything they wished to discuss; if she felt the need, she would then "schedule a one-on-one coffee date to go deeper" (Donna & Jessica).

The idea of *positive communication* was consistent, both in terms of motivation and when giving feedback and correction. Having someone who points out your successes and celebrates them was commonly shared, as was the idea of positively reinforcing good habits (Fred, Greg, Isla, Donna, Holly). When asked if *tone* was important in terms of healthy communication, most athletes agreed that it was, but not necessarily that a negative tone was not effective when used appropriately. In fact, most athletes expressed that within a certain context, a negative tone had positive implications in terms of accountability.

One unanticipated subtheme was that the framing of criticism matters greatly to Generation Z. This again ties into their need for coaches to be straightforward with their communication, but not in a way that is insulting, demeaning, or lacking in constructive application. In terms of how they can improve, Alice shared that she'd like her coach to say, "I

saw that this is what you did wrong, but this is how you can fix it” (Alice). Similarly, Isla stated that rather than hearing “why do you keep making the same error” she wants to hear “we did practice this, so I KNOW you can do it.” Generation Z athletes do want to know their weaknesses, but more than this, they want you to show them how they can improve and to communicate that they are capable of growth and improvement (Alice, Isla, Kelly, Holly, Fred, Greg, Bobby, Eric).

Common among the female athletes was nonverbal communication. Many mentioned that facial expressions and body language sometimes communicate more strongly than words, how a coach is feeling about an athlete or athletic performance. This was particularly true for athletes who described their relationship with a coach as *unhealthy* (Holly, Isla, Fred, Greg, Alice). One athlete stated, “When we get down in a game, my coach just sits there and pouts. They don’t have to say anything for me to know that they are totally checked out” (Isla). Finally, most participants mentioned that they want their coach to teach through visual examples. For all male athletes and some female athletes this was manifested in their desire to have coaches who can still model how to do a drill or a skill correctly, or who can still compete in the activity. A few mentioned that coaches who spend too much time talking or giving explanations lose their athletes’ concentration and ability to focus (Cody, Fred, & Eric). The idea of the coach being a *teacher* was also mentioned by a few participants, particularly in terms of *clear* and *concise* communication (Holly, Eric, Isla, Alice).

**Accountability in athletics and life.** Perhaps the most unanticipated emergent theme was the desire for accountability in athletics and life. When applied to Generation Z, several athletes expressed a desire for their coach to have *high* and *clear expectations*. Donna mentioned wanting her coach to set expectations “and then when I don’t meet them on or off the field, hold

me accountable, have a conversation with me, and remind me of the goals I set for myself.”

Though they wish to be held accountable they need an explanation for the expectations before they will *buy in*. This was particularly true for athletic expectations, especially when it came to understanding how training or conditioning positively contributed to skill development. Several athletes mentioned that when they understand how a drill or a training activity is making them better, they are more motivated to invest in the activity. Eric explained,

My generation needs to know *why* because we are science driven. We can look up anything on Google and find a solution for anything, so coaches need to understand that if you ask us to do something, it should mean something, it should have proven credibility, and we need to know why it works in order to buy in to whatever it is. (Eric)

High expectations were linked to team goal setting, but in terms of accountability, also contributed to player conduct. A few participants mentioned their desire to have coaches help them set goals both at the start of the season, and for their total time spent at the institution (Donna, Holly, Alice, Bobby). Goals were not just limited to athletics, but also included academics and opportunities beyond graduation. Several athletes mentioned that if a coach asks them to condition and workout in their off time, or to live by a particular code of conduct, they need to make sure all players are doing so, because when some don't, it affects team unity (Fred, Greg, Larry, Kelly, Bobby). Interestingly, though several athletes mentioned that they believe their generation is too *soft* (Bobby, Fred, Cody, & Kelly) or *needs a trophy for everything* (Eric, Cody, & Donna), all athletes said that they prefer a firm coach to one who does not hold them accountable. Kelly explained,

At the end of the day we are athletes, and at this level, we should all want to get better. I'm only going to be my best if I respect my coach, and I won't respect someone who I can walk all over.

Yelling is approved by Generation Z, if it is coming from a place of accountability and is framed in a way that helps the athlete to grow. "It's important that coaches are strict in what they expect from you, but in a positive way" (Holly). Similarly, "It's okay for someone to yell at me and be stern, but keep it skills-related, don't hold anything against me, and show me how to get better" (Isla).

