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Relationship Building Communication Between Female Student-Athletes and Coaching Staff

Hannah McGlone
hmcglone13@winona.edu

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Relationship building communication between female student-athletes and coaching staff.

A thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Department of Leadership Education

College of Education

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By

Hannah McGlone

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Women make up 42% of all NCAA Division II student-athletes (Schwarb, 2019). For women, the most important relationships within athletic programs are the student-athlete and coaching staff relationships. For team or individual sport, the coach has an extreme influence on the student-athletes physical and psychological development (Short, 2005). Good communication skills are needed to create a positive coach-athlete relationship. A positive coach-athlete relationship is defined as a state reached when coaches' and athletes' closeness, commitment, and complementarity are mutually and casually interconnected (Jowett, 2007). Pocwardowski (2002) stated, the mutual respect and effective communication between coach and athlete are important factors that establish a successful relationship. Investigating the communication practices and communication challenges female student-athletes use to build a relationship with their coaching staff are techniques to find how to build stronger relationships between female student-athletes and coaching staff.

The relationships between female student-athletes and coaching staff require effort and commitment. In this study finding barriers that affect the communication between the female student-athlete and coaching staff is the first step in improving the communication process. Finding best practices to build on the relationship through the communication, will move us forward in women's athletics. This will help coaches gain better relationships with their female student-athletes and make it clear how important it is for female student-athletes to have relationship building practices.

Problem Statement

Player-coach relationships are crucial to the success of a player and to a team (Burns, 2019). Within women athletics men have dominated the coaching staff since the passing of Title

IX in 1972 (Haines, 2017). A trend within women's sports is that majority of head coaches are male. The gender barrier is an issue in the player to coach relationship, which can make it more difficult to build upon for female student-athletes (NCAA, 2017). According to Burton (2011) the gender gap can make it difficult for female student-athletes to be able to communicate freely with their coach. One misconception is that preferred leadership gender within athletics is perceived to be male (Beam, 2004). Beam (2004) expanded stating that male coaches typically perceive to have the masculine qualities that athletes are more naturally drawn to for leaders. A study done 2012 found that student-athletes that have coaches who give social support and positive feedback tend to have higher levels of communication skills (Choi, 2020). A positive atmosphere will help student-athletes communicate more effectively and perform better (Culver, 2000).

Background

The relationship a student-athlete has with their coach directly relates to the effectiveness the coach has on the student-athlete (Jowett, 2017). Explained by Dehaan (2019) something that many female student-athletes agreed on when talking about their coaches was having an efficient, confident communication with little to no negative aggression. Communication is an effective way to build trust. Research done by Six (2007) states that trust is an interactive process between two or more people, trust is built gradually and reinforced by previous trustworthy behavior. To build trust you need to use effective communication which is what student-athletes need more experience with when it comes to working with their coaching staff (Six, 2007).

The purpose of this research is to identify how female student-athletes can build stronger relationships with their coaching staff through improved communications. The results of this study will identify the best practices female student-athletes have found to better build upon their

relationships with coaching staff, the challenges female student-athletes face when building relationships with coaching staff and to determine if coaching staff gender makes a difference when it comes to what topics female student-athletes share with coaches. Bringing the communication gap between coaching staff and the female student-athlete closer will help build trust and build relationships on and off the competition floor/field.

The research questions this study is aiming to answer are:

Q1: What are best practices female student-athletes use to build relationships with coaching staff?

Q2: How does gender of coaches influence the topics shared between female student-athletes and their coaching staff?

Q3: What are challenges female student-athletes face building relationships with their male coaching staff?

Q4: What are challenges female student-athletes face building relationships with their female coaching staff?

Limitations and Delimitations

There are two limitations: site selection and COVID isolation. First, participants are from one university. This is due to the researcher's participant availability. The second limitation is due to COVID-19 many new student-athletes have not had the opportunity to create any deep relationship with their coaching staff yet. This creating an even smaller pool of participants that have relevant experiences with their coaches.

Definitions of terms

The definition of terms are terms that are specific to this study and will help better understand specific topics and language throughout. The terms are as listed and defined below.

Gender Gap: the difference between the opportunities for men and women who are working within athletics. Example, the power struggle between a man and woman in the same position (Celis&Lovenduski, 2018).

Coach player relationship: a situation in which a coach's and an athlete's cognitions, feelings, and behaviors are mutually and casually interrelated (Ayer, 2018).

Positive coach-athlete relationship: a state reached when coaches' and athletes' closeness, commitment, and complementarity are mutually and casually interconnected (Jowett, 2007).

Summary

A positive coach-athlete relationship is a key component in any successful athletic competition season (Jowett, 2017). Finding ways to build on that relationship and help female student-athletes communicate better with their coaching staff will help the relationship grow. Chapter one discussed the need to find the best practices female student-athletes use to build relationships with coaching staff as well as find challenges female student-athletes face while building relationships with coaching staff. Chapter two discusses the importance of successful communication between female student-athletes and coaching staff and how to build on the relationship through communication.

Chapter 2: Review of the literature

Introduction

Positive interpersonal relationships and open communication are what most student-athletes strive for when it comes to working with their head coaches (Yi-Lang, 2016).

Communication is fragile and can be affected by many outside variables. This chapter discusses ways to communicate and build relationships using communication theories. Finding best practices and strategies to strengthen the relationship and make communication more effortless will aid future female student-athletes in the relationship building process.

Interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal relationships are defined as a strong bond between two or more people (Juneja, 2015). Interpersonal relationships can be between individuals that work together, people working in a team, relationships with family members/relatives and friends (Juneja, 2015).

Potrac (2002) stated the coach-athlete relationship is intentionally developed through appreciation and respect of one another and is acquired by meeting both sets of needs by athlete and coach. Interpersonal relationships are built on a list of things. Burns (2018) created this list as, having a laugh, creating high performance culture, and overcoming barriers. Having a laugh is explained by Burns (2018) as facilitating positive relationships beyond the player/coach relationship, allowing an athlete to have time out from high-pressure competition. This could be as simple as asking about the student-athletes day, sharing a meal with them or a “how are you?”. Student-athletes feel more supported by coaches that connect with them on an empathetic level (Burns, 2018). Creating a high-performance culture means there is an effective support network where roles, responsibilities and strategies are clearly and openly communicated (Burns, 2018). Creating supportive interpersonal relationships is not a passive process, but rather a dynamic

interplay, which evolves and grows (Burns, 2018). Interpersonal relationship trust must be built overtime with both individuals having actions guided by joint goals (Six, 2007). Interpersonal trust building is a crucial part of interpersonal relationships, it is a reciprocal process in which both individuals are actively involved in having trust and following through with action that reinforces that trust (Six, 2007).

Interpersonal relationships are a key component in high-performance sport (Burns, 2018). Jowett (2011) stated, relationships formed by athletes with their coaching staff is to learn skills, techniques, and tactics, to feel competent and successful, and to gain satisfaction from their sport. Positive relationships between coaching staff and student-athletes have a direct relationship with the overall team's success (Lafreniere, 2011). An interpersonal relationship can shape the developmental experiences and perspectives for athletes for better or worse (Burns, 2018). Interpersonal relationships do not just affect the overall team success but the coaches and athlete's overall happiness (Lafreniere, 2011).

Communication barriers between coaching staff and female student-athletes

Clear communication is crucial to build the relationship between coaching staff and female student-athletes (Jowett, 2017). Having a good relationship with coaches start with open communication, yet communication can be difficult between coach and athlete (Rezania, 2014). Rezania (2014) states, relationships between coach and athlete have similarities with the relationship between supervisor and employees in an organizational setting. Communication barriers often happen in relationships where one is the supervisor/coach and the other is the employee/athlete (Mikkelson, 2017). Ineffective communication can be a barrier to athlete and coach relationships because there is a feeling of uncertainty that is relayed between coach to athlete. Effective communication has a direct impact on supervisor – subordinate relationship

and overall employee satisfaction (Mikkelson, 2019). Applying that to a coach-athlete relationship would be that the success of the athlete directly relates to the relationship between the coach and athlete. Ineffective communication can happen on both the coaching staff side as well as the athlete's side of things. Ineffective communication happens when thoughts are unorganized, interpretations are difficult, and/or content is unclear (Middaugh, 2013).

A barrier Dehaan (2019) found is female student-athletes can struggle and feel less confident and comfortable when it comes to communicating freely with their male coaches. There is a relationship barrier that occurs between male coaches and female student-athletes that can cause issues when building trust with coaching staff for female student-athletes (Ayer, 2018). Jowett's (2011) research supported the all-female dyads (female coach to female athlete dyad), female athletes were more satisfied with training and instruction from female coaches. This finding supports Montoya (2008) implication that a combination dyad of actual similarity and perceived similarity regulate the strength of the association between the relationships. As stated previously, student-athletes feel stronger connections with their coaches they feel are empathetic. A consequence of this theory states that males are perceived to be more assertive and dominant meaning that they will have lower level of empathetic accuracy (Jowett, 2010). Lower levels of empathy between female student-athlete and male coaches make it difficult to build stronger relationships.

