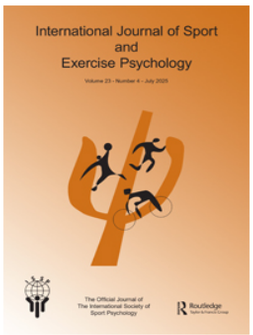

International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology

ISSN: 1612-197X (Print) 1557-251X (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rijs20

Conceptions of the coach-team relationship in the views of youth team sport coaches and athletes

Samuel J. Booth, Paul R. Appleton & Joan L. Duda

To cite this article: Samuel J. Booth, Paul R. Appleton & Joan L. Duda (05 Jun 2025): Conceptions of the coach-team relationship in the views of youth team sport coaches and athletes, International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, DOI: 10.1080/1612197X.2025.2512552

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2025.2512552

Published online: 05 Jun 2025.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPORT AND EXERCISE PSYCHOLOGY
https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2025.2512552

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Conceptions of the coach-team relationship in the views of youth team sport coaches and athletes

Samuel J. Booth[a], Paul R. Appleton[b,c] and Joan L. Duda[a]

[a]School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences, College of Life and Environmental Sciences, The University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK; [b]Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Faculty of Science & Engineering, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK; [c]Institute of Sport, Manchester Metropolitan University Institute of Sport, Manchester, UK

ABSTRACT

While the coach-athlete relationship (CAR) has been central to understanding relational dynamics in sport, it does not fully capture the complexity of coaching in team environments. This study explored the existence of the coach-team relationship (CTR), aligned with broader coaching science that views coaching as a relational and context-dependent practice. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with coaches and athletes from competitive youth team sports in the USA. Reflexive thematic analysis revealed that the CTR was perceived as separate from the CAR and characterised by three core dimensions: passion, support, and commitment. These manifested positively (harmonious passion, integrated support, and attached commitment) or negatively (diminished passion, divided support, and detached commitment), shaping the overall team dynamic. The findings offer a foundation for advancing research into team-level relational processes and relevant information for applied practitioners working in team sport settings.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 24 July 2024
Accepted 23 May 2025

KEYWORDS
Coach; team; athlete; relationship

Coaching is widely recognised as a multifaceted practice involving active engagement, interaction and communication between a coach and an athlete. An important aspect of the process of coaching is the quality of interactions that coaches and athletes have with each other. Côté and Gilbert (2009) conceptualised coaching effectiveness as an integrated application of professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge, converging to enhance athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character. However, in team sports, effective coaching should also capture the coach's ability to draw upon and communicate their knowledge in the context of a team sport environment and in regard to the realisation of team goals (Lyle, 2020). Clearly, the coach has a central role in the evolution and development of their team.

The coach creates a foundation for success via behaviours that influence their team's performances and the sporting experiences of the athletes being coached (see Hague

CONTACT Samuel J. Booth sxb1531@student.bham.ac.uk

et al., 2021). König (2013) postulates that when coaching athletes, two main factors are fundamental to coaching performance within team sports. The first is teaching professional competence, which includes conditional, technical, tactical, and strategic factors related to the team's training and competition. The second factor is leadership skills, which include team shaping, conflict resolution and communication.

The manifestation of leadership skills is a critical aspect of coaching practice. When coaches adopt an interpersonal and relational approach when coaching an athlete, they can, in turn, support athletes' beliefs of collective efficacy (Hampson & Jowett, 2014). In terms of developing cohesive and efficacious teams, a coach's ability to establish and maintain a personable connection with each athlete while congruently nurturing the collective as a unified entity has been identified as a vital quality (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016).

At the heart of coaching lies the coach-athlete relationship (CAR) (Jowett, 2017), a purposeful partnership between a coach and an athlete that becomes the glue that holds sports teams together (Jowett & Felton, 2014). The CAR is defined as a social situation/exchange that is continuously formed by the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of the coach and the athlete. That is, a coach and an athlete share a mutually and causally dependent relationship, where one person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours can influence and be influenced by each other (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). Over the last twenty years, Jowett and colleagues (see Davis et al., 2024) have interviewed and surveyed athletes and coaches of all levels across the globe to unravel the complex and elusive nature of the CAR. The results of this considerable body of research provided the basis for the development of the 3 + 1Cs model of CAR quality, as reflected by the following four interpersonal dimensions: closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation.

- Closeness reflects the interpersonal feelings of coaches and athletes that largely encapsulate an affective bond through their mutual respect, trust, appreciation and liking for one another.
- Commitment reflects interpersonal thoughts of coaches and athletes of maintaining a close (as opposed to distant, detached, unfriendly) relationship over time despite "ups and downs".
- Complementarity reflects coaches' and athletes' interpersonal behaviours of leadership (reciprocal complementarity) and cooperation (corresponding complementarity).
- Co-orientation reflects coaches' and athletes' level of interdependence in terms of similarity and understanding concerning their views of the quality of their relationship.

These four dimensions provide operational meaning to the quality of the CAR when viewed as positive (rewarding, supportive, motivating) or negative (disappointing, unhelpful, uninspiring) and are assumed to be the medium that influences both coaches and athletes to express their desires and fulfil their individual, collective, and/or mutual ambitions (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016).

The quality of the CAR, as defined by the constructs of the 3 + 1Cs model, has been highlighted as an important factor for athletes sporting experiences such as skill development and performance as well as psychosocial development and wellbeing (e.g., Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Frost, 2007; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Jowett et al., 2007). Investigations into the factors related to the

CAR have been explored such as gender (Jowett & Clark-Carter, 2006; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012; Gosai et al., 2021), personality traits (Jackson et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2012), harmonious passion (Lafrenière et al., 2008; Jowett et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2020), and coach behaviour (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Felton & Jowett, 2013; Jowett et al., 2017a, 2017b; Jowett & Arthur, 2019), individual/ team sport differences (Rhind et al., 2012), satisfaction (Davis et al., 2019; Jowett & Nezlek, 2012), motivation (Adie & Jowett, 2010), and self-efficacy (Jackson & Beauchamp, 2010). Additionally, high-quality CARs have also been found to be a predictor of important group variables such as team cohesion (a sense of belongingness in the group) and collective efficacy (a sense of being valuable and effective as a collective) (see Evans et al., 2012). Conversely, low-quality CARs have been associated with athletes' perceiving an ego-involving climate (Olympiou et al., 2008), using avoidant attachment styles (Davis et al., 2013), and developing maladaptive relationships (Philippe et al., 2020).