**The ability to create meaningful relationships.** One of the most common responses from participants was their desire to have coaches who *knows their story*. This was the most commonly given response when asked to share what they believe coaches should do to create meaningful relationships with Generation Z athletes. Larry stated,

I think my coach needs to know me as more than a basketball player. They should know my whole life, and I think if they take the time to get to know each player individually this can help a lot.

This desire to be known stretched beyond the playing field. Generation Z wants coaches to know their background story, their dreams and goals, and their struggles. In their opinion, taking the time to learn what sets each athlete apart is what will ultimately help coaches to build meaningful relationships. "Coaches should get to know their players, not just how they play, or their athletic strengths and weaknesses, but what their personal interests are, and getting to know their family, and who they are as a person. They can't help you succeed if they don't know where you've been" (Holly).

Generation Z athletes want more than a coach, they want a mentor and a guide. Several of the male athletes mentioned wanting a coach who could guide them as they decide where they will play beyond college, and as they enter the next phases of their lives. Fred stated,

You're a leader, showing players what is right and what is wrong. Your players look up to you, so as a player, I want to be able to come to you for guidance and advice about more than just basketball.

Larry added "you need that guidance and when your coach is able to mentor you it just builds security and trust." Interestingly, in many cases, it was not the head coach who had taken on the role of a mentor, but rather the assistant coach. Alice stated,

My assistant coach is to this day my role model in life. She still calls me to see how I'm doing, and while I was playing, helped me with many of the struggles that were happening in my life outside of soccer.

Several athletes felt that their assistant coach had played a much larger role in their life than their head coach, both in helping them to grow as an athlete and as a person (Fred, Isla, Greg, Alice, Holly, Eric).

Finally, consistent with both *trust* and *integrity* was the need for *openness* and *authenticity* on the part of both the coach and athlete. Several athletes mentioned that this authenticity should start from the moment that you are recruited by the coach. One participant explained:

One of the reasons I chose to go to [this institution] is because my coach was honest with me from day one. He explained that I was going to have to earn my spot and I had a lot to work on, but if I was willing to work hard, I was capable of being the best. At other

schools I felt like the coach just talked me up and I could just tell they were just saying what they thought I wanted to hear. (Kelly)

Bobby echoed this belief, “You see that’s the thing with recruiting, it’s such a messed-up thing, you’ll say anything to get an athlete to come, and then the moment they sign, the whole attitude switches and you’re just another player.” Finally, Isla captured the opinions of many of the participants when she said,

Being real, authentic, and humble is a big factor for me with my coaches. I really do look up to them as an athlete . . . I want to be inspired by them, learn from them, and grow from them, and I can only do that if they are real with me.

**The ability to create team synergy.** Though the ability to create team synergy was a commonly shared desire among all participants, best practices for how to do so differed by sport. One participant explained that the reason for the differences is primarily due to the type of sport and the number of participants on the team.

Some football programs carry more than 100 guys on a team, it’s just unrealistic to expect one coach to get that many guys to buy in, especially when from that 100, only 30 guys are gonna play. I mean for me, I’m the quarterback, so I’m literally the only guy who will see playing time for my position. (Bobby)

Even on smaller teams, athletes consistently mentioned their need for coaches to make all players feel like they *matter*.

I see a lot of freshman volleyball girls come in, and they are so discouraged that they don’t get to play. I’d really like a coach who would affirm them, and encourage them to think beyond just this year, to think about who they want to be as a senior, and to work towards that. Everyone needs to feel like part of the team, or we will fall apart. (Isla)



As Eric explained, “You have to have everyone pulling in the same direction, you can’t have any outliers going the opposite way. The talent can do something, but you know those bonds do way more than the talent ever will.”

Several athletes mentioned that team dinners and activities outside of athletics helped bonds to form and were one of the best practices used by their coaches to create team synergy (Fred, Greg, Alice, Jessica, Donna). Greg mentioned that he likes a coach who sits with the players at meals. “I want him to get to know us and get in on our sense of humor and our inside jokes, especially since most of them start at our team dinners.” Other athletes mentioned non-practice team competitions geared more towards *having fun with each other* and *bonding* (Donna, Fred, Isla, Larry, Alice, Kelly, Eric). One athlete shared that every year her coach would rent sumo suits for one practice and let them “go at each other” (Alice). Another shared that their video game hangouts at their coach’s team dinners were where they became friends with their teammates (Larry). “I think focusing on bonding, just having team dinners and team events where you have time for players to build relationships helps the chemistry to form on and off of the court” (Fred).