A barrier that can be more of a challenge for athletes to overcome while building relationship is that of intimidation. If an athlete feels intimidated by their coach it can lead the athlete to feel less friendly and even angry towards their coach (Lafreniere, 2011). Intimidation by supervisors (coaches) happens when the expression of dominance is overwhelming (Mikkelson, 2017). Athletes that feel intimidated by coaches have reported higher levels of sport

anxiety (Baker, 2000). Intimidation used incorrectly can create an increased sensitivity to feedback, and potential impediment of learning for athletes because of negative emotional feedback (Titsworth, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this research is to identify how female student-athletes can build stronger relationships with their coaching staff through improved communication. Finding where the communication barrier stems from will then help coaches and female student-athletes mend or build better relationships. A positive coach-athlete relationship is built on mutual acts of trust. Theoretical frameworks to support this study is the Interpersonal Trust Building Theory and Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT).

Interpersonal Trust Building Theory

According to Six (2007) interpersonal trust building theory is a state of intention to accept vulnerability to the actions of another party, based upon the expectation that the other will perform a particular action that is important to you. Six (2007) explained ways to build trust in interpersonal relationships by acting in a trustworthy manner and giving off a positive relational signal. The key takeaway from interpersonal trust building is that both parties should want to continue the relationship into the future (Six, 2007). It is human behavior to want to build trust within a relationship, in doing so building trust is an interactive process involving both individuals learning the others trustworthiness in a multitude of situations (Six, 2007). The coach-athlete dynamic is built off interpersonal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Jowett, 2017). Interpersonal relationships are a key component when it comes to a coach-athlete relationship building and gaining trust.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Along with trust building another way that explains the process of building the relationship is that of the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). Uncertainty Reduction Theory is defined as, lower levels of uncertainty increase levels of verbal and nonverbal communication and increased levels of liking of individuals. Uncertainty is a cognitive process which one considers multiple possibilities in trying to explain or predict something (Redmond, 2015). Redmond (2015) explains the need of the theory as when a person feels uncertain, they seek out information. Acquisition, processing, retention, and retrieval of information is vital to the growth, maintenance, and decline of personal relationships (Berger, 1988). Berger who is one of the top researchers on this theory, found that expanding the research on URT there are three types of information seeking strategies to help reduce uncertainty. They are passive, active, or interactive strategies. Adding to the theory by Vajda (1950) that increased information results in a decrease of uncertainty. Uncertainty reduction is about making sense out of something unknown (Redmond, 2015). Relational uncertainty has direct ties with the way communication behaviors come out in people (Knobloch, 2010).

Summary

Chapter two discussed the importance of interpersonal relationships, communication barriers athletes face, the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, and the Interpersonal Trust Building Theory. Chapter three will discuss the research design and methodology of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Previous research supports the coach and athlete relationship, or partnership is essential for the development of the team and their potential (Jowett & Pocwardowski, 2007). This research will help us understand the athlete-coach relationship.

The purpose of this research is to identify how female student-athletes can build stronger relationships with their coaching staff through improved communications. A qualitative research design was used in this study to find what topics female student-athletes are comfortable discussing with their coaching staff. By using a qualitative research design, we aim to understand people's experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (Pathak, 2013). This information aims to answer the issues female student-athletes face while trying to build relationships with their coaching staff. The interviews will help identify the best practices the female student-athlete uses to communicate better and build upon the relationship with their coaching staff as well as find what challenges the female student-athlete has faced communicating or building those relationships. Using survey and interviews in this research the data being collected can be better used to help put together a broader understanding of the relationships between female student-athletes and their coaching staff (Carter, 2014). By using a qualitative research design the opinions and experiences from the female student-athletes can be collected.

Sample and Setting

The population for this study was current female student-athletes and current female athletics coaching staff at a Division II college athletics program in the Midwest. The university is in southeast Minnesota with an enrollment of 7,602 students. The university is home to 14 NCAA athletic teams, nine of them being women's sports.

The survey was emailed to 147 female student-athletes by the University athletics office. The survey was sent to all current female student-athletes. Purposeful sampling was used for the interviews. Purposeful selection is the selection of information rich cases related to the topic of interest (Palinkas, 2015). The criteria for choosing female student-athletes to be interviewed included athletes who had been working with their coaching staff for two or more years and whose coaching staff consisted of a male head coach and a female assistant coach/coaches. Coaches were chosen by the criteria of current coaches of a women's sport, choosing a mixture of head coaches and assistant coaches. Six female student-athletes and five coaches were chosen for interviews.

Data Collection

The athletics department worked with the principal investigator to send out an email explaining the study's purpose and included a link to the survey.

The survey was sent out to current female student-athletes by the athletic administration to ensure participants anonymity. The survey consisted of ten questions with four choices to answer each question. The survey aimed to find a relationship based on gender of coaching staff with ten different topics student-athletes feel comfortable discussing with coaching staff. The survey was sent out to 147 student-athletes and 31 responses were recorded.

The female student-athletes and coaches were interviewed online via Zoom to ensure safety for all, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions were open-ended to give the interviewees opportunity to expand on the topics they felt comfortable discussing with their coaches. This open-ended design of the questions gives the participants opportunity to explain their responses. The participants identities were kept confidential. The female student-athlete's

participants are distinguished by “student-athlete 1” and so forth, coaches were identified as “coach 1” and so forth. The interviews were recorded and saved on a password protected drive.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research the most important part of data analysis is to be true to the participants and put yourself in their shoes (Sutton, 2015). The survey was analyzed by descriptive statistics for each separate topic.

Thematic coding was used for both student-athlete interviews as well as the coaching interviews. This process was to transcribe them, then to organize the data under what research question they best answer. Interviews will be analyzed separately for each interviewee then gathered all together to categorize themes (Bushkovskiy, 2018). Highlighting important specific words in the interview’s answers will help with theme identification.

Summary

Chapter three discusses the demographics and criteria of the university chosen, as well as the way data was collected and processed. Chapter four will discuss the data recorded and themes that emerged from the data collection.

Chapter 4: Results Section

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to identify how female student-athletes can build stronger relationships with their coaching staff through improved communications. This chapter provides the results from survey and interviews.

The data analysis for the survey was done by the Qualtrics system. The data was then put into tables to show the overall information from the surveys.

Demographics

The survey was sent out to 147 female student-athletes, 31 surveys were returned. Six female student-athletes and five coaches of female student-athletes participated in the interviews. All participants were from a Midwest Division II NCAA college athletics program. Each female student-athlete interviewed has been a part of a women's athletic program for more than three years, and each student-athlete competed for a team where the coaching staff had at least male and at least one female coach on staff. The coaches chosen were from the same athletic program, and all were current coaches of female student-athletes. Of the coaches interviewed three were male and two were female. The chosen coaches interviewed consisted of three head coaches and two assistant coaches.

Survey Findings

The question that was posed to help identify if gender has a role in what topics a female student-athlete feels comfortable discussing with their coaching staff is that of the following:

RQ1: How does gender of coaches influence the topics shared between female student-athletes and their coaching staff?

Survey questions that aimed to answer the research question were:

Survey Question 6 (SQ6): For the topic of mental health, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Survey Question 7 (SQ7): For the topic of sickness/health, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Survey Question 8 (SQ8): For the topic of family, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Survey Question 9 (SQ9): For the topic of relationships, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Survey Question 10 (SQ10): For the topic of injury, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Survey Question 11 (SQ11): For the topic of friendship, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Survey Question 12 (SQ12): For the topic of academics, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Survey Question 13 (SQ13): For the topic of sport performance, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Survey Question 14 (SQ14): For the topic of goal setting, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Survey Question 15 (SQ15): For the topic of team/teammate conflict, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

In response to the survey, table 1 shows how the participants responded personal communications questions and table 2 shows how the participants responded to sport related

questions. The topics were also placed into two subgroups, personal topics, or sport related topic.

The topics were grouped as follow,

Sport Related: sickness/health, injury, academics, sport performance, and goal setting.

Personal: mental health, family, relationships, friendships, team/teammate conflict.

Table 1

Gender of Coaches influence on Personal Communications

Topic	Male Coach <i>N (%)</i>	Female Coach <i>N (%)</i>	Neither <i>N (%)</i>	Both <i>N (%)</i>
Mental Health	1 (3)	23 (74)	5 (16)	2 (6)
Family	2 (6)	13 (42)	0 (0)	16 (52)
Relationships	0 (0)	21 (68)	8 (25)	2 (6)
Friendships	1 (3)	20 (65)	3 (10)	7 (23)
Team/Teammate Conflict	0 (0)	18 (58)	4 (13)	9 (29)
Totals	4 (3)	95 (61)	20 (13)	36 (23)

Table 1 illustrates that 61% of female student-athletes feel most comfortable communicating personal topics with their female coaches. Then 23% of female student-athletes feel comfortable discussing with both male and female coaches. The topic of relationships recorded that 68% of female student-athletes are comfortable discussing the topic with their female coach and 25% discuss this topic with either coach. Family is a topic that athletes feel comfortable talking with coaching staff 52% responding that they are comfortable with both coaches and 42% with their female coach. For the topic of team/teammate conflict female student-athletes are most comfortable discussing with their female coach at 58%. Overall, when

the topic is personal female student-athletes are most comfortable discussing with their female coaches.

Table 2

Gender of Coaches influence on Sport Related Communications

Topic	Male Coach <i>N (%)</i>	Female Coach <i>N (%)</i>	Neither <i>N (%)</i>	Both <i>N (%)</i>
Sickness/Health	1 (3)	7 (23)	1 (3)	22 (71)
Injury	2 (6)	3 (10)	3 (10)	23 (74)
Academics	3 (10)	2 (6)	0 (0)	26 (84)
Sport Performance	3 (10)	7 (23)	0 (0)	21 (68)
Goal Setting	2 (6)	7 (23)	0 (0)	22 (71)
Totals	11 (7)	26 (17)	4 (3)	114 (74)

Table 2 illustrates that female student-athletes are comfortable discussing sickness/health (71%), injury (74%), academics (84%), performance (68%), and goals (71%) with both male and female coaches.