Investigations informed by the CAR model have studied the effects of relational coaching dynamics within team contexts. These studies have revealed significant divergences in the perceived quality of the relationship between coaches and athletes in team sports, as opposed to those participating in individual sports, suggesting a nuanced relational spectrum contingent upon the sporting discipline (Jowett & Shanmugam, 2016). For instance, coaches in individual sports showed greater empathic accuracy, understanding their athletes' feelings and thoughts more accurately, compared to coaches in team sports. The empathetic accuracy of team sports coaches declined as the team or group increased in size (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009). Additionally, it was discovered that coaches' communication styles varied when interacting with an individual athlete as opposed to addressing a team or group collectively (see Lorimer & Jowett, 2009; Rhind et al., 2012). In a study by Rhind et al. (2012), individual sports athletes were more likely to have greater relational satisfaction with their coaches compared to athletes and coaches from team sports. This was attributed to the former's greater opportunities for one-on-one interaction (Rhind et al., 2012).

There appear to be distinctions between athletes' perceptions and experiences in individual sports versus those participating in team sports. Van de Pol and Kavussanu (2011) reported differential links between achievement goals and athletes' responses depending on whether they participated in an individual or team sport. Wachsmuth et al. (2022) asserted that coaches in team sports should prioritise team goals over individual goals and consider the team as a whole when assessing team composition. Additionally, Rhind et al. (2012) reported that closeness, commitment, and complementarity (3Cs) were significantly more strongly correlated for team sport athletes than individual sport athletes. This research implies that, at the team level, there appears to be an interdependence between athletes' individual views and team views regarding the quality of their relationship with their coach. Existing research findings also intimate that athletes' individual and team perspectives may differ regarding their assessment of the 3Cs in their relationships with their coach.

While the CAR has offered valuable insight into the interpersonal dynamics between coaches and individual athletes, researchers (e.g., Evans et al., 2012; Jowett, 2017; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007) have increasingly recognised the need to expand relational research to better reflect the complex, dynamic and social nature of team sport environments. The field of sports coaching science has evolved to consider coaching as

more than a series of dyadic interactions; it is now viewed as a relational, context-sensitive, and culturally situated practice (Jones & Wallace, 2006; Lyle & Cushion, 2016). Within this view, the coach's role involves managing group dynamics, creating a shared team culture, and fostering psychological safety across an entire squad, not just through one-on-one connections. Thus, there is growing momentum for understanding how coaches relate to their teams as collectives, prompting a shift in attention toward the coaches' relationship with their team. Investigating this concept (coach-team relationship) moves beyond traditional relational frameworks and aligns with broader coaching literature that emphasises leadership, communication, athlete-centred approaches, and social complexity within team sport settings (Cushion et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2025). This study contributes to that shift by exploring the CTR as a distinct yet interdependent layer of relational functioning in youth team sports.

In the context of this study (i.e., teams participating in competitive interscholastic team sports), a team is understood as a group of individuals who interact interdependently toward a shared objective within a structured sport environment (Carron & Eys, 2012). Teams such as volleyball, soccer, lacrosse, and basketball involve high levels of task interdependence, dynamic role execution, and coordinated effort, which require ongoing communication, shared leadership, and relational functioning (Cotterill, 2012; McEwan & Beauchamp, 2014). These sports are also characterised by real-time performance demands, which heighten the need for trust, cohesion, and clarity of roles among athletes and between athletes and their coaches. Acknowledging the nature of team sport settings helps to clarify why conceptualising a coach-team relationship (CTR) is not only logical but necessary. Unlike individual sports, these team settings demand that coaches manage both individual relationships (CARs) and the broader collective relational climate, which has implications for motivation, performance, and psychosocial development.

Moreover, all teams are inherently unique, shaped by their specific composition, culture, leadership, and contextual dynamics; no two teams' function identically, even within the same sport or level of play (Carron & Eys, 2012; Wagstaff et al., 2017). Known interpersonal differences, such as the CAR gender pairings, can also influence the quality and nature of interactions within teams, with research showing that dynamics may shape communication styles, perceptions of support, and relational outcomes (Jowett & Nezlek, 2012; Kavanagh et al., 2020). These factors further highlight the need to explore the coach-team relationship within specific team environments that reflect the diversity and complexity of real-world sports settings. This uniqueness underscores the importance of studying the CTR within specific team contexts, such as those features in this study, to capture the nuanced relational processes that may not be generalisable across all team settings.

An interdependence between athletes' views within teams has been found in regard to other group concepts such as collective efficacy (Stajkovic et al., 2009), team cohesion (Bruner et al., 2014) and the perceived motivational climate (Weiss et al., 2021). In a noteworthy endeavour to examine the motivational climate's influence on individual and team-level outcomes, Gano-Overway et al. (2005) found that 202 athletes from 25 volleyball teams held shared perceptions within teams regarding the motivational climate. This study underlined the existence of interdependencies between individual perceptions of the coach-created motivational climates' impact on intrapersonal, interpersonal and group outcomes at both the individual and team levels.

Pulling from and extending the existing literature, the present qualitative study explores whether there is a conception of a coach-team relationship (CTR) and whether the CTR is deemed not to be the same as considering individual CARs formed within a sport team. This research aims to build upon Jowett and colleagues' (e.g., Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Frost, 2007; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Jowett et al., 2007) original work that proposed the 3 + 1Cs of the CAR model and arrive at a deeper understanding of (1) the existence (and relevance) of the CTR, (2) the characteristics of the CTR, and (3) the emotions, thoughts and behaviours perceived by coaches and athletes in team sports when the CTR is positive or negative.

Methodology

Epistemology and study design

The present research was underpinned by a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, which emphasises that there are multiple realities as opposed to one objective single truth (Crotty, 1998; Smith & Sparkes, 2020). While participants may have held similar views, it was also recognised that they may have held divergent ones, shaped by their individuality, ideologies, values, and lived experiences, all of which can influence interpretation and meaning.

Establishing a clear epistemological and ontological foundation was essential in guiding all aspects of the study design and analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress that while their thematic analysis method is theoretically flexible, it is not philosophically neutral. They advocate that researchers must explicitly position themselves within a theoretical framework to ensure coherence and integrity in the analytic process. Similarly, Smith and Sparkes (2020) argue that epistemological and ontological assumptions significantly shape the questions asked, the relationships developed with participants, and the meaning derived from the data. Articulating these foundations enhances reflexivity and transparency, which are cornerstones of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

In line with this philosophical stance, the current study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology to generate insights and illustrate the coaches' and athletes' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours related to conceptions of the CTR in team sports. It was acknowledged that researcher transference would inevitably play a role in the research process, an underscoring consonant with the axiological assumption of qualitative research highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2016), whereby the researcher's values and positionality are seen as integral to meaning.