**Building motivation.** Finally, strategies for building motivation were shared by many participants. It was apparent that some of the participants were more intrinsically motivated than others, but even those that weren’t, shared that they desired a coach that helped players to build resilience in defeat, to view failure as a learning opportunity, and to never be fully satisfied with success, because you can always improve. “My coach would say, ‘we have to get better, we have to work harder, it’s fine to be happy and enjoy this win but we need to get ready for the next game” (Larry). This idea also tied into the subtheme of *differentiating based on individual player needs*. Where some athletes needed positive reinforcement and encouragement, others

wanted a coach who humbles them. “When a coach humbles you, it helps to instill the mindset that you should never be satisfied” (Bobby). Cody explained, “I know my generation likes to get hyped up, they are all about getting crazy, getting excited, so when you see that the coach gets excited too, that energy kind of floods into us.” Nearly all participants mentioned that because no two athletes are the same, it is essential that coaches *get to know each athlete* on a personal level so that they know how to *motivate* them. “I think coaches have to adapt to what their players need and learn how to work with you. I also think that my needs change from year to year.” Several participants also mentioned that their needs changed from their freshman year to their senior year; where verbal *encouragement* and *validation* was needed during their early years, opportunities for *leadership* and a need for *accountability* were more necessary as they matured (Isla, Eric, Greg, Fred, Donna).

Finally, Generation Z needs variety, not only during competition, but during practices and workouts as well. Many participants mentioned that their motivation to work hard during practice often depends on the activities; for this reason, they desired engaging and creative practices. Several participants mentioned *game-within-a-game* activities, where athletes build skills through mini competitions (Bobby, Cody, Eric, Greg, Holly). Bobby stated, “I don’t want the same thing every day, I want it mixed up, different workouts, different competitions, creativity.” Other athletes mentioned that when a coach makes it clear that a practice activity is linked to success, they are more motivated to work harder. Jessica shared that every Monday her coach had them do a team “Championship Run” to train for the Monday later in the season where they would be competing for their conference championship. Similarly, Kelly’s throwing coach explained the importance of each exercise and how it impacted her throwing.

His background in kinesiology is really cool because when we talk about throwing javelin, he talks about what muscle group you're using, how it should feel in your muscles when you throw, and even the physics behind what's going to make the javelin go farther. I can trust in his education, which motivates me to take every rep seriously. This again affirms the desire of Generation Z athletes to know the *why* behind what they are doing, so that they are motivated to do their best.

**Research questions.** These six themes represent the Generation Z collegiate team sport athlete's perspective of both the relational best practices of collegiate coaches and the relational coaching qualities that have had the greatest impact on athletic success. Research question one focused on Generation Z's perspective concerning the elements of the coach-athlete relationship that are essential for success in collegiate athletics. Similarly, research question two focused on Generation Z's perspective of the best practices that coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players. The findings indicate that Generation Z athletes believe that trust between the coach and athlete, healthy communication, accountability in athletics and life, and the coach's ability to create meaningful relationships, create team synergy, and build motivation are essential relational qualities that impact success and are the preferred best practices of coaches who work with collegiate Generation Z athletes.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

Prominent authorities in the field of sports psychology propose that the quality of the relationship has strong implications for both the coach-athlete dyad, and success in collegiate team athletics (Jowett & Cocherill, 2003; Rhind, Jowett, & Yang, 2012). jowett (2005) argued that "The coach-athlete relationship is not an add-on to, or by-product of, the coaching process . . . instead it is the foundation of coaching" (p. 412). The review of literature, which developed a unique conceptual framework using Kelly and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory, and

Jowett's (2003) 3+1Cs model, focused on the characteristics of Generation Z, best practices in coaching, and the interdependent nature of the coach-athlete relationship. By examining the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of Generation Z collegiate athletes who had experienced a quality dyadic relationship with their coach and had achieved success, relational best practices were identified that were both effective and preferred by this cohort of athletes.