The two themes identified from this data was that of 1) topics that fell under “personal” female student-athletes were more comfortable communicating with the female coaches or neither coach and 2) topics identified as “sport-related” were more comfortable communicated with both coaches.

Interview Findings

The research question posed to help find what ways female student-athletes build relationships with their coaching staff was:

RQ2: What are the best practices female student-athletes use to build relationships with coaching staff?

Student-athlete interview questions that aimed to answer this research question were:

Student-athlete interview question 1 (SAQ1): What are some ways you have built relationships with coaching staff?

Student-athlete interview question 2 (SAQ2): How has your relationship with your coaching staff changed over the years?

Student-athlete interview question 3 (SAQ3): Do you feel you have a good relationship with your male coach? Why or why not?

Student-athlete interview question 4 (SAQ4): Do you feel you have a good relationship with your female coach? Why or why not?

Coaches interview question to answer this research question:

Coach interview question 1 (CQ1): How do you build an off the playing field/court relationship with your student-athletes?

In response to the SAQ1, “What are some ways you have built relationships with coaching staff?”, four of the six student-athletes (66%) stated that stopping in their coach’s office during the day to talk about non sport related topics was a main way they built on their relationships outside of their sport. Three of the six student-athletes stated that COVID has made it difficult to do so, because of regulations on who and when students have access to campus.

SA1 stated,

When we actually could stop in their offices at anytime between classes just having conversations with [Head coach], more of a human-to-human interaction rather than a coach to player one

The question SAQ3, “Do you feel you have a good relationship with your male coach? Why or why not?” gave an array of answers. Of the six, two stated they did not feel they had a good relationship, one saying that the relationship was strictly just an on the competition floor

relationship. Two of the student-athletes said they had an exceptional relationship and the last two student-athletes said they felt their relationship was good but not perfect. SA1 stated her personal growth by saying,

I think over the years for me personally, I have grown into a more mature person. Where [Male coach] and I can have tough conversations and talk about some pretty serious topics. I personally do not get offended by things I need to hear from [Male coach] either.

The final student-athlete question is SAQ4, “Do you feel you have a good relationship with your female coach? Why or why not?”, this question has a theme of comfortability in communication and topics to go to the female coach for. All six student-athletes mentioned some form of comfortability with their female coach in topics that do not revolve around sports. Three of the six (50%) student-athletes commented that the emotional understanding that the female coaches have with the female student-athletes make communication simpler and easier to build on the relationship. SA6 stated,

I feel emotionally [female coach] understands us more. For example [male coach] can say something that may come off as harsh or kind of rude or disrespectful and [female coach] can basically tell him how we as a women’s team took the comment. Just being a woman [female coach] understands us as women and makes communication a little bit easier with [male coach].

The coaching staff were asked, “How do you build an off the competition floor relationship with student-athletes?” this question was answered in a multitude of ways, but all mentioned that it begins in the recruiting process with the student-athlete. C2 made a comment about how they begin to build relationships,

I try to engage our athletes on a personal level, so that we are first humans and then develop the coach-player dyad from there. I make it a point to ask them everyday about something not [sport] related. I want them to know we understand the other responsibilities and stresses that they may encounter on a daily basis.

Each coach had their specific ways of building relationships but three of the five (60%) mentioned an “open door policy” to their offices and when COVID was not keeping athletes away from campus that student-athletes used those hours to talk about anything and everything non sport related. Three coaches (60%) stated that their relationships are built on trust and honesty with the student-athlete. The overall theme in this section was that of building trust over time.

The research questions to dig deeper into the challenges faced while communicating with coaching staff were the following:

RQ3: What are the challenges female student-athletes face building relationships with their male coaching staff?

RQ4: What are the challenges female student-athletes face building relationships with their female coaching staff?

The female student-athlete interview questions to answer this set of research questions were the following:

Student-athlete interview question 5 (SAQ5): what are challenges you have faced while building relationships with your female coach?

Student-athlete interview question 6 (SAQ6): what are challenges you have faced while building relationships with your male coach?

The coaches interview question that helped answer this research question was:

Coach interview question 2 (CQ2): Have you faced any challenges while building relationships with student-athletes? And what are those challenges?

SAQ5 “What are challenges you have faced while building relationships with your female coach?” three of the six (50%) student-athletes stated that past events handled by their female

coach made it difficult for them to trust or communicate with them for a period of time. Of the six student-athletes two (33%) stated that the control the female coach has is not much as the male coach. Discussing issues with the female coach meant that it was just to vent not for any real change on the field/court. One student-athlete identified the personalities can be intimidating making the very beginning of the relationship difficult. The comment was from SA2,

[Female coach] is slightly intimidating, she has a big personality to her. Like you do not want to be on her bad side, so sometimes it can be like intimidating confronting or talking with her. But once you break that barrier it is night and day; she would do absolutely anything for any of us.

SAQ6 asked “What are challenges you have faced while building a relationship with your male coach?”. Of the six student-athletes, three (50%) stated gender of coach being a factor to some challenges. SA3 was specific to what exactly was the most challenging part of building a relationship with their male coach such as,

I think that we think very differently, and I think my logic compared to his are very different just because of the generational difference. [male coach] is very old school and how he thinks and what he does it has worked for him, so it has never changed. Also, him being male and growing up in a time when males were not supposed to show emotion or be vulnerable. You can tell that there’s a difference there and me being a female we are expected to more emotional, so I feel like sometimes my concerns or issues are seen as me being emotional versus like something that he necessarily understands, so he kind of just shakes it off when he thinks it’s too emotional to deal with.

In response to CA2 “Have you faced any challenges while building relationships with student-athletes? And what are those challenges?” answers were across the board from coach to coach. Three of the five coaches (60%) stated that each student-athlete comes with their own set of challenges some more than others. Two of the five coaches (40%) made comments that gender difference can be a part of the challenge, as well as the generational difference. One male coach made it clear he has trust in his female coaches on staff to help him better communicate as well as deal with certain topics with the female student-athletes,

There are always challenges until a relationship of trust is established through honesty. Different personalities and attitudes are more challenging than others and take more time. I have two female assistant coaches that I completely trust our players going to for personal discussions about most anything. Now that I am older, I delegate my trust to them, and they get me involved if they deem necessary.

The findings from RQ3: “What are challenges female student-athletes face building relationships with their male coaching staff?” are that of the generational difference, differences in thought processes and the difference in gender. The differences between coach and athlete create a barrier that can be difficult to overcome. The findings from research question four, “What are challenges female student-athletes face building relationships with their female coaching staff?” include that of how coaches have handled past events and that of intimidation of the female coach creating a barrier.

Summary

Chapter four discusses the demographics of the group who provided the data, the way the data was collected, and the themes that emerged from the data. The next chapter will discuss the themes and findings more in-depth.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this research is to identify how female student-athletes can build stronger relationships with their coaching staff through improved communication. In this chapter we will discuss the themes found from the study as well as connect it to previously done research, the theoretical framework and leadership implications. This Chapter will also discuss recommendations for future potential research.

Discussion and Conclusions

The research questions posed to help identify how female student-athletes can build stronger relationships with their coaching staff through communication were the following:

RQ1: What are best practices female student-athletes use to build relationships with coaching staff?

RQ2: How does the gender of coaches influence the topics shared between female student-athletes and their coaching staff?

RQ3: What are challenges female student-athletes face building relationships with their male coaching staff?

RQ4: What are challenges female student-athletes face building relationships with their female coaching staff?

The theme emerged from RQ1 is being honest in overtime. The themes that emerged for research questions two were 1) female coaches are more trusted with personal topics and 2) gender has no effect to sport related topics. RQ3 theme was that of differences between coach and athlete. RQ4 brought the theme of past events and intimidation.

Theoretical Connection

An athletics team is an intertwined web of interpersonal relationships. Good team chemistry is built on by relationships between, coach to coach, athlete to athlete, and coaches to athletes. All having a crucial impact on the team success (Jowett 2017). As explained in chapter two, interpersonal trust building is an interactive process between two or more people (Six, 2007). The process involves being trustworthy in ongoing situations (Six, 2007). All student-athlete participant stated that their relationships with their coaching staff grew overtime, as well as many of the student-athletes mentioning being truthful in stressful situations helped them gain more trust from their coaches. The coaching participants all spoke about the relationship building starting early with the student-athlete during the recruiting process, the coaching staff also mentions building relationships off continuous honesty.

Building on the interpersonal relationship is a large part of a successful relationship, the uncertainty reduction theory explains how getting to know the individual better helps with the process (Redmond, 2015). The more information you seek out to better understand and know another individual personally the easier it is to build a relationship with the individual and to better communicate with them (Berger, 1988). Coaches in this study spoke about the opportunity's student-athletes must stop by and chat with the coaches away from the competition floor. All coaches mentioned an "open-door policy" for athletes to drop by and talk about anything they want. Most coaches also explained that at some point whether during individual meetings, pre practice or during travel they take the time to ask questions to their student-athletes that do not revolve around the sport. This taking away uncertainty that student-athletes may have when thinking about their relationship with the coaches. Student-athletes also mentioned the "drop-in hours" coaches have in their offices to come and talk about whatever it was they needed

to get off their chest. This time was also used to better understand and build on the relationships that were previously there.