The use of a qualitative descriptive design was particularly well-suited to semi-structured interviews, enabling a nuanced exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions (Kim et al., 2017). This approach also provided the necessary flexibility to adapt and evolve ideas throughout the data analysis process, reflecting the iterative and interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry (Neergaard et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews are especially compatible with a relativist ontology, as both acknowledge the existence of multiple, co-constructed realities shaped by individual perspectives, social interactions, and contextual factors. Rather than seeking a singular objective truth, this method embraces the richness and complexity of lived experiences consistent with the subjectivist epistemology underpinning this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Personal and professional positionalities

At the outset of this study, the lead researcher held faculty and coaching roles within the institution. Their role naturally led to developing rapport with some of the coaches and athletes during the interviews. For interviewees with less rapport, the interviewer utilised their skills in counselling, such as humour, mirroring, and prompt techniques, to build a comfortable rapport with the participants, thus enabling a more fluid dialogue (Prior, 2018). The lead researcher was positioned to provide a unique perspective regarding their insider's view (emic) and outsider's view (etic) to allow for a deeper understanding of the institution's social and cultural norms, potentially further facilitating rapport and conversation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In addition to their roles, they upheld a researcher role relating to their PhD studies, driven by their interest in the concept of the CTR, developed through exchanges with their lead supervisor, previous academic studies in sport psychology, and their own experiences in elite sport. They also held certifications in mental performance consulting and performance psychology.

Participants

The participants (coaches and athletes) were required to be members of a team sport, have at least two years of experience coaching/participating on that team, and have been in season for a minimum of six weeks. A total of 23 individuals from seven different team sports (girls' volleyball, basketball, soccer, and lacrosse; boys' basketball, soccer and lacrosse) participated in the study. These individuals comprised twelve high school varsity coaches (7 male, 5 female; age 18 + years, range = 36–57 years) who dedicated their non-coaching professional time to teaching and eleven student-athletes (4 male, 7 female; age 18 + years, range = 18–19 years). The research team felt that the in-depth exploration of the concept of the CTR and its characteristics required input from both athletes and coaches engaged in a variety of high school team sports. To achieve this, the recruitment process entailed the involvement of a specific independent school sample of coaches and athletes to characterise and conceptualise the CTR within a single sporting community.

Procedure

Before commencing the research, ethical approval was granted from the lead researcher's university in the United Kingdom. The lead researcher also required approval and informed consent from the Athletic Director at the independent school to recruit coaches and student-athletes for participation in this study. Following an outreach email to the athletic director describing the study and its purposes, an in-person meeting was scheduled to explain the study's concept, purpose, and intent further. Additionally, the lead researcher shared that interviews with coaches and student-athletes from team sports would be audio/video-recorded, then transcribed, and used for scientific purposes while maintaining anonymity and doing all possible to protect all participants and the institution from being identified. Following the Athletic Director's approval, coaches and student-athletes were invited to participate via email, describing the study's purposes, participation requirements, and anonymity. Upon each participant's

voluntary agreement to be involved in the study, interviews were scheduled at their convenience, and each participant provided their consent via an encrypted e-signature informed consent form at least 24 hours prior to their scheduled interview. Due to the timing of this study (during the Covid-19 pandemic, August 2021-May 2022), the options of masked and socially distanced in-person or virtual video interviews were offered to the student-athletes and coaches to meet the health and safety protocols adopted by the independent school. The secure office of the lead researcher was used when the interviews were carried out in person or virtually (via Zoom).

A semi-structured interview was chosen to guide the interview process and to generate a natural exchange of ideas to yield novel, rich and nuanced insights into the nature and characteristics of the CTR (Nelson et al., 2014; Smith & Sparkes, 2020). The interview guide was constructed to build from and potentially extend Jowett's (2007) 3Cs + 1 model first to ascertain whether the team sport coaches and student-athletes felt that the CTR exists and then, secondly, to understand the nature (quality) of the CTR in their views. The affective/emotions (closeness), cognitive (commitment), and behavioural (complementarity) aspects/characteristics/features of this relationship were explored. With the aim to further examine potential differentiation between concepts/conceptualisations, questions were posed to determine whether coaches and athletes distinguished and described experiences of CTRs that vary in their quality (positive versus negative and vice versa).

The flexibility of interview guides allowed the lead researcher to begin the conversation by asking the participants a direct closed-ended question on whether, in their opinion, the CTR existed (e.g., "Do you consider there to be a separate relationship between the coach-team versus the relationship between a coach and individual athlete?"). The directness of adopting closed-ended questions created a short and direct response, followed by moments of silence and slight awkwardness, where the interviewer used humour as a response, which allowed for natural conversation to follow. The participants were then asked to expand on their initial responses and asked whether they thought the CTR was important to them, the team, or the coach (e.g., "Do you think the coach-team relationship is important to the team?"). They were also asked to describe their thoughts, feelings, and emotions regarding the CTR as a generalised concept (e.g., (b) "Let's think about the team's perspective …. do you think teams feel like they have a relationship with the coach as a group/collective, beyond or separate from how they relate to their coaches as individual athletes?") as well as when positive (e.g., "How do you act or behave when the coach-team relationship is positive?"), and negative (e.g., "Now, let's talk about the features or characteristics of a coach-team relationship that has poor quality/ is negative?").

Interviews ranged in length between 38 and 122 minutes, with the coach's interviews ranging from 51 to 122 minutes and student-athlete interviews from 38 to 91 minutes. Notes were taken during the interviews, and as part of personal reflections, these notes supported the data analysis process and accounted for inferences relating to body language, voice tone and facial expressions. The audio/video recordings remained secured for seven days before being transcribed to allow time for the participants to withdraw their responses from the study. Once transcribed, the audio/video recordings were securely destroyed, and the written transcripts were stored under the anonymous identification number allocated to each participant on the university's secure online platform.

Data analysis

The method of thematic analysis (TA) was applied due to its wide use within the social, behavioural, and applied sciences (clinical, health, education) and its alignment with epistemology and research questions. The purpose of using TA was to develop patterns of meaning ("themes") to deliver a descriptive and interpretative conceptualisation of the data represented by "the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). To this extent, a "reflexive" version of thematic analysis (reflexive TA) was the approach chosen due to its theoretical flexibility for drawing out knowledge from coach and student-athlete experiences, views and perceptions of the CTR and their thoughts, feelings and behaviours characterised by it (see work by Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2021a, 2021b, 2023). In line with the "+1" element ("co-orientation") of Jowett's (2007) 3 + 1Cs conceptualisation of the CAR, separate reflexive TAs were conducted for the coaches and athletes to enhance the quality of data and reflect any potential congruence of or distinctions in perceptions. This study utilised five theoretical assumptions of the analytic process within reflexive TA: (1) inductive analysis, where the data content directed coding and theme development; (2) semantic analysis, where coding and theme development reflected the explicit content of the data and did not extend past what the coaches and athletes shared; (3) latent analysis, where the authors looked beyond the coding to understand the underlying meaning, (4) realist analysis, where assumed realities became evident within the data, (5) interpretivist analysis, where the authors attempt to make the assumed realities understandable to others.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide were followed to generate patterns of meaning across the dataset pertaining to the coaches' and athletes' perceptions of the nature and characteristics of the CTR. Additionally, Braun & Clarke (2021a) identify ten core assumptions of reflexive thematic analysis that highlight implications for rigour during the thematic development. For example, the third assumption highlights that "good coding can be achieved alone or through collaboration. If collaborative coding is used to enhance understanding, interpretation, and reflexivity rather than to reach a consensus about data coding" (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, p. 8).