Trust was a prominent theme in both the literature and this study. Seemiller and Grace (2016) argued that trust is imperative to this cohort, who require straight-forward intentions and clear expectation from authority figures. Consistent with the literature was the idea that trust is linked to financial stability. Several participants shared that the fact that their financial stability was tied to their athletic performance added stress that sometimes affected their ability to perform (Bobby, Holly, Fred, Greg, Larry). This was consistent with findings from several studies, which found that financial security was important for Generation Z (Fry, 2017; Marron, 2015; Northeastern University, 2014). Finally, Jowett and Cockerill (2002) argued that negative coaching styles betray the trust that is implicit within the dyadic relationship. This is consistent with the subtheme of the *coach demonstrating care for the athlete*.

Numerous studies indicated that athlete's perception of the coach's communication contributed to satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the relationship, particularly concerning affirmation and encouragement, constructive feedback, responsiveness, friendliness, respect, tone, open channels, assertiveness, and lack of communication (Jowett, 2003; Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Sagar & Jowett, 2012). It was not surprising to see that Generation Z athletes desire technological communication, and that the mode of communication matters. Prensky (2012) labeled Generation Z as the first cohort of digital natives, who have had information at their fingertips for most of their lives. Though

technological advancements have contributed to Generation Z's connectivity, global awareness, and increased compassion and care, it has also left them longing for real face-to-face connections and relational depth (Edmunds & Turner, 2005; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). For this reason, coaches must be aware of the potential impact they can have on their athletes when they take on the roles of mentor, teacher, and collaborator, in addition to that of coach. If mentorship is provided, many of the generational conflicts and differences that are commonplace in athletics can be avoided, and skills that are lacking with this generation—such as conflict resolution and assertive communication—can be learned (Marron, 2015; Shatto & Erwin, 2017).

From an instructional perspective, Gen Zers have short attention spans but will absorb information instantly; as such, they expect quick explanations and hands-on learning experiences (Rosen, 2010; Shatto & Erwin, 2016; Shatto & Erwin, 2017; Williams, 2010). This was echoed by participants, who desire clear explanations and demonstrations to build understanding, and freely acknowledge that they lack the attention span for loquacious coaching (Cody, Kelly, & Fred). Humanistic thinkers argue that coaches should recognize the athlete holistically, by focusing on developing the total individual (Connolly, 2016). In applying humanistic principles from the literature, such as communication, self-concept, affect, and personal values, coaches take on the role of a teacher who creates a learning environment that grows players, builds player confidence through care, and develops thinking players (Jones, 2009).

Because of their desire for connection, Generation Z athletes seek out meaningful relationships (Ricks, 2016). Connolly (2016) argued that strategies for optimizing player growth should include honesty, listening to players, helping athletes to set goals, and really getting to know each athlete. This was consistent with findings from the study, which indicated that Generation Z athletes want coaches to help them set both athletic and life goals, be open and

authentic, and know each athlete's story. Marron (2015) argued that mentorship will be increasingly important for this cohort, and because of their high trust in authority, it was not surprising to see that these athletes desire mentorship and guidance in all aspects of life.

Recent empirical research suggests that attributes such as cooperation and the ability to create team cohesion were associated with effective coach-athlete dyadic relationships (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). The literature also indicated that experiences are important to Generation Z in terms of overall enjoyment and pleasure. One study found that working with a "cheerful team" was an important factor in the future jobs of Generation Z employees (Cseh-Papp et al., 2017). Participants shared that coaches who provided opportunities for athletes to bond was a best practice strategy that contributed to their team's synergy. Furthermore, this study revealed that athletes contributed much of their team success to the coach's ability to create an environment where athletes *play for each other* (Bobby, Eric, Fred, Donna, Isla, & Cody).

In terms of motivation, several theories were mentioned in the literature, but all seemed to emphasize the impact that coaching behaviors have on player motivation. Controlling behaviors were associated with a decrease in motivation, while autonomy-oriented behaviors contributed to player self-determination (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Blanchard et al., 2009). Coaching behaviors pertaining to healthy communication, positive and informative feedback, acknowledgement of both success and failure, and democratic decision-making were all perceived by players to increase motivation in their sport (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Blanchard et al., 2009; Hollembeak & Amorose, 2005; Smith et al., 2005). Results from this study indicated that teaching players to have a growth mindset and designing creative practices also played a prominent role in player motivation and engagement, as did understanding the *why* behind each

activity. Though coaching behaviors do have positive and negative correlations with player motivation, participants acknowledged that the best practices of their coaches were also instrumental in building their motivation, which they felt affected their success.