The data collected from both the student-athletes and the coaching staff were grouped together and identified under the themes they identified. The first research question: “What are best practices female student-athletes use to build relationships with coaching staff?” revealed a theme of being honest consistently.

Research Question 1 Discussion

Theme 1: Being honest consistently

RQ1 brought up an array of answers on how female student-athletes build relationships through communication. Interpersonal trust building is the main contributor to building a strong relationship (Six, 2007). Building the interpersonal relationship is the ongoing process of being truthful and following it up with actions that support the truthfulness (Six, 2007). The participants in this study identified being honest consistently and overtime is what really grew the relationship between their coaching staff and themselves. Some situations make being honest with coaching staff difficult, especially when the student-athlete may have broken a team rule or done something to harm team chemistry. When consequences are on the line when telling the truth, many student-athletes find it difficult to want to tell the truth. Whether it be because they do not want to deal with the consequence or have the coaching staff have a change of opinion on you based on your actions. These situations make it hard or scary to be honest but being honest when it is difficult is the most important time to be honest. In these types of situations, it is better to be honest and come forward for your own actions than it is for caching staff to find out from an outside source. When the outside source brings up the incident to coaching staff before the student-athlete, it makes the student-athlete look like they are hiding something from the coach

or trying to. This harms the overall relationship because the student-athlete can break trust that the coaching staff may have had in them. Honesty followed up with actions that support honesty is the best way to build upon interpersonal relationships.

Discussions relevant to this theme:

SA3: Our relationship has changed a lot, because they probably know more about me than they should. But like learning to know people better and how they react to things or how they deal with things. I think there is a lot of trust that was built from having to be honest about situations or having to talk to them about things I have struggled with, from now to where it was in the beginning, I know that [coaches] have trust in me because they know that I am going to tell them the truth. Even if they are going to be mad, as long as I am truthful and honest and they are obviously truthful and honest with me it will go smoothly.

C3: During a normal year (Not COVID-19), we have several group meetings or team bonding activities for players to create a more personal atmosphere or environment to increase engagement without coaching or criticism and makes us more approachable. I also take advantage of many brief individual meetings with players before and after practices. In addition, there are many opportunities that present themselves during lifting, conditioning and individual workouts or film sessions to encourage open discussions about their academic progress and mental and physical well-being.

Research Question 2 Discussion

The themes that emerged for research question two were 1) topics identified as “personal” more comfortably discussed with female coaches and 2) topics identified as “sport-related” were comfortably discussed with both gender of coaches.

Theme 2: Topics identified as “personal” more comfortably discussed with female coach

The student-athlete and coach dyads are delicate ones that require effort from both individuals (Jowett, 2011). When it comes to the athlete coach dyad Jowett (2011) found that same gender dyads typically have a higher satisfaction rate between the athlete and the coach. Of the topics listed under "personal" four of the five topics were most comfortably communicated with their female coach. The one topic under this grouping that was comfortably discussed by

both genders was “family”. The personal topics typically come with empathetic feelings, which according to Jowett (2010) males are more assertive and dominant, they may lack or be seen to lack empathy. This is supported by the data from the survey that personal topics were more freely communicated with female coaches, which also falls under the same gender dyad.

Personal communications between student-athletes and coaches can be difficult because there is a line to what is appropriate to be discussed between coach and athlete. Although there is this line it does not take away that sometimes coaches are the closest confidant for student-athletes. This makes it much more important for student-athletes to be able to comfortably come to a coach to talk about personal topics. When speaking about personal topics talking with someone of the same gender makes it easier because they can have similar experiences that makes it easier to openly discuss personal topics. Coaches often lend an ear for student-athletes to vent or get things off their chest when the relationship is established. Getting to that point takes more time when there are barriers like a gender difference.

Theme 3: topics identified as “sport-related” comfortably discussed with both genders of coaches

Communication between student-athlete and coaching staff is important to a successful team experience (Jowett, 2017). The simpler the communication the better the outcome. Student-athletes normally can discuss sport-related topics confidently with coaches by the time they reach collegiate athletics. By this point they have had opportunities to practice these conversations with prior coaches. These conversations are usually easier because they are driven by facts and or statistics. When talking with coaches about playing time, skill level, or academics it is usually driven by proof of the issue or success. There is nothing hidden or no uncertainty on how one feels. These conversations do not normally come with any surprises; therefore, the

conversation is easy going. The data shows that gender has little to no effect on “sport-related” topics being discussed freely with coaching staff.

Research Question 3 Discussion

Theme 4: The differences between coach and athlete

This theme came up when talking about RQ3 and the differences between female student-athletes and male coaches. The differences between coach and athletes can be a multitude of things, in this research the differences that stand out the most are that of gender, generational difference and the difference in thought processes. The athlete- coach dyad is a very delicate one as stated earlier. When female student-athletes are emotional, it may be seen as overly emotional or unnecessary. Some male coaches struggle with identifying the real issues when speaking with their female student-athletes because they cannot get past the emotions they may be showing. This can create a barrier that makes it difficult for female student-athletes to freely communicate with their male coach. The student-athlete may go into it already having the feeling that they will not be listened to at face value because of the emotions that may be brought up by the conversation. Female student-athletes go through many obstacles that are specifically because of their gender and often male coaches are unable to understand it on any other level than the outside looking in.

Discussions relevant to this theme:

SA3: I think we think very differently, and I think my logic compared to [male coach] are very different just because of the generational difference and he’s kind of old school and the way he thinks about things and does things because its worked for him, but I am [age] and I only know what I know and what works for me, so I just think that’s a big thing but also just him being a male and the kind of generation he grew up in. It’s more of toxic masculinity but like men are not supposed to show emotion or be vulnerable. Not that he is or is not, but you can just tell that we are expected to be more emotional, so I feel like sometimes my concerns or issues are seen as me being emotional versus something that he actually understands. The way he kind of like shakes things off to the side that are seen as more emotional because he’s never had to be a girl.

C5: With there being such a large age gap between myself along with the gender differences, common ground with the student-athlete is more difficult to achieve. Taste in music, technology, socially cultural differences are all challenges. I also feel the club background the student-athletes are coming from has caused a challenge as in they are not being held accountable in their actions as much. I feel this is due to the club model, which is money driven.

Research Question 4 Discussion

Theme 5: Past events and intimidation

This theme was brought up by multiple participants when answering RQ4. As stated by Lafreniere (2011) intimidation can lead an athlete to feel less friendly and turn angry towards their coach. Intimidation creates sport anxiety for the student-athlete (Baker, 2000). There are many events that can happen through the course of a year that student-athletes may feel it is too much to handle on their own, therefore they ask the help of their coach. This can incite a positive or a negative response depending on what the coach can or cannot do in the situation. When the coach must make decisions for more than one student-athlete that is involved, they are deciding they believe is best for all involved. This can leave some of the student-athletes feeling their needs or wants were not considered, which can then create animosity towards the coach. Coaches do what they believe will be the best for the overall team, not just the few individuals. The barrier between the all-female dyad is intimidation. Intimidation inherently inside females can create a barrier to overcome when a female student-athlete is building relationships with their female coach. The constant fear of whether or not the female coach will judge you, is a difficult barrier to overcome.

Discussions that led to this theme were:

SA1: Some challenges? I guess there's been some. Big situations that we have brought [female coach] into. That personally I do not think she handled the best so that kind of challenged how I thought about her for a little bit and, like the way it felt she was judging

us on how we were handling the situation. [female coach] always talked about how she wants to be there for us and that certain time, but then, when the time came to it there was like now there is no point talking to her about it, but it was nice that she is offering to be like that close with us and letting us feel comfortable with her knowing that stuff.

SA2: I would say [female coach] as an example she is slightly intimidating, she has this big personality to her. Like you do not want to be on her bad side so sometimes it can be like intimidating confronting her, but I do think when you break that barrier like it is just night and day, like she would do absolutely anything for any of us.

C2: I think a challenge is when an athlete does not meet the standards set by the program, academically, or break a team rule, or cutting corners at practice/lifting. Not only does it affect our coach-player relationship, but it also affects teammates.

Conclusions

After conducting surveys and interviewing six female student-athletes and five coaches, reviewing of literature, and analyzing the findings from chapter four, conclusions the researcher decided on from the study are:

1. Relationships between coaching staff and female student-athletes are built over time and by consistently being honest.
2. Gender of coach has some effect on what types of topics female student-athletes have when it comes to communicating freely with coaching staff.
3. The main contributing challenge when building relationships between female student-athletes and male coaches is the gender difference, generational difference, and difference in thought processes.
4. Female student-athletes may be intimidated by their female coaches.

All student-athletes have communication barriers they must overcome when building a relationship with their coaching staff. Female student-athletes and their coaching staff have found ways that specifically work for their coach athlete dyads.

Leadership Implications

This study amplifies the need for strong leaders within athletic teams. The communication barriers between student-athletes and coaching staff are ones that can be overcome if there is strong and confident leadership. Participants identified best practices female student-athletes use to build on those relationships, the types of topics female student-athletes are comfortable discussing with their male coach and their female coach, as well as the different challenges faced when building relationship with a male coach and a female coach.

Conclusion 1: Relationships between coaching staff and female student-athletes are built over time by consistently being honest.