The initial phase was crucial in the data analysis process, where meanings were created (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999), and the lead researcher became immersed in the video/audio recordings, transcribing the interviews, reading, re-reading, and re-listening/watching to understand the depth and breadth of the content. At this stage, intelligent verbatim was employed in the transcription of the interviews to eliminate the inclusion of excessive repetitions or verbal fillers such as "um", "like", and "you know". As such, we were able to share the participants' quotes in a more readable manner. Additionally, by employing an intelligent verbatim approach, the lead researcher was able to account for indications of laughter, nonverbal cues (such as sighs and body language), voice demeanour, tone inference and word prevalence – features not afforded solely within transcribed editions of each interview (McMullin, 2023).

The ensuing phases generated codes and coding (phase two) for the plethora of patterns formed from the ideas within phase one, which were recorded/stored using Nvivo software. Each code identifies a feature within the data that interested the lead researcher and guided (a) the conceptualisation of the CTR, (b) what is the nature of the CTR, and (c)

emotions, thoughts and behaviours by coaches and student-athletes in team sports when this relationship is perceived positive and when it is negative. While the initial coding was led by the first author, preliminary codes and observations were discussed within the research team to challenge assumptions, identify alternative interpretations, and ensure the coding scheme remained reflexive and inclusive of multiple perspectives (Tsai et al., 2016). These early inter-author dialogues helped to surface differing epistemological positions and to iteratively refine the coding framework beyond the sole influence of the lead researcher.

Phase three entailed an analysis of the codes formed during phase two with the determination to sort and combine the different codes into potential themes. These codes created an early-stage thematic map of codes, themes, and sub-themes to outline the relationships between them. At this stage, the thematic map was shared and discussed with the broader research team in a series of collaborative meetings. These inter-author discussions served as a check against individual bias and enriched the conceptual development of themes, aligning with calls for transparency and intersubjectivity in qualitative inquiry (Broom et al., 2009; Tsai et al., 2016).

Phase four applied two review levels to refine the themes collated during phase three to justify, combine, or nullify those themes. The first of the two levels reviewed the extracts for each code to determine whether they formed a coherent pattern. The themes that formed a coherent pattern moved forward to a review (second level). The second level considered the validity of individual themes concerning the entire data set to ensure the accuracy of the thematic map. At this stage, many iterations of reflection, reviewing, organising, and re-organising the entire data set allowed for creating new/missed codes from the earlier stages to interpret the data more accurately. These iterations were not undertaken in isolation; instead, they were grounded in rigorous inter-author discussions. Through these dialogues, the research team interrogated each theme's coherence, revisited transcript data collaboratively, and deliberated over interpretive divergencies. This reflexive practice enhanced both analytical depth and credibility, acknowledging that qualitative data analysis is inherently shaped by collaborative interpretation (Tsai et al., 2016).

The focus of phase five was to define the primary and secondary themes within the data by defining and refining the essence of each theme through supported evidence (coach and student-athlete exemplar quotes). Once themes were established, structured discussions were conducted to examine their salience and interpretive coherence. Dissenting views were actively explored before arriving at a consensus, a process that contributed to the trustworthiness of the findings. The collaborative interpretation, grounded in team members' disciplinary and applied expertise, ensured that findings were not solely reliant on a single perspective, in line with the best practice in qualitative research transparency (Broom et al., 2009; Tsai et al., 2016).

In the case of the coaches and student-athletes, participant validation was recognised through informal participant follow-up conversations to develop the trustworthiness of the generated themes (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This supported the lead researcher in reflexively engaging with and critically considering their construction of knowledge, thus helping to increase the quality of the data analysis (Smith & McGannon, 2018). This process also facilitated the creation of a visual representation (phase six) of the data (see Figure 2) that captures the nature and characteristics of the CTR in the views of team sport coaches and student-athletes.

Results

Identification of the coach-team relationship

Data generation identified that all the coaches (n = 12) and athletes (n = 11) perceived the existence, importance, and conceptualisation of the CTR. Findings revealed, however, that the CTR was not a known or considered concept to all participants prior to participating in this study (when they were specifically queried about this). The interview schedule allowed each participant to describe how they interpreted the CTR with one coach, stating:

> I don't know that I ever thought about it until you asked the question … but yes … all of my athletes have separate agendas, separate experiences, and separate needs and oftentimes, those come into conflict with each other, and that's a very complicated landscape … And so, I am definitely conscious of thinking about the team's direction and the team's goals as the standard by which I make decisions. C7-VGS

Separate interpretations of the CTR further revealed the concept as a "unique", "nuanced", "complex", and "dynamic" relationship that plays an integral role in the operations of the team "as a whole" and drawing attention to the team direction, team goals and an overall unified sense of "us as a team":

> I think a coach would agree that there is a coach-team relationship. I also think that they would probably agree that they have different relationships with different athletes … Everyone recognises those moments where the coach is talking to the team; they're talking to the team as a whole, and I think that those are the moments when we are trying to be one body and one mind as a team. I think the coach-team relationship is a really important aspect in creating the unified "us" as a team. So, I think as a team becomes more unified, they probably understand that this [coach-team] relationship with the coach becomes more prominent. SA8-VGS

Most participants shared their perceptions of the CTR in contrast to their understanding of the interpersonal relationships between a coach and each athlete (i.e., the coach-athlete relationship). When queried particularly about the latter, the CAR was perceived as more "personal", more "particular", and "individually oriented" toward and impacting both athlete and coach roles, goals and expectations.