### **Limitations**

There were limitations to this study, as is the case with all research (Creswell, 2014). When considering the research design, synchronous interviews were the primary method used for data collection. Both observations during practices and games, and an interview with the coaches of each athlete could have extended the dimensions of the findings. More time spent with the participants and opportunities to see the athlete engaged in athletic competition could impact the interpretations of the data and strengthen the validity of the findings. This would have also affected the methodological choices that were selected for this study. Had additional forms of data collection occurred, triangulation could have been used as an additional form of analysis for increasing validity.

The sample size, time constraints, and delimitations of location should also be considered should this study be replicated. Since this was a qualitative study, transferability is limited, due to the location of the study, which was the Pacific Northwest. The experiences of athletes in other regions of the country could produce different findings, and a larger sample size would only strengthen the validity of the findings. Time constraints for this study also could have impacted the results. Athletes were interviewed in February and March of 2019; as such, some athletes were currently in their season, while others were either in their off-season or had recently completed their collegiate athletic career. If replicated, consistency in each of these areas could affect results, as some participants had more time for reflection than others.

## **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

This qualitative study was designed to investigate the relational needs of Generation Z collegiate athletes under the presupposition that the quality of the coach-athlete dyad impacts athletic success (Jowett, 2005). The review of literature revealed unique characteristics of Generation Z that affect their relational needs, and that a gap in the literature exists concerning the preferred relational coaching qualities of Generation Z collegiate athletes. Since Generation Z will be filling the rosters of all collegiate athletic teams for the next decade, this study sought to identify the best practices that collegiate coaches should employ to form quality relationships with their athletes that could lead to success. Implications for practice, policy, and theory will be presented in this section.

**Implications for coaching practice.** The findings from this study most impact collegiate coaches and athletic policy makers in the Pacific Northwest who are currently working with Generation Z athletes. Because this study only focused on quality coach-athlete dyads, and all participants had experienced some level of athletic success while in this dyad, participants were able to reflect on the relational qualities that they felt most affected their success. The themes that emerged from this study reflect the relational qualities that these collegiate athletes believe correlate with the athletic success they experienced. Though this study was limited to the Pacific Northwest, multiple measures were taken to ensure the transferability of these themes across ethnicity, gender, sport, and institutional classification. Therefore, the themes presented in this study, which are: trust between the coach and athlete, healthy communication, accountability in athletics and life, ability to create meaningful relationships, ability to create team synergy, and ability to build motivation reflect both the best practices that are present in a variety of successful collegiate coach-athlete dyads in the Pacific Northwest, and the preferred



coaching qualities of Generation Z. Coaches should implement these relational best practices to better meet the needs of their Generation Z athletes and to improve athletic success in their sport.

**Implications for athletic policy.** A desire for trust and authenticity stretched beyond just the coach-athlete dyad, as several athletes mentioned that this trust started the day that they were recruited to join their institution's athletic program. Organizational integrity impacts the Generation Z athlete, particularly when it comes to recruitment and financial security. Their desire for clear and straight-forward communication, reflects their need for trust in authority, which includes the athletic department, recruitment policy, and scholarship allocations. For this reason, integrity must be the heartbeat of the athletic department, as this core value affects not only the athletes, but the coaches, support staff, and policies that impact the entire organization (Fullan, 2011; Paine, 1994). Furthermore, these findings affect the hiring and coaching expectations for collegiate athletic departments in the Pacific Northwest. Several participants mentioned that when the relational qualities they desired from their head coach were lacking, they were able to find what they needed in an assistant coach. The implications of these findings suggest that for relational shortcomings, coaches can and should build a support staff that is able to fully meet the relational needs of their athletes. For example, not all head coaches are enthusiastic or energetic during competition, so having an assistant coach who encourages players on the bench and during the game would help to meet the relational needs of Generation Z athletes.