Implication: Good leaders are strong at building interpersonal relationships with anyone. Good leaders also understand that a relationship does not just happen. It takes hard work and consistency to maintain a good relationship. Student-athlete leaders in sport have direct communication with the coaches, and this communication is crucial to the successfulness of the team. Positive player coach relationships are strengthened by good communication skills. Female student-athletes need strong female leaders to serve as female leader role model. Teaching female student-athletes how to be comfortable and confident communicators will help them become better leaders.

Conclusion 2: Gender of coach has some effect on what types of topics female student-athletes have when it comes to communicating freely with coaching staff.

Implication: Female student-athletes have shown to have a stronger empathetic accuracy than male athletes and both male and female coaches. Understanding gender can influence topics an athlete will discuss freely with a coach shows the importance it is to have a female on staff if not a head coach for women athletics. Having an all-male staff working with a women's team can be

detrimental to the team's overall success, and the student-athletes overall well-being. Having open communication with coaching staff is crucial to being a strong leader. When an athlete is uncomfortable speaking with a coach because of their gender, the coach may not be aware of the problem. Female student-athletes need leaders they can comfortably discuss all topics with.

Conclusion 3: The main contributing challenge when building relationships between female student-athletes and male coaches is the gender difference, generational difference, and difference in thought processes.

Implication: Coaches as leaders of any gender have a responsibility to the athlete to help them gain confidence in their sport as well as their leadership skills away from the competition field/court. Good leaders learn from other good leaders and collaborate. Female student-athletes often have male coaches, which in the athletics world is normal. Female student-athletes need to learn the differences between them and be able to affectively overcome the barriers. The differences between most male coaches and female student-athletes begin with the difference in gender. The gender difference can create a tough situation because typically it is implied that women are more emotional than men. Other differences that happen often with any gender coach is that of age difference, the generational difference, and the communication differences. The uncertainty that comes with these differences make communication difficult. Ways to overcome this is by getting to know one another away from the competition floor/court. Another important leadership aspect is having mutual respect and being able to agree to disagree.

Conclusion 4: Female student-athletes may be intimidated by their female coaches.

Implication: Intimidation is a tactic some coaches use to get the most out of their athletes, but it may cause more harm than positive results. Within athletics, intimidation between coach and athlete can be detrimental to trust and confidence. If used incorrectly by the coach, intimidation

can cause an athlete to have angry feelings towards the coach as well as self-doubt. Good leaders have strong confidence when it matters most. Effecting a student-athletes confidence can hinder their leadership skills. Leadership is also about making tough decisions that others may not agree with. Coaches handle situations differently and there can be times where the decision does not make sense to the athlete. Which can cause some distrust or uncertainty between coach and athlete. Overall coaches try to make the best decision in the moment that satisfies everyone and everything as best it can. Each person involved may have a difference of opinion which make those decisions extremely difficult. A good leader needs to be able to make decisions and stand by them, while understanding that it may not make everyone happy but needs to be done.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research is needed to identify challenges female student-athletes face while building relationships with coaching staff to determine how female student-athletes build relationships. Research could explore the relationships with head coaches and assistant coaches, based on gender. Further research could also investigate higher levels of communication between female student-athletes and coaching staff.

Conclusion

In conclusion there are challenges female student-athletes must overcome to build better relationships with their coaching staff. Challenges like gender, generational differences and intimidation of coaches are all barriers that can be overcome by the student-athlete with the help of being truthful consistently over time and stopping in coach's offices to spend time communicating away from the competition field/court. Gender can affect the topics that female student-athletes feel comfortable freely communicating with their coaching staff.

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Appendix A

Survey

Female student athletes and their coaching staff

We are interested in understanding the topics in which female student-athletes feel comfortable discussing with specific gender of coaching staff. For this study, you will be presented with information relevant to determining the topics female student-athletes feel comfortable discussing with their coaching staff. First you will be asked a few questions to gain knowledge on your coaching staff dynamic, then you will be given a topic and you are asked to choose for that specific topic are you most comfortable discussing it with your male or female coach, and if neither that will also be an option, as well as both. Your responses will be kept completely confidential.

The study should take you around 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study. The Principal Investigator of this study can be contacted at Hannah McGlone at hmcglone13@winona.edu

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary.
- You are 18 years of age.
- You are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation at any time for any reason.

I consent, begin the study

I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Q3 What is the gender of your head coach

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

Q4 What is the gender of your assistant coach?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

Q5 If you have a second assistant or graduate assistant what is their gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

Q6 For the topic of MENTAL HEALTH, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

- Male Coach
- Female Coach

Both

Neither

Q7 For the topic of SICKNESS/HEALTH, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Male Coach

Female Coach

Both

Neither

Q8 For the topic of FAMILY, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Male Coach

Female Coach

Both

Neither

Q9 For the topic of RELATIONSHIPS, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

Male Coach

Female Coach

Both

Neither

Q10 For the topic of INJURY, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

- Male Coach
- Female Coach
- Both
- Neither

Q11 For the topic of FRIENDSHIPS, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

- Male Coach
- Female Coach
- Both
- Neither

Q12 For the topic of ACADEMICS, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

- Male Coach
- Female Coach
- Both
- Neither

Q13 For the topic of SPORT PERFORMANCE, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

- Male Coach
- Female Coach
- Both
- Neither

Q14 For the topic of GOAL SETTING, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

- Male Coach
- Female Coach
- Both
- Neither

Q15 For the topic of TEAM/TEAMMATE CONFLICT, which coach are you most comfortable discussing the topic with?

- Male Coach
- Female Coach
- Both
- Neither

Consent Forms

Survey Consent Form:

Relationship building communication between female student athletes and coaching staff.

What is this research study about?

This research study is designed to find the topics in which female student-athletes feel comfortable discussing with their coaching staff. We hope to learn best practices to communicate and build relationships with coaching staff as a female student-athlete.

All data collected for this study is anonymous and will not be linked back to any of your identifying information.

What activities will this study involve?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey online, that will ask you a series of questions that you will answer according to your best knowledge, as well as list some topics that coincide with your own personal beliefs and feelings. The survey will take no more than 15 minutes.

How much time will this take?

Participation will require approximately 15 minutes.

Are there any risks for participating?

There are no appreciable risks from participating in this study.

What are my rights as a participant?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop at any time. You may decide not to participate or to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. A decision not to participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with Winona State University or the Leadership department or the Athletics department.

Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this study?

If you have any questions about the study or your participation, contact, Hannah McGlone at (630)-624-0533 or hmcglone13@winona.edu
Theresa Waterbury at (507)-457-5607 or twaterbury@winona.edu

Who can I contact if I have questions about my rights as a participant?

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact Human Protections Administrator Brett Ayers at 507-457-5519 or bayers@winona.edu. This project has been reviewed by the Winona State University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects.

If you agree to participate, responding to the survey questions constitutes your consent.

Participation is voluntary and you may stop participating at any time.

Interview Consent Form:

Relationship building between female student athletes and coaching staff

What is this research study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to find the topics in which female student-athletes feel comfortable discussing with their coaching staff. We hope to learn best practices to communicate and build relationships with coaching staff as a female student-athlete.

What activities will this study involve?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of question which will then be used to find trends within the study. The interview should take between 20 and 45 minutes, subject to how lengthy answers tend to be.

How much time will this take?

The study will begin on February 1st, 2021 and end on March 1st, 2021. Estimating 20 to 45 minutes for the interview.

What will be done with the data collected during this study?

The information you give will not be identifiable, it will not be able to be traced back to you.

Meaning that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. All information you give will be handled confidentially.

All information collected will be stored under a password protected file on a portable drive.

When the study is completed, the data will be held onto to ensure safety, then be deleted after its use has been fulfilled.

Are there any risks for participating?

There are no appreciable risks from participating in this study.

Are there any benefits for participating?

There are no appreciable benefits from participating in this study.

What are my rights as a participant?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may stop at any time. You may decide not to participate or to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. A decision not to participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relationship with Winona State University.

Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this study?

The main researcher conducting this study is Hannah McGlone, a student at Winona State University. The faculty advisor for this study is Theresa Waterbury, (507)-457-5607, twaterbury@winona.edu. You may ask any questions you have about the study and your participation now or later during the study by contacting, Hannah McGlone at either of the following, by email at hmcglone13@winona.edu or by phone at (630)-624-0533.

Who can I contact if I have questions about my rights as a participant?

If you have questions or concerns about your participation in the study, contact the Human Protections Administrator Brett Ayers at 507-457-5519 or bayers@winona.edu. This project has been reviewed by the Winona State University Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Agreement to Participate

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. Your signature indicates that the study has been explained, you have had an opportunity to ask questions, and you have decided to participate.

Your signature: _____ Date _____

Your name (printed): _____

Signature of person obtaining consent: _____ Date _____

Name of person obtaining consent (printed): _____

Prospective Participant Email

Hello prospective participant,

My name is Hannah McGlone. I am a student from the department of Educational Leadership here at Winona State University. I am conducting an anonymous survey about the topic's female student-athletes are comfortable discussing with their coaching staff. I am looking to find whether the gender of the coach makes a difference when it comes to what topics female student-athletes will discuss with their coaching staff. You are eligible because you participate in a female athletic sport.

There is an interview portion to this study that if you wish to volunteer for, please contact me using either my email or phone number listed below. Interviews will be held separate from the survey and will be used to investigate the best practices female student-athletes use to build relationships with coaching staff. There is no need to participate in the interview if you do not want to, participation of survey does not require you to participate in the interview portion.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will follow the link at the end of this email. To participate, you must be 18 years or older. The survey is completely voluntary, and you can stop participation at any time during the survey. If you have any questions about the study my contact information is below.