> I think it's important because understanding your role in that team is the biggest thing you know if your roles [are] not clearly defined and you don't clearly accept and embrace it, you can't possibly be looking at that bigger picture, and I think that's a job of the coach is to make everybody feel that they're important in their role because that's what makes the team perform as a unit. C10-VBS

Whereas the CTR was perceived to be a more generalised, team-focused, performance – and success-oriented concept which also impacts athlete and coach motivation but is interdependent from other interpersonal relationships, as described by an athlete from a lacrosse team:

> I would say that the coach-athlete [relationship] is a lot more personal, and the coach-team [relationship] is a lot more goal-oriented. So, the coach-to-athlete is a lot more personalised, obviously, and it is a bit more tailored to a specific person's goals and abilities and what their weaknesses and strengths are. And I would say, a relationship from a coach to a team is a lot more enthusiastic and optimistic and a lot more generalised, and I feel that's really when a

> coach has an ability to either really inspire a team or tell them, hey, this is what we really need to work on as a group. SA3-VGL

Coaches and athletes congruently referred to the prominence and importance of "good individual relationships" between each other within their respective teams. However, the CTR was viewed as being "a separate thing altogether" and potentially "more important", as stated by the Varsity girls' basketball head coach:

> The team piece is honestly the most important thing to me because I'm always going to have good individual relationships, but the team, the team is a separate kind of creature, a separate thing altogether … Man, in itself, it's so nuanced and so complex on so many levels, and there's so much that can be done to influence and shape it, and it has to start literally from the moment you finish cutting your team. C6-VGB

In terms of success produced on the field, another coach shared the view that identifies the CTR to be at least as important, if not more important than the CAR, by bearing influence on intra-team dynamics individually and collectively:

> If we're talking about success in terms of how you produce on the field, that coach-team relationships are going to probably be at least as important, if not more important [than the coach-athlete relationship] because you're talking about everybody versus one or two players. C9-VBS

Congruent coach and athlete interpretations of the CTR provided foundational evidence to suggest that the CTR serves as a significant relational concept within youth team sports. Furthermore, the results support the plethora of research studies that suggest interpersonal relationships (i.e., CAR and PPR) play an integral role in the outcomes associated with team sports. The results of this study support a synergistic tripartite relationship model [see Figure 1] that consists of coach-athlete relationships (CARs), athlete-to-athlete relationships (AARs), and coach-team relationships (CTRs). Depending on the quality of the CTR, the CTR subsumes the CAR and PPR (as further detailed below).

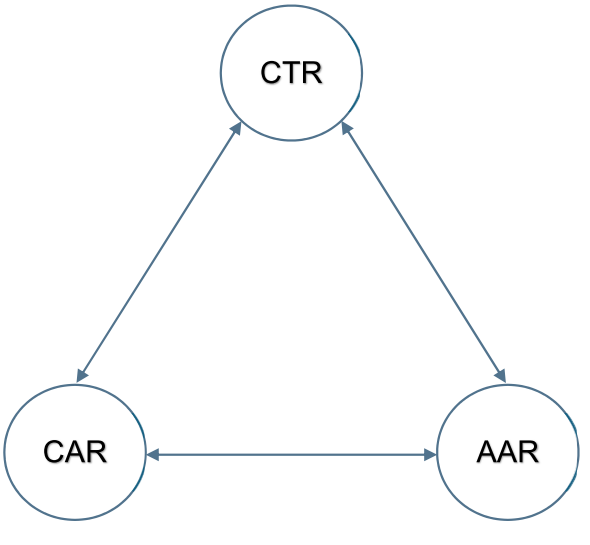

Figure 1. Team sport tripartite relationship model.

Characteristics of the CTR & perceptions of the CTR when positive and negative

The coaches' and athletes' views of the CTR's characteristics were captured within three overarching themes: (1) passion, (2) support, and (3) commitment. Each higher-order theme consisted of two sub-themes. The lower-order themes became apparent when coaches and athletes described how their positive and negative experiences of the CTR influenced their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours within their respective teams (see Figure 2).

Passion

Passion was the first higher-order theme to capture the shared views of coaches and athletes, who described experiencing a mutual transference of energy, effort, and joy between each team's coaches and athletes and with the team as a whole:

> To love what you do, have fun, doing the best that you can, that's big … The mindset of your coach can be transferred to the mindset of the team. SA10-VBS

When the CTR was experienced positively, passion befitted a harmonious (Vallerand, 2015) influence towards the team as a whole, leading to individual internalisation of enjoyment and autonomy as well as collective fulfilment:

I was always really excited to go, and I would look forward to it. SA6-VGB.

However, the perceived experiences of negative CTRs characterised passion as diminished due to the increasing nature of controlling and autocratic coach behaviours while simultaneously reducing individual and team autonomy.

> There's less internal motivation. It's more external, driven by the coach … You have to do this, rather than what I want to do this. SA10-VBS

Furthermore, diminished passion was perceived to increase individuals' negative emotions, and the team's relationship with the coach became increasingly explosive.

> I think that as an individual, it's a lot easier to get upset, sad and reflective. But when it comes to the team and having a negative relationship with the coach, it's more explosive, more angry, more offended. SA2-VGV

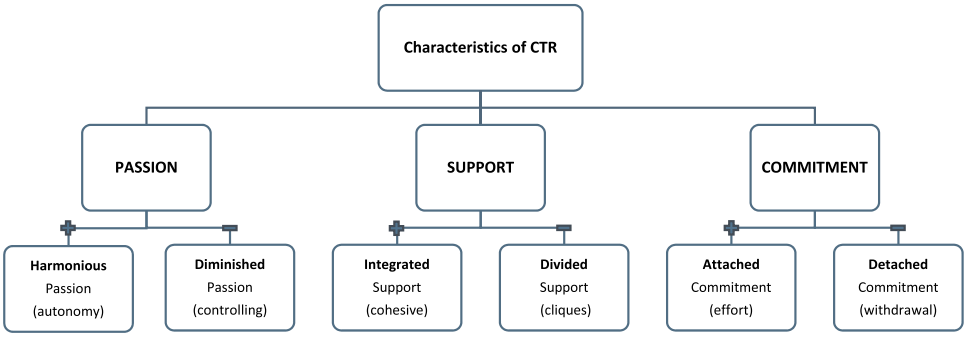

Figure 2. The characteristics of the CTR.

Support

Coaches and athletes described the impact of their social, emotional, and physical safety as key components to feeling supported individually and collectively within their teams.

> These are 13 adoptive kids that I have, that I would walk into traffic to protect them. The hope is they might not agree with everything we do right now, but in 15 years, they will feel and think how supported, how trusted, and how loved they were. C5-VGB

Support became more integrated and cohesive when interpretations relating to positive CTR experiences were shared. Integrated support positively influenced individual and collective motives and strengthened intra-team bonds (i.e., CAR & AAR), with the coach feeling connected and a part of the team (i.e., CTR).