**Implications for theory.** This study was framed by Kelly and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory and Jowett's (2007) 3+1Cs model. Interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) focuses on relationships and the interpersonal experiences that form interdependence between groups and individuals. In the coach-athlete

relationship, interdependence is inherent, and the behaviors of each party will either positively or negatively affect this balance (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). Similarly, Jowett (2007) created the 3+1Cs framework to better understand the interdependence that occurs between coaches and athletes, and to assess the quality of the relationship. The literature review addressed multiple studies that used this framework to assess coach-athlete dyads, but none that specifically focused on Generation Z, or what relational qualities they believe had the greatest impact on their athletic success. Therefore, this study adds the construct “Generation Z perceptions” to the literature pertaining to collegiate coach-athlete dyads.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There are several recommendations for further research based on this study’s findings. In order to identify relational best practices that were both effective and preferred by this cohort of athletes, this study examined the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of Generation Z collegiate athletes who were experiencing or had experienced a quality dyadic relationship with their coach and had achieved success. Though the themes reflect the general relational needs of today’s collegiate team sport Generation Z athlete, focusing the target population could produce more generalizable themes. For example, conducting a study which focuses on the relational needs of Generation Z community college athletes, or needs by gender would add to this body of knowledge.

A study on successful athletic programs, specifically the coach and assistant coach dynamic could shed more light on how the relational needs of Generation Z can be better met with collaboration. Additional studies could explore integrity in recruitment, as this desire was also frequently mentioned by participants. Since Generation Z is new to higher education,

research concerning generational analysis should continue, as new characteristics from this generation emerge and become more apparent. This would lend easily to a longitudinal study of how Generation Z's relational needs change overtime; for example, will the relational needs of today's 10-year-old athletes be the same when they enter college?

Finally, accountability was an emergent theme and should therefore be further explored. Several studies addressed aspects of accountability such as mentorship, communication, and high expectations, but none directly focused on accountability as a relational quality that is desired by Generation Z athletes. Research pertaining to both the impact of accountability on collegiate Generation Z athletes and its relation to success could offer new insights.

## **Conclusion**

Using a qualitative design, this study explored the perceptions of today's Generation Z collegiate athlete and their preferred relational coaching qualities. It further explored the relational best practices that impact collegiate athletic success in quality coach-athlete dyads across the Pacific Northwest. Twelve collegiate athletes from various sports who had experienced some form of awarded athletic success participated in this study. Chapter 5 focused on the data derived from this study and how it impacts the coach-athlete dyad. Findings from this study reflect both the best practices that are being used by collegiate coaches in quality coach-athlete dyads that have experienced athletic success, and the preferred relational qualities of Generation Z collegiate athletes.

This study revealed six main themes. First, trust between the coach and athlete is essential for success in athletics. This includes integrity, a demonstration of care for the athlete, proof of success demonstrated in results, and honesty. Healthy communication contributes to success and is a best practice for collegiate coaching. According to Generation Z athletes, healthy communication includes positive communication that inspires athletes, clear

explanations and demonstrations to build understanding, framing criticism in a healthy way, and integrating both technology and face-to-face communication to suit the athlete's needs. An emergent theme was that Generation Z athletes desire accountability in athletics and life, which includes, having high and clear expectations, being firm, and helping athletes to set and achieve goals. The ability to create meaningful relationships was also a theme from this study. Gen Z athlete's want coaches to know their story, to mentor them in all areas of their lives, and they want their coach to be open and authentic. Another theme was the desire for coaches to create team synergy by providing opportunities for athletes to bond, and ultimately, creating an environment where athlete's play for each other. Finally, Generation Z collegiate athletes want coaches to build motivation by teaching them to have a growth mindset, being enthusiastic and engaged during competitions, differentiating based on each player's needs, and designing creative practices. These themes reflect the relational needs of today's Generation Z collegiate athlete.