Thank you very much.
Sincerely,

Hannah McGlone
(630)-624-0533
Hmcglone13@winona.edu

Link to Survey:

https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3lXepu7PihtyRDw

Interview Questions

Student-athlete Interview Questions

SAQ1: What are some ways you have built relationships with your coaching staff off the playing field/court?

SAQ2: How has your relationship with your coaching staff changed over the years?

SAQ3: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your male coach?

SAQ4: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your female coach?

SAQ5: What are some challenges you have faced building a relationship with your male coach?

SAQ6: What are some challenges you have faced building a relationship with your female coach?

Coaches Interview Questions

C1: How do you build an off the competition floor/field relationship with your student-athletes?

C2: Have you faced any challenges while building relationships with student-athletes? What are those challenges?

Appendix B

Interview Transcriptions

Student-athlete 1

Researcher: Okay, what are some ways, you have built relationships with coaching staff off the Court?

SA1: off the Court. I guess well does individuals count? I can say that doing workouts with them and having small talk. And kind of growing it from there um. When we actually could go in their offices not COVID season, stopping in their office and just having a normal conversation with them, talking to them as a human not so much as a coach.

Researcher: How has relationship with your coaching staff changed over the years, so from when you first either were recruited or stepped on campus to where you are now.

SA1: How it changed, I will definitely say it grew stronger for sure Okay, and then I guess just the more time that we spend together the more we're going to end up knowing about each other and just being able, on that comfort level. I know like right away it's like you want them to like you. Like I am not trying to impress them, but just kind of like impress them. But once you earn their trust and stuff, you can kind of be more laid back in a way with them, but still have respect.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your male coach.

SA1: Oh yeah, I would say so. I think over the years for me personally I've grown. To be more mature in a way, where I can actually have conversations with him. I'd say our relationship is pretty good. We're able to talk about some pretty serious stuff and just not be so offended by it.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your female coach why or why not?

SA1: I would say so, yes. Well, she knows a lot about me I feel. I'd say so she knows enough about me to like make it personal but not enough for us to be like kind of weird level of friendship, I guess.

Researcher: What are some challenges you have faced building a relationship with your female coach?

SA1: Some challenges? I guess there's been some. Big situations that we have brought her into. That I personally don't think she handled the best so that kind of challenged how I thought about her for a little bit and, like the way she was like judging how all of us were handling that situation. She always talked about how she wants to be there for us and that certain time, but then, when the time came to it there was like now there's no point talking to her about it but it was nice that she is offering to be like that close with us and letting us feel comfortable with her. Like knowing all that stuff.

Researcher: What are some challenges, you have faced building a relationship with your mail coach?

SA1: I don't think there were that many challenges with coach like he's just a very up-front man tells you how it's going to be. He'll listen to your input, but he'll just tell you how it's going to be I guess I've never really had issues with that. Of course I'm going to be mad at him for some things but that's usually in my control but I don't think our relationship has ever been that challenged.

SA1: Well, I guess the one instance the strikes but I feel like those were just brush on the road right away live in learn.

SA1: One relationship I had with a male coach he and I did not have a good relationship. him because he was just swearing, he never taught like he literally just yelled the entire time. And I just did not personally enjoy him at all like I it ruin when it honestly ruin that summer basketball for me just because of how awful like he taught us well coaching like I'm sure it's not normal.

Researcher: Thank you so much.

SA1: you're welcome, I hope I helped somewhat

Student-Athlete 2

Researcher: Alright, so to start the first question is what are some ways, you have built relationships with coaching staff off the playing field.

SA2: My head coach specifically, we have a very good relationship we always have, but I would even say like it all started I would say, like started like through the recruiting process just really getting to know each other, then and honestly, just like on a personal standpoint, like him, being more of like a father figure even cause obviously mom and dad aren't here, but he can act like a dad when we're away from softball. And I know we I there's just times i'll just go and talk to him and his office just to like talk to him, and I think a lot of people don't have that same relationship that I have with him and i'm very fortunate for that. But I truly feel like I could just talk to him about whatever so they're great people I love them.

Researcher: So the next one, is how has the relationship with your coaching staff changed from first year from recruiting to where it is now?

SA2: um it's definitely gotten a lot stronger, and I even just think about like this COVID year like coming back for a fifth year. I think they would always want me to come back, even if this happened, four years ago, but when this happened, like last year in the heart of our season like. I just felt like he was like I felt wanted, and he wanted me to come back he wanted me to like continue being like an impact on this team. So definitely gotten stronger we've gotten to know each other more obviously even just more like a personal standpoint. I watch his kids I watch his

dog like just stuff like that so. He knows a lot about my family and if I ever need anything I feel like I can just go talk to him about in vice versa, good.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your male coaches why or why not.

SA2: Do I think, personally I connect better with a male coach and I would have female coach. Just because I would say that's like the type of athlete I am. I've had female coaches, in the past and they've been great to me but I'm just something about girls I don't know. But yeah nothing's ever like weirder it, I think it could go a lot different like it could be uncomfortable having no coaches feeling like you could talk to them about certain things, but with my coaches like I don't feel that way at all.

Researcher: Do you feel you've had a good relationship with your female coaches why or why not?

SA2: yeah she and back to like the whole like mom figure like anytime any I feel like I could speak for my entire team, right now, like anytime anyone needs like stupid things like. I need help talking in my Jersey, or like I need it, or like personal questions like, she always been like that mom figure and always like someone that we always feel like we can go to. she's very respected and, obviously, was a very good player here at went on a long time ago, but I just think she's a huge role model for a lot of like us younger women looking up to her now.

Researcher: What are some challenges, you have faced building relationship, if you have had challenges with female coaches?

SA2: um. I would say, like using coach as an example she's a slightly intimidating she has a big personality to her. Like you don't want to be on her bad side so sometimes it can be like intimidating confronting her, but I do think when you like break that barrier like it just like night and day like she would I know she would do absolutely anything for any of us. It's just nice knowing having like that female like there in the back corner to so if you ever do feel like you can't talk to, I cannot with my male coach about something it's really nice, knowing that like you have her.

Researcher: last question, what are some challenges you faced building relationship with male coaches?

SA2: um I would say, Personal issues outside of softball sometimes it's hard to go and like talk to coaches about things that aren't related to sports and I've been very fortunate that I've played since I've been here, but I could see being very hard for people who didn't get that same opportunity that I've gotten to like feel that they can talk to coaches outside of softball because it's all about trying to impress them. You know, say, the right things you don't want to like come off I don't know ignorant or anything like that so I've been very fortunate like I said don't ever feel like I could never not go to them, but I could see how other people would feel that way.

Researcher: Thank you and thank you.

SA2: Of course, have a good day.

Student-athlete 3

Researcher: What are some ways that you have built relationships with coaching staff off the Court?

SA3: I mean we spent a lot of time with them so like outside of practice and traveling with them like obviously we're all living our own lives, outside of it and our coaches have shared a lot of their experiences with us. So, like they we know a lot about them, which helps us like understand them more and then that kind of brings into more like sharing. Our experiences and what not with them, plus they like recruited us and stuff they already knew a lot about us coming in and they see us like interact with each other as college students versus them being like full grown adults, I know coach is like a dad from cracking dad jokes all the time stuff so. Like off the Court relationships are pretty good it's kind of like a family situation in that sense.

Researcher: How has your relationship with your coaching staff change from the moment you stepped on campus to where you are now?

SA3: Well, it's changed a lot, because they probably know a lot more about me than they should. But like I know you like learning to know people better and like how they react to things and how they deal with things. And I think that there's just a lot of trust that was built from like having to be honest about situations or having to go on and talk to them about like things that I was struggling with or having to hear things from them that were hard for me to hear about basketball and or things off the floor, so I, I know, for now, like will now versus from the beginning, like, I know that they both have trust in me a lot more because. They know that I'm

going to tell them the truth, like after four years there's not really anything you can kind of hide or keep them so it's kind of more just like a trust thing, even if I think they're going to be mad as long as I'm being truthful and honest and they're obviously truthful and honest with me like things are going to go smoothly, I suppose, but that's the biggest thing, just like trust and being comfortable having them know all this stuff about me my personal life.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your male coach why or why not?

SA3: I would say, do I think coach is an exceptional male coach like I've had a lot of female coaches, but I have had a couple male coaches and I have never really had like a bad experience with a male coach but coach being a grandpa and having kids and just like he's been doing this for a long time he's been like knows what it is like to be in situations with a lot of college girls, he is like that grandpa which, like I don't have any grandparents so it's kind of nice to get the dad jokes and stuff away from home. I like the old people things he's not terribly old but like the old people things you kind of miss out on. I would say that, like we have pretty good relationship.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your female coach why or why not?

SA3: yeah, she knew more stuff about me than I even know coming in, because of my HS coach. So that's fair but she's also been through the program so like she understands it more than anyone really could like any coach that even coaches that have played somewhere else, because she literally played for the same coach and has been through all of that and gets the process and how things work and she does try really hard to kind of make sure I'm doing well outside of

basketball like we got on walks together, so I could explain or vent about my life and the beginning of the year, when things were kind of just messy, especially with COVID and stuff. Always trying to be someone that like has a door open and obviously when COVID wasn't a thing, she was the person that always had her door open just dropped by to talk to her. Just sit in her office and talk about anything or get some candy or something so I actually missed that.

Researcher: Next one, if any, what are some challenges, you have faced building a relationship with your male coach?