> I think the more content, the "us" they do better, they perform better, they play better. At the end of the day, you will get the performance. If they're feeling safe, the more positive your environment is, the safer they feel, to feel like being themselves, their performances are much elevated. C10-VBS

A contrasting image is created when the CTR is perceived as negative due to reported experiences of divided support. Divided support breaks down the cohesive nature of the team as a whole (including the coach). It separates the athletes and coaches into hierarchical cliques in an attempt to seek social, emotional and physical support from their peers (i.e., AAR).

> I think it makes me want to be around my teammates more than the coach, and I will try to avoid them. SA6-VGB

While the majority of the athletes form cliques and focus on their AARs, the coaches shared their intentions to identify the root of the issues, causing the team to divide by communicating with individual athletes (favourites) with whom they have high-quality interpersonal relationships (i.e., CAR):

> My first response is to continue to communicate and find a way to figure out how the coaches and team can get on the same page. Continuing to open the doors to figure out what is the root of the problem. C3-VGL

Commitment

Commitment was the third higher-order theme, which was also associated with individual and collective perceptions of attachment. Individual commitment is characterised by coaches' and athletes' mutual development of loyalty, trust, respect, and understanding.

> If the relationship is really good between the coach and the team, I just look forward to it more; I wouldn't dread it; it would be more like a fun thing than a job. SA3-VGL

Collective commitment is characterised at the team level. Coaches and athletes shared their experiences of commitment to the team (as a whole) through accountability, relatedness, and competence.

> I would just say that I put in more effort to look up new drills or look up specific cues I think they're going to hit or watch film, and I just inherently will do more. When that's the case, I also look for other opportunities to keep building the team connection through doing

> different team bonding events or writing thank you letters and just doing outside [of sport] activities … I keep thinking back to volleyball this season in terms of we had a great relationship with the team, and it made it really easy to want to do things and to do things together, because we were all just flowing together. C2-VGV

When the CTR is perceived as positive, commitment is characterised as attached, where both coaches and athletes display willing behaviours by exerting effort individually and collectively as a team.

> When your players trust you, they're willing to work hard and buy into the team. C3-VGL

When the CTR is perceived as negative, commitment is characterised as detached, where the coaches and athletes display withdrawal behaviours by transferring their commitment from the team as a whole (inclusive of the coach) to their peers, where intra-team dynamics separate from the coach.

> I think that if you don't have a good coach-team relationship, then that's when my players might start to turn against the coach. SA11-VBB

Similar to the characteristics of support (see above), coaches and athletes share comparable experiences of exerting less effort individually, leading to withdrawal from participation and "buy-in" to the team as a whole.

> It can be poor body language; to me, that is the first trigger. It's the visual cues, the huffing and puffing, and kind of crossed arms closed-off cues. C3-VGL

However, while coaches report exerting less effort, they remain committed to the team as a whole, albeit divided and not reciprocated by the majority of the athletes. The intra-team athlete-to-athlete relationships form a stronger bond, and the coaches work to understand the causes of the team division.

> I've learnt over the years when it is negative, I've just got to double down on figuring out why that relationship isn't strong. They don't have to love me, they don't have to like me, but we can still be respectful, and we can still work together. C5-VGB

Across all three characteristics, there is a common thread. When the CTR is viewed positively, the coaches and athletes experience a cohesive bond that includes the entire team. Conversely, when the CTR is perceived negatively, the differential dynamics within the team (AAR & CAR) become more pronounced, leading to division between the athletes and the coach as well as the team and the coach.

Some of the athletes shared that their experiences of the CTR differed at the "club" level compared to high school. Where "club" sports such as volleyball, softball, basketball and soccer were more competitive and performance outcome-oriented, they reported that participation in high school was more socially oriented (play with friends). In a similar vein, some of the coaches also noted that the CTR might vary as a function of competitive level. One specific coach reflected on their differing coaching experiences between coaching a lacrosse team at the collegiate level and at the high school level:

> I think at the high school level, I see it a little bit differently, just in that I spend less time with them. We pretty much only get the five months we have together as a team, and then they're off participating either in other sports or other activities throughout the year, so I see them, obviously, in passing and kind of celebrate them as student-athletes in their other

> endeavours. But in terms of my coach-to-team experience, I'm only getting them from January to May … When I was coaching at the college level, we were with our students 10 months out of the year. So, I would say that collectively, that relationship was just that much greater because, for the most part, the student-athletes were only participating in lacrosse. There weren't other multi-sport athletes and other activities taking priority at other times of the year, so just the focus was more on the sport. We just had more time to create a different chemistry within our coaching and team dynamics. C3-VGL

Thus, the present results also suggest that the CTR (and its characteristics) may appear differently at varying levels of sport, such as grassroots, university, academy, and elite.

Discussion

The focus of this study was to explore the nature of the CTR within youth team sports and its characteristics pertaining to coach and athlete perceptions when positive and negative. Reflexive thematic analysis of the data obtained from 12 athletes and 11 coaches revealed that (a) the CTR was characterised as passion, support, and commitment, (b) the characteristics of CTRs when positive (harmonious passion, integrated support, and attached commitment), (c) the characteristics of CTRs when negative (diminished passion, divided support, and detached commitment), (d) the role and significance of CTR on the coach-athlete and athlete-athlete relationships, (e) the role and significance of CTR through a proposed team sport tripartite relationship model. Overall, it was revealed that the relationship between the coach and the team is important and variable at the youth level of competitive team sports.

This study found that the 3Cs of the 3 + 1Cs motivational model came through in the findings, highlighting the importance of commitment, closeness and complementarity within the CTR model at the team level and individually. The findings revealed that the CTR's characteristics differed when perceived as positive or negative. When the CTR was perceived positively, team unity prospered, with CARs and AARs subsumed by the CTR, resulting in a synergetic relationship triad. For example, when a positive CTR was experienced, harmonious passion, integrated support, and attached commitment not only characterised team-level outcomes but also allowed for positive transference to the perceived quality of coach-athlete and peer relationships, further strengthening the team's unity.

While this study draws conceptually from the CAR literature, it also contributes to the broader field of sports coaching research, which extends beyond dyadic coach-athlete interactions to encompass a more systemic view of coaching practice. Contemporary coaching literature emphasises coaching as a complex social and relational activity involving multiple stakeholders, dynamic group processes, and contextual adaptation (Cushion et al., 2006; Jones & Wallace, 2006; Lyle & Cushion, 2016). The conception of the CTR developed in this study aligns with this shift, highlighting the need to understand how coaches influence and are influenced by the collective relational climate within a team. Rather than viewing coaching relationships in isolation, the findings support a holistic, ecological view that recognises the interdependence of relationships among athletes, between athletes and coaches, and across the team as a social unit. Thus, this work adds value not only to relational models such as the 3 + 1Cs but also to applied coaching frameworks that prioritise communication, leadership style, team cohesion,

and the social construction of trust and safety in coaching environments (Nelson et al., 2025; North et al., 2018).