This study fills the gap in the literature pertaining to the preferred relational needs of today's Generation Z collegiate athlete. It also fills the gap concerning the relational coaching qualities Generation Z believes most impact their collegiate athletic success. Members of Generation Z now fill not only the dorms of higher education institutions, but also the rosters of each collegiate athletic team. Though they have been shaped by their formative experiences, perhaps some of the more defining characteristics of this generation are their unique relational needs. When it comes to collegiate athletics, research continually points to the quality of the coach-athlete relationship as one predictor of success in athletic competition (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Kanakoglou, 2012; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). For these reasons, collegiate coaches and athletic program administrators should recognize the

preferred relational qualities of this generation, and best practices that are already occurring in collegiate athletics, so that they can form quality relationships with their athletes, maximize their athletic potential, and improve athletic success.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions**

“This study is designed to examine the relational needs of collegiate Generation Z team-sport athletes, specifically, what they desire relationally from their coach. We want to know what you believe are the best practices that collegiate coaches should use to build relationships with their athletes, and which relational qualities that you think most impact the success of a team or athlete. I know that you have your own personal experiences with your current coach, and we will discuss what has been positive regarding that relationship. I will also ask you to imagine the type of coach that you would really enjoy playing for and try to answer the following questions in the best way that you can. This interview is divided into three sections, and each section contains four questions. Each of these questions are open-ended, which means I’d like you to share all that you want to in your response. If needed, I may ask follow-up questions to encourage you to elaborate and add more specific details. This interview should take approximately 45-minutes. If you are ready, let’s begin with section one.”

### **Section One: The Participant’s Relationship with Their Coach**

“For this study, we specifically chose athletes that have been successful under the direction of their current coach and have developed a positive relationship with the coach. As you answer the questions in this section, I’m going to ask you to think about your relationship with your current coach and the impact that the relationship has had on your personal and team athletic success.”

1. Describe how your coach communicates with you and your team.
2. Describe how your coach motivates you and your teammates.
3. Describe the relational qualities that you most appreciate about your coach.

4. When thinking about the best relational qualities that your coach possesses, which ones do you think most contributed to your success as an athlete and team?

“Is there anything else you would like to add before we move on to section two?”

### **Section Two: The Coach-Athlete Relationship and Success**

“For section two I’m going to ask you to describe your ideal coach by imagining the type of coach that you would really enjoy playing for. Answer the following questions in the best way that you can.”

1. Describe how your ideal coach would communicate with you and your team.
2. Describe how your ideal coach would motivate you and your teammates.
3. Describe the ideal relational qualities that this coach would possess.
4. When thinking about the relational qualities you just described, which ones do you think would most contributed to your success as an athlete and team?

“Is there anything else you would like to add before we move on to the final section of this interview?”

### **Section Three: Relational Best Practices**

“For the final section of this interview, I’m going to ask you to think about the general needs of today’s collegiate team-sport athlete. In general, the overall purpose of this section is to discover what relational practices collegiate coaches should use when working with today’s collegiate athletes. Try to answer the following questions in the best way that you can.”

1. Describe how collegiate coaches can create meaningful relationships with their athletes.
2. Describe how collegiate coaches can motivate their athletes.
3. Describe how collegiate coaches should communicate with their athletes.
4. Describe how collegiate coaches build trust and security with their athletes.

“Is there anything else you would like to add before we conclude this interview?”

“Thank you for participating in this study. Your answers to today’s questions will help collegiate coaches to recognize the coaching qualities that today’s collegiate team-sport athletes’ desire. This information could help coaches to form quality relationships with their players, improve athletic performance, and ultimately, lead their team to success. Thank you for the valuable information you provided today, this concludes our interview.”



## Appendix B: Consent Form

Concordia University – Portland Institutional Review Board  
Approved: January 10, 2019; will Expire: January 10, 2020

**Research Study Title:** Generation Z: Perceptions from Today's Collegiate Athlete on the Coach-Athlete Relationship and Its Impact on Success in Athletics  
**Principal Investigator:** Mandy Vance  
**Research Institution:** Concordia University  
**Faculty Advisor:** Bill Boozang

### **Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this interview is to investigate the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of collegiate Generation Z athletes. From your answers, we hope to determine what Generation Z athletes believe are best practices that collegiate coaches should use to build healthy relationships with their players, and what relational practices have the greatest impact on athletic success. We expect approximately 12 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on February 1st and end enrollment on March 25th. To be in the study, you will participate in a semistructured one-on-one interview at your institution with the principal investigator. During the interview you will be recorded and answer approximately 12 open-ended questions and all follow-up questions to the best of your ability. The interview should take approximately 45-minutes of your time. At a later date, you will be emailed a typed version of your interview and asked to read your responses to assure that your answers reflect your true perspectives.