SA3: I think that we think very differently, and I think my logic compared to his are very different just because of the generational difference and he's kind of old school and the way he thinks about things and does things because it's worked for him. But I'm 21 years old, and I only know what I know and what works for me, so I just think that's a big thing but also just him being a male and kind of generation he grew up in, It's more of I don't want to say, like toxic masculinity but like it was a thing when he was probably younger that like men are supposed to not show emotion or be vulnerable and this and that and not saying that he's not but it's you can just like tell that there's a difference there and me being a girl like we're expected to be more emotional, so I feel like sometimes my concerns or issues are seen as me being emotional versus like something that he necessarily understands and his way like he kind of like shakes things off to the side that are seen as more emotional because he's just like never really had to will be a girl obviously whatever to do that you know.

Researcher: Our last one, what are some challenges you face, if any, building a relationship with your female coach?

SA3: I would say in talking to her, I know she gets a lot more stuff the one thing with our male coach is that he does forget about things really quickly and the thing with our female coach, is that I get more nervous she's going to be thinking about whatever happened, or whatever I tell her for a lot longer like I know she worries about us more than he probably does because, like she is concerned about our well-being and he is too, but like I know she thinks about that a lot more so it's kind of like that. Things that I would tell her like I don't want to stress her out or for her to be mad at me or to like think that she's mad at me after I tell her something because you can't really tell sometimes like she just like having a bad day or she pissed at me or am I just overthinking this that's like more of the thing like because I know that she does really understand that more than our male coach does so it's more of if she's going to keep it in her mind longer than he would.

Student-athlete 4

Researcher: Okay, so the first one is what are some ways you have built relationships with coaching staff off the floor?

SA4: The biggest one was before COVID-19, because their offices we're always open so in between classes and stuff going to their offices and just like chatting even kind of. Other than that, probably like individual meetings where they don't talk about sports kind of when they just like ask how you are.

Researcher: How was your how has your relationship with your coaching staff changed from the moment you stepped on campus to where you are now?

SA4: It's been kind of rocky. We have definitely grown more of a respect for each other, at first I didn't love coach but we get each other's personalities more because we've had so many blow ups that we've talked it through, so now we respect each other more and are better at communicating with each other, because we get how each person talks kind of personally.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your male coach why or why not?

SA4: yeah I'm kind of blunt person and so at first we didn't get along we clashed heads a lot, but then, once we like talked it out and figured out a way to like talk to each other more it's good I'm not best friends, I wouldn't go talk to him about like stuff other than our sport but, like the relationship we have is fine for being coaching player.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your female coach why, or why not?

SA4: Yes, I was closer with our other female coach before she left, I feel like part of that was what I said before, like, I was on campus lot, so I spent like hours in her office. It was really easy to talk to her about like anything. I'm so close with this coach but it's just different because I didn't spend as much time on campus and spend as much time like in her office but yeah.

Researcher: What are some challenges, you have faced while building relationship with your male coach?

SA4: Well, he's kind of hothead and gets mad pretty easily and I get mad pretty easily so that did not mesh super well. But yeah, that was probably the hardest.

Researcher: What are some challenges you faced while building relationship with your female coaches.

SA4: Oh, wow I think the only one, I was really close with our other female Head coach so, the new one, I was kind of mad, like I was so close with my other coach that I would call her up or talk to her if I wanted to talk to someone instead of going to the new our new female coach so it's kind of just me not really branching out as much.

Student-athlete 5

Researcher: The first one is what are some ways you have built relationships with coaching staff off of the floor?

SA5: um I would say, a building relationship also floor would be just like, I have done, like knowing when they had certain things going on, or like something that was scary in their life happening like just shoot them a text and be like hey like thinking of you are like hope everything went well like let me know how it went or something like that on those lines, just to be like show that you also care about them, and that obviously they care about you, but yeah.

Researcher: How has your relationship with your coaching staff changed over the years, from the moment you stepped on campus or were being recruited to where you are now?

SA5: i'm definitely a lot as coming in, I just was scared and timid to talk to anybody honestly, but now I can fully say like they have like taught me how to communicate, I guess, to them and to other people and to not be shy and not be scared so it's changed a lot, I guess, if that's answering the question correctly.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your male coach why or why not?

SA5: um yeah I would say both of my male like all my coaches are male except for the one and so I would say just usually having male coaches it's not that different to me, so it kind of just I'm just so used to it it's nothing that is different. Establishing relationship with them it's just you

know you're like you know this, that boundaries obviously like with any coach even if it's female you just know the boundaries and what not to cross and want to cross so yeah.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your female coach why or why not?

SA5: yeah um yes, I do feel like I have a great relationship with them, I feel very open to communication with them more about personal things, I guess, even with my male coaches, I still not very comfortable with that, but it's just nice to have effective or, to be able to relate to what I could be going through or certain things like that so yeah it's really nice to have both.

Researcher: What are some challenges you faced building relationship with your male coach?

SA5: I guess, maybe sometimes just not understanding. I mean, most of them do understand because they all have daughters or some type of female figure in their life but, just like the normal things about like female athletes have to go through like experience. I've really struggled with that with any of my coaches, to be honest, so I don't really have an example of that but that'd be just the one thing that I feel like if I didn't have a female coach to talk to that would be kind of a struggle for me, but yeah.

Researcher: What are some challenges you've faced building relationships with your female coaches?

SA5: I don't really have a lot of challenges, I guess, maybe that sometimes just building relationship as off the field like on the court maybe they're not as hard as I would want them to be as like a male coach would be I guess so maybe not as they're not really motivating and I know they're talking about, but maybe they're just not as in my face as a male coach.

Student-athlete 6

Researcher: Alright, so the very first question is what are some ways, you have built relationships with coaching staff off the field.

SA6: I mean, personally I don't have that close relationship with my coach which is kind of a bummer because I know that a lot of other female athletes do, I mean teams that I've talked to a pretty good relationships with their coach and I'm friends with a few girls in the basketball team and they seem to be very close with their coach. I mean my coach doesn't really ask much about us, which is pretty like disappointing it's definitely gotten better. To be completely honest with my coach I have minimal personal relationships with him, like the only thing that we've connected over is soccer and he tried to join the [military branch] and I'm in the [Military branch] but yeah it's actually like pretty short answer it's like I don't really have a relationship with my coach.

Researcher: How has your relationship with your coaching staff changed over the years from when you first be recruited to where you are now.

SA6: Well, I was recruited by a different coach the first coach that was here and then he left, and then we had the one which wasn't good obviously. Now we have coach, and I mean he has made more of an effort to kind of share his own personal life and like to you know professional level, which I feel like that's super important and that's what's changed since sophomore year to like my senior year now is like just kind of bringing us into his personal life without it like you know crossing a line, but then like we kind of get to know him as a human, not just like as a coach and

I feel like that's really important, because then like when he makes decisions and stuff we can kind of be able to understand it, because we understand him as a person, and how he, looks at things, and so I think sharing his personal life like he's had two kids since I've been on the team. We get to be involved in those lives has, I think, really pushed me from no relationship to like a minimal relationship, which is a step in the right direction.

Researcher: Did you feel you have a good relationship with your male coach why, why not and you've kind of touched on it a little bit.

SA6: yeah, with my male coach I mean to an extent, but I feel like I would be close to my female coach but that's pretty obvious because she kind of relates just more and she's younger and she played women's soccer in college, so I feel like that's more you know, have a connection but yeah I mean I don't really feel like once you have a connection with my coach, unfortunately.

Researcher: Do you feel you have a good relationship with your female coach?

SA6: yeah, I mean yeah because she I feel like emotionally understands us more like my coach can kind of come off harsh sometimes and that's just because he doesn't think about women's emotions and then my assistant coach will be like hey like that did not come off how you meant it, so I think that she helps like the emotional standpoint, and I mean yeah just being a woman, you should understand it does help like i'm so glad honestly that we have that female assistant, right now she's on maternity leave because she has had kids and like it's just been my male coach and like he's fine alone, but I miss our female coach so much because it's just like having that

woman presence, just like it really is important, I feel like. It almost makes like communication, a little bit easier it's like okay he's not understanding what I'm saying, can you help me explain it to him better.

Researcher: what are some challenges you face building relationship with your male coach?

SA6: I honestly feel bad for him, I feel like he came in at a disadvantage and it's kind of gotten better, and I think that's also because of the previous seniors who actually had all the previous coaches like, I never played for that coach. I just was recruited by him, I think that they lost so much trust, because of the horrible way he left, and so I think that they didn't give him a chance, and so I feel I allowed myself to just like get over that situation and understand that, like that he's here to stay and then you know, like I said he made an effort to like have meetings with us, every few weeks and we didn't talk about anything related to soccer he just was like what are you guys doing and stuff like that so he's making an effort, I think it's more just like people are having trouble connecting with him, based on just like the way he communicates and he's a male and stuff like that, but the biggest thing was just getting to know his personal life more so we could understand him more.

Researcher: The last one, is what are some challenges you faced, if any, building relationship with your female coaches?

SA6: The only thing that I've had a problem with our female coach is just she's the assistant coach and in the end our head coach does make the final decision, and I mean I don't know

behind the scenes, but I can't really say but it just kind of seems like that he definitely has the final say like will say his input, but if he thinks this one way he doesn't really be flexible and it's I mean that's The only thing is that, like it makes it hard for her because she can't really like do anything about some situations.

Researcher: I know, obviously, because you had female GAs, was it easier or harder when you had a female GA around to talk to?