However, the findings revealed that when a negative CTR was experienced, diminished passion, divided support, and detached commitment caused the unity of the team to collapse. When the CTR was negative, most coaches adopted a hierarchical, autocratic style of coaching in an attempt to establish control and connect with their team. To fix the issues at the team level, the coach's communication and behavioural style would place more importance on enhancing the quality of individual relationships between coaches, athletes, and peers. Similar findings were found in previous CAR research by Lorimer and Jowett (2009). They identified that different communication, and behavioural styles were adopted by coaches when addressing individual sport athletes in contrast to those participating in team sports. Divided support emerged as a critical issue when the CTR was perceived negatively, fracturing the cohesion of the team and prompting athletes and coaches to retreat into hierarchical subgroups or interpersonal cliques. These findings echo those of Cushion and Jones (2006), who identified divided support (collective athlete perceptions of misrecognition of power) as a core challenge in coaching contexts, particularly where inconsistent/ unclear communication undermines team unity. In such environments, athletes often seek emotional, social and psychological safety within peer relationships rather than from their coaches, mirroring the present studies' findings that athletes gravitate toward their teammates when feeling unsupported or misunderstood by their coaches.

Conversely, coaches in this study attempted to regain control and connection by engaging more closely with individual athletes (often favourites), inadvertently deepening the divide. This dynamic reinforces how critical cohesive integrated support is, not just to team performance but to athletes' sense of belonging, safety and trust within the broader team environment. Similarly, Cooke et al. (2024) explored psychological safety in high-performance sports environments, highlighting that a lack of cohesive support can erode trust and hinder open communication between coaches and athletes. This underscores the importance of fostering an environment where both athletes and coaches feel secure to express concerns and collaborate effectively.

These findings have important implications for athlete and coach well-being. For athletes, the quality of the CTR may influence not only motivation and performance but also broader psychosocial outcomes such as identity formation, belonging, and emotional safety, especially in adolescence. Equally, the relational demands placed on coaches, particularly in youth sport, can be substantial. When relational dynamics within the team become unsustainable, emerging research suggests that coaches often experience emotional exhaustion, role overload, and burnout as a result of the complex interpersonal and organisational pressures they face (Bentzen et al., 2016; Olusoga et al., 2010). Future research should consider how CTRs affect coaches' mental health and occupational well-being and explore strategies to support them in managing the social and emotional complexity of team environments.

The primary focus of this study was to understand the nature of the CTR in youth team sports, and it is important to reflect on how the developmental stage of these junior athletes likely shaped the kinds of relationships they formed with one another and their coaches. Literature on adolescent attachment (e.g., Allen & Miga, 2010) and youth friendship dynamics (Hartup, 1996; Smith & Ullrich-French, 2020) offers useful context,

highlighting that such relationships are not only functional but also formative, shaped by evolving social, emotional, and identity needs. Parallels can also be drawn with other competitive–cooperative environments, such as the military, where cohesion and leadership are critical under pressure (MacCoun et al., 2006). More broadly, the emergent patterned attitudinal space in this study may be understood as a social construct, a shared reality co-created through ongoing interaction, which underscores the intersubjective nature of relational experiences in sport and may reflect more universal processes of bonding, leadership, and cooperation. Further research, especially quantitative in nature, could further explore this attitudinal space as a multidimensional construct grounded in developmental, social and cognitive psychology.

The research findings underscore the critical role and significance of the coach-team dynamic within the subsystem of youth sports, highlighting its impact on two primary stakeholders who can influence, or be influenced by, athletes: peers and coaches (Smith & Mellano, 2022). Positive CTRs improved coaches' and athletes' perceptions of relationship quality between the coach and individual athletes as well as among the athletes. The significance of positive CTRs in improving the quality of CARs is embedded in research on the outcomes associated with high-quality CARs in team sports. For example, Olympiou et al. (2008) suggested that the quality of the CAR impacts young athletes' motivational patterns and affects important outcomes such as enjoyment, satisfaction and persistence in organised sports. Similarly, with peers acting as essential contributors to athletes' behaviours, attitudes, experiences, and outcomes in youth sports (see Smith et al., 2019; Weiss & Stuntz, 2004), there is importance to developing high-quality peer relationships. The significance of positive CTRs in improving the quality of AARs may lead to thwarting conflict (Holt et al., 2012) and victimisation (Partridge & Knapp, 2016) amongst peers and, ultimately, promoting more positive psychosocial development via sporting involvement. The significance and composition of the CTR revealed in this study underscore the value given to the team's needs as well as individual needs, resulting in either strengthening relationships and forging more interdependence within the team or weakening the relationships and forming a division between the coach and the team.

The interviews also uncovered a potential synergistic tripartite relationship model consisting of the coach-athlete, athlete-to-athlete, and coach-team relationships (see Figure 1). First, the results provide evidence of a hierarchical conceptualisation of the 3Cs in team sports. As such, our findings are in accordance with Rhind et al.'s (2012) call for a model of relationship quality within team sports that may better fit the data generated. Second, the model unveils the dynamic and interrelated nature of relationships in team sports. Third, considering Jowett and colleagues' (see Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004) extensive work on the development of the 3 + 1Cs model and the CART-Q, this study's qualitative results provide evidence for further investigation of the antecedents and consequences of positive and negative CTRs. Based on this line of work, there will be a basis for developing and validating a self-report instrument that measures the nature of the CTR (based on current findings, we would expect this questionnaire to be multidimensional). It is possible that in assessing the quality of the CTR via a quantitative assessment tool, there may be at least three sub-dimensions or factors centreing on the emotional aspects (passion), the cognitive facets (support) and the behavioural manifestations (commitment).

In a systematic review by Lefebvre et al. (2016), findings showed that coaching development programmes (CDPs) were primarily aimed at improving professional skills and technical knowledge – with very few trying to improve interpersonal and intrapersonal coach behaviours. Moreover, a more recent systematic review (Silva et al., 2020) identified only ten CDPs that targeted intrapersonal coach behaviours, despite self-reflection and awareness being key characteristics of effective coaching (Hague et al., 2021). The outcomes of proposed future studies stemming from this research are critical for CDPs aimed at team intervention and relationship enhancement. For example, considering the nature and quality of the CTR potentially aids in exploring the social dynamics within sports teams with the general purview of understanding the implications for both individual and team-level outcomes (e.g., Eys et al., 2019; Lyle, 2020).