### **Risks:**

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the principal investigator's vault. When the principal investigator looks at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times; recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription and member-checking. All other study-related materials will be kept securely for 3 years from study close and will then be destroyed.

### **Benefits:**

Information you provide will help collegiate coaches to recognize the relational needs of this new generation of collegiate athletes and their preferred relational coaching practices, so that they can form relationships that lead to success in athletics. Information from this study could ultimately help you to form a relationship with your coach that allows you to maximize your athletic potential.

**Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, the principal investigator will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Mandy Vance. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Mandy Vance  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Mandy Vance*  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Investigator: Mandy Vance email: [redacted]  
c/o: Professor Bill Boozang  
Concordia University–Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street



## Appendix C: Recruitment Email to Coaches

Dear Coach \_\_\_\_\_,

This spring I will be conducting research at (university name) and am seeking your assistance. This study is designed to investigate the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of collegiate Generation Z athletes to determine what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate sports. The study also investigates the preferred coaching qualities and habits of Generation Z athletes. I am seeking student athletes who meet the following qualifications for the study:

- Participant is 18–22 years old
- Participant is a team-sport athlete (volleyball, baseball, basketball, football, etc.)
- Participant has played for the same coach for a minimum of two seasons
- Participant is a starter, or is a significant contributor on their team
- Participant has received or been part of a team that has received an awarded athletic achievement while under the direction of the coach (player of the year, conference titles, all-conference accolades, etc.)

This is a qualitative study, and data will be collected via a 45 minute onsite semistructured synchronous interview that will be scheduled with the athlete at their convenience. Though only four students are needed for this study, I am asking that you recommend any athletes that meet this criterion. In total, twelve will be contacted via email and invited to participate, and from that pool, two male and two female participants will be selected. Findings from this study could help collegiate coaches to better understand and meet the relational needs of this new generation of athletes. Thank you so much for your help with recruitment, please email me the names and email addresses for any athletes that you would recommend at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,  
Principal Investigator  
Mandy Vance

## Appendix D: Recruitment Email to Participants

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This spring I will be conducting research at (university name) and would like to invite you to be part of this valuable study. This study is designed to investigate the coach-athlete relationship from the perspective of collegiate Generation Z athletes to determine what elements of the coach-athlete relationship are essential for success in collegiate sports. The study also investigates the preferred coaching qualities and habits of Generation Z athletes. You have been recommended for this study by a coach at your institution because you meet the following criteria:

- Participant is 18–22 years old
- Participant is a team-sport athlete (volleyball, baseball, basketball, football, etc.)
- Participant has played for the same coach for a minimum of two seasons
- Participant is a starter, or is a significant contributor on their team
- Participant has received or been part of a team that has received an awarded athletic achievement while under the direction of the coach (player of the year, conference titles, all-conference accolades, etc.)

This study is voluntary, and all information shared will be kept confidential. All that is required of you is 45 minutes of your time, and your participation in an on-campus semistructured interview that will be scheduled at your convenience. Findings from this study could help collegiate coaches to better understand and meet the relational needs of their athletes. I ask that you consider being part of this valuable study. Please respond to this email at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,  
Principal Investigator  
Mandy Vance

## Appendix E: Screening Survey Questions

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Before moving forward, please take a few moments to complete the following screening survey. If you qualify for this study, you will be contacted in the next two weeks to schedule your interview.

Please follow this [redacted] to complete the survey.

Please answer the following questions truthfully.

1. What is your legal name?
2. What is your date of birth?
3. What college or university do you attend?
4. Are you a student-athlete? If yes, what sport(s)?
5. Have you played for the same coach for a minimum of two seasons?
6. Describe your athletic role on your team (example: I am a starter, I led our team in rebounding, I mostly was a practice player, etc.)
7. While playing for your coach, list any athletic awards the you received (example: player of the year, all-conference accolades, setting a new school record, etc.).
8. While playing for your coach, list any team awards that were received (example: conference champions, national champions, setting a school record, etc.).
9. How would you describe your relationship with your coach (example: healthy, toxic, we work together, they help me achieve my goals, etc.)?

Thank you for your feedback.

## **Appendix F: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### **What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### **What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

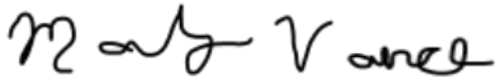
“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

### Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
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Mandy Vance

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Date