SA6: I think it helped like in the sense that, like we felt more comfortable like complaining about certain things like our season that. Like though a lot of things were going wrong, and so, like the frustrations and stuff I felt more comfortable going to her, because I knew like she knew I was just like venting like it wasn't something that was like anything to bring to the coaches. But I mean I think I wasn't as close as I was with our previous GA. I was closer to my GA my freshman year. She was like just kind of like a mother figure like I looked up to her a lot and I looked up to, so I think it was more like because they're closer to our age it's more like a role model than like the coaches, which are more like authority figures. I think that, like is a really good like bridge is to like they can give us their insight of what they just experience coming right out of college, so that help yeah.

Coach 1

Researcher: How do you build an off the competition field relationship with your student-athletes?

C1: At the risk of sounding dismissive of question #1, I actually do not try to build an “off the competition field relationship” with the athletes I coach. There a few reasons for that, but it also has to do with my belief and understanding of human relationships in general. As a male coaching female athletes, from the time I started until this very day I have never wanted my motives questioned. I have never wanted suspicion about “too friendly” relations with players. That does not mean I try to dehumanize the individual, quite the opposite in fact. But as I stated about my belief in human relationships, I don’t think you can ever really separate the coach/player nature of my relationship with the players I coach. I absolutely want to be available to assist every single one of the young ladies I coach in other aspects of life, whether that be academic, social or friends and family, but whether I am talking to a player about softball or a possible career choice, ultimately the coach/player relationship is also a mentor/mentee relationship. So I try to cultivate a relationship with players that is not simply based on my authority as a coach, I do think the relationship is still always centered around me being a mentor or advisor more than any kind of peer friendship.

Researcher: Have you faced any challenges while building relationships with student-athletes?

And what are those challenges?

C1: Almost every challenge we face as coaches really comes back to the challenge of relationships because even game strategy still can test the relationship a coach has with players. So instead of trying to isolate one or two particular challenges, I actually think everything we do as coaches needs to be looked at through the prism of the challenge of building good relationships with the players we coach. As with all human relationships, sometimes it is just easier than at other times. There are some players that starting with the very first recruiting conversations seem easier than others. When it is more difficult, especially with a current member of the team, it is important to recognize what are the impediments to the relationship, and especially be willing to try and recognize when I, as the coach, maybe the bigger impediment than the player. That doesn't mean to just give in to a player in order to build a better relationship because that would be a false building process. However, it is important to always try and figure out exactly where a player is psychologically and emotionally when we are having difficulty. There are some things that are certainly beyond the pay grade and expertise of a coach when trying to assess young people psychologically and emotionally, but there is no way to build a trusting relationship if those things aren't considered.

Coach 2

Researcher: How do you build an off the competition floor relationship with your student-athletes?

C2: I think building a relationship outside of competition is vital to attaining the trust needed between a coach and player. I try to engage our players on a personal level, so that we are first humans and then develop the coach-player dyad from there. I make a point to ask about something outside of softball each day to each of our pitchers. I want them to know that we understand the other responsibilities and stresses that they may encounter on a daily basis. I also try to ask a lot of questions about their previous experiences with other pitching coaches or past experiences that they feel have made them successful-- I want to cultivate that they have been very successful to get to the college level, and we want to keep all that is good with their previous preparation. Then I start to infuse the pillars of our success at [university]. For example, with pitchers, we begin to break down each pitch and rebuild with a mesh of their style and our mechanics. I attempt to provide equal amounts of positive feedback with areas of improvement, and I make a point to be straight forward with my coaching style from the beginning. I feel feedback should be deliberate and simple, and I ask for their suggestions on solutions/ improvements. Ideally, my goal is to mentally prepare our pitchers to be alone in the circle and have to "fix themselves" if things start to go bad. I want them to have the tools to self-assess, and not depend on me to "fix them." This is mostly because I am not at every single game, so they need to have confidence in themselves and our pitching staff as a whole to lean on in times when I may not be there.

I also believe in empowering our [Playing position] to be leaders. I use the philosophy that there are 2 things every human wants: to be needed and to be noticed. I try to provide this for each [position] as often as possible. I also empower them to meet these 2 wants for EVERY one of their teammates! The need to develop the trust of every player in order to get the best production and to achieve the greatest cohesion as a team. I hope that our staff of [position] would say that I treat them as equal partners in our pursuit to win at the game of [sport] as well as the game of life.

We also have at least one time per week that we meet in the locker room or some location to just talk. Some of this is performance related, but it is also an opportunity for them (or me) to share things that may be going on in our personal lives. Keeping that human connection and compassion really cements the coach player relationship. And as an assistant coach, I feel that this is a huge part of my role! I have to reach out as a human to all of our players and allow for them to also be human. Whereas the head coach(es) can focus on the athlete side more to help each player reach their full potential. I also believe it helps to have at least one female coach on staff when working with female athletes!

Researcher: Have you faced any challenges while building relationships with student-athletes? And what are those challenges?

C2: Yes, of course. Some relationships form with little to no effort, especially when a player's aspirations align with our expectations. But there are certainly pitchers that I have not been able to reach a full connection with. One of the biggest challenges can be playing time or getting an

opportunity to pitch. For players that don't feel they are getting what they deserve, there is tension and sometimes they need to blame me/coaches for their situation. With [position], we can usually reframe their role so that they continue to grow and compete-- such as making sure a freshman understands that there may not be an opportunity to "start" a game this season, but that relief [game time] are just as important.

Another challenge is if a pitcher doesn't buy in to our style/ mechanics. There are always changes to be made when moving from one level to the next (high school-- college), but some [position] believe that their skill set is good enough and they don't need to make changes. It takes some time for maturity to develop and for the growth mindset to take hold. So there is room for these relationships to evolve over the course of 4 years as well!

And I think the other challenge is when a [position] does not meet the standards set by the program (ex: academically or breaking team rules or cutting corners at practice). Not only does this affect our coach-player relationship, but it also affects her teammates. A [position] needs her team to want to go to battle for her... if she is doing what she is supposed to, her teammates start to pull away and their belief in her decreases (especially for females!!). A [position] is an automatic leader on the field, so they are held to a high standard. If this cannot be upheld, all relationships suffer.

Coach 3

Researcher: How do you build an off the competition floor relationship with your student-athletes?

C3: During a normal year (not Covid), we have several group meetings or team bonding activities for players to create a more personal atmosphere or environment to increase engagement without coaching or criticism and makes us more approachable. I also take advantage of many brief individual meetings with players before and after practices. In addition, there are many opportunities that present themselves during lifting, conditioning and individual workouts or film sessions to encourage open discussions about their academic progress and mental and physical well being.

Researcher: Have you faced any challenges while building relationships with student-athletes? And what are those challenges?

C3: There are always challenges until a relationship of trust is established through honesty! Different personalities and attitudes are more challenging than others and take more time! I am blessed to have two female assistant coaches that I totally trust our players go to for personal discussions about most anything. Now that I am older, I delegate my trust to them and they get me involved if they deem necessary.

Coach 4

Researcher: How do you build an off the competition field relationship with your student-athletes?

C4: The relationship building begins during the recruiting process. As we go through the process, we try to build relationships with them where we learn more about them than just who they are on the softball field. From their Junior year in high school until the time they arrive on campus, we continue to text and e-mail and send letters as well as have them on campus for visits. This is the beginning of the relationship building, and the basis of where we truly get to know our kids away from the game.

As they arrive on campus and begin their time at [university], we obviously want to continue to see that relationship grow. We have always had an "open door" policy with our team, and every player handles that differently. Some kids come in only when they need something or need to address an issue on the field or off. Others are more social and stop by more often to talk. Ultimately, it is always my hope that our players come to my office to talk WITH me, not TO me.

The relationships we build are built over time and built on trust and openness. I have always said to our players that I would rather you be really mad at me for being honest with you instead of mad at me for leading you on or trying to tell you what you want to hear. The Standards of our Program are built around communication and honesty. Conversations are much easier to have when you know you can be open and honest and expect the same from the other person.

Some of what we do is listen. . . . some of what we do is offer a shoulder to cry on. . . some

of what we do is sit in the mud with them when they need it. I don't tell them "I know how you feel" or "It will get better" . No conversation is easy and no conversation is the same as the other, but as long as we can be honest and open, the relationships continue to grow.

Researcher: Have you faced any challenges while building relationships with student-athletes? And what are those challenges?

C4: There are constant challenges. Sometimes the biggest challenge is you can't help. . . it just gets too deep or its too much for what I can do or be for them. At times the challenge is getting them to be open to listening to hard truth. The biggest challenge is knowing you can't always fix it. Whatever "it" is that day that brings them in.

Coach 5

Researcher: How do you build an off the competition floor relationship with your student-athletes?

C5: I believe this starts in the recruiting process, as I get to know the Student-Athlete and make sure she is a good fit for the program. Once on campus, meeting with the Student-athlete away from the court is an important function, continuing to building the relationship.

Researcher: Have you faced any challenges while building relationships with student-athletes? And what are those challenges?

C5: With there being such a large age gap between myself along with the gender difference, common ground with the Student-athlete is more difficult to achieve. Taste in music, technology, socially cultural differences are all challenges. I also feel the club background the student-athletes are coming from has caused a challenge as in they are not being held accountable in their actions as much. I feel this is due to the club model, which is money driven, which means they have to keep the player (and her parents) happy. Creating relationships and overcoming the challenges that we face is crucial to success on the court.