Finally, some of the athletes and coaches in the present study suggested that there may be differences in the nature of the CTR as a function of competitive level. Such findings are aligned with what has been reported in the coaching efficacy literature. That is, past research has revealed the type and relevance of specific sources of efficacy information to vary between collegiate, high school and recreational coaches (i.e., Feltz et al., 1999; Myers et al., 2005). Additionally, there are cultural and contextual differences in sports participation at the high school level. For example, interscholastic sports in the USA are typically not curriculum-based (i.e., they are extracurricular). In contrast, school sports are PE curriculum-based in most other countries (Pot & Van Hilvoorde, 2013). These differences highlight the importance of future studies on adopting the same language across sports participation as elite and non-elite individuals. Due to the competitive and educational differences, the evolving concept of CTRs in team sports may not fully represent all youth team sports in all countries. While this small particular sample may not be considered conclusive nor necessarily generalisable, it allowed for an initial in-depth study of the key questions. It provided a foundation for future replication studies to explore other sports environments, such as educational, college/university, elite, and diverse cultural settings (Morse, 2015).

Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to extend the scope of existing research by conceptualising the concept of the CTR and its nature when positive and negative. The CTR can be defined as a social construct that impacts team members' motivations individually and collectively. At the heart of these findings, the 4Cs of the 3 + 1Cs motivational model (closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation) influence the quality of the coach-team relationship when the CTR is experienced positively or negatively. Further research is required to define the outcomes of the CTR when positive and negative. High school-level coaches and athletes all reported that the CTR existed, which is separate from the CAR. They also perceived the CTR to be an important aspect of how the team is functioning/they are experiencing their sport involvement. The key characteristics of the CTR which emerged from the qualitative data were passion, support, and commitment, with differing inferences regarding when the CTR was perceived as positive or negative.

Disclosure statement

The author reported no potential conflict of interest. This study was part of the author's PhD project.

Funding

This study was self-funded by the lead researcher as part of their doctoral studies.

Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author, SJB, upon reasonable request.

References

Adie, J. W., & Jowett, S. (2010). Meta-perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship, achievement goals, and intrinsic motivation among sport participants. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *40*(11), 2750–2773.

Allen, J. P., & Miga, E. M. (2010). Attachment in adolescence: A move to the level of emotion regulation. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *27*(2), 181–190. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407509360898

Bentzen, M., Lemyre, P. N., & Kenttä, G. (2016). Development of exhaustion for high-performance coaches in association with workload and motivation: A person- centered approach. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *22*, 10–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2015.06.004

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021a). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *18*(3), 328–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021b). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. London: Sage.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and becoming a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, *24*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 213–227). Routledge.

Broom, A., Cheshire, L., & Emmison, M. (2009). Qualitative researchers' understandings of their practice and the implications for data archiving and sharing. *Sociology*, *43*(6), 1163–1180.

Bruner, M. W., Eys, M. A., Wilson, K. S., & Côté, J. (2014). Group cohesion and positive youth development in team sport athletes. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, *3*(4), 219–227. https://doi.org/10.1037/spy0000017

Carron, A. V., & Eys, M. A. (2012). *Group dynamics in sport* (4th ed.). Fitness Information Technology.

Cooke, M., Paradis, K. F., Sharp, L. A., Woods, D., & Sarkar, M. (2024). Psychological safety: A qualitative study on coach and athlete perceptions. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *1*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2023-0115

Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *4*(3), 307–323. https://doi.org/10.1260/174795409789623892

Cotterill, S. (2012). *Team psychology in sports: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications.

Crotty, M. J. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*.

Cushion, C. J., Armour, K. M., & Jones, R. L. (2006). Locating the coaching process in practice: Models 'for and 'coaching. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *11*(01), 83–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/17408980500466995

Cushion, C., & Jones, R. L. (2006). Power, discourse, and symbolic violence in professional youth soccer: The case of Albion Football Club. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, *23*(2), 142–161. https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.23.2.142

Davis, L., Jowett, S., & Lafrenière, M. A. K. (2013). An attachment theory perspective in the examination of relational processes associated with coach-athlete dyads. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *35*(2), 156–167. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.35.2.156

Davis, L., Jowett, S., & Tafvelin, S. (2019). Communication strategies: The fuel for quality coach-athlete relationships and athlete satisfaction. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 2156. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02156

Davis, L., Keegan, R., & Jowett, S. (Eds.). (2024). *Social psychology in sport*. Human Kinetics.

Evans, M. B., Eys, M. A., & Bruner, M. W. (2012). Seeing the "we" in "me" sports: The need to consider individual sport team environments. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, *53*(4), 301–308. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030202

Eys, M., Bruner, M. W., & Martin, L. J. (2019). The dynamic group environment in sport and exercise. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *42*, 40–47.

Felton, L., & Jowett, S. (2013). Attachment and well-being: The mediating effects of psychological needs satisfaction within the coach-athlete and parent-athlete relational contexts. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *14*(1), 57–65.

Feltz, D. L., Chase, M. A., Moritz, S. E., & Sullivan, P. J. (1999). A conceptual model of coaching efficacy: Preliminary investigation and instrument development. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *91*(4), 765–776. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.91.4.765

Gano-Overway, L. A., Guivernau, M., Magyar, T. M., Waldron, J. J., & Ewing, M. E. (2005). Achievement goal perspectives, perceptions of the motivational climate, and sportspersonship: Individual and team effects. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *6*(2), 215–232. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2003.11.001

Gosai, J., Jowett, S., & Rhind, D. J. (2021). Coaching through a "gender lens" may reveal myths that hinder female athletes: A multi-study investigation. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *9*(2), 222–233.

Hague, C., McGuire, C. S., Chen, J., Bruner, M. W., Côté, J., Turnnidge, J., & Martin, L. J. (2021). Coaches' influence on team dynamics in sport: A scoping review. *Sports Coaching Review*, *10*(2), 225–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2021.1874096

Hampson, R., & Jowett, S. (2014). Effects of coach leadership and coach-athlete relationship on collective efficacy. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, *24*(2), 454–460. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0838.2012.01527.x

Hartup, W. W. (1996). The company they keep: Friendships and their developmental significance. *Child Development*, *67*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.2307/1131681

Holt, N. L., Knight, C. J., & Zukiwski, P. (2012). Female athletes' perceptions of teammate conflict in sport: Implications for sport psychology consultants. *The Sport Psychologist*, *26*(1), 135–154. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.26.1.135

Jackson, B., & Beauchamp, M. R. (2010). Self-efficacy as a meta perception within coach- athlete and athlete–athlete relationships. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *11*(3), 188–196. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2009.12.005

Jackson, B., Dimmock, J. A., Gucciardi, D. F., & Grove, J. R. (2011). Personality traits and relationship perceptions in coach-athlete dyads: Do opposites really attract? *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *12*(3), 222–230.

Jones, R. L., & Wallace, M. (2006). The coach as 'orchestrator': More realistically managing the complex coaching context. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *The sports coach as educator* (pp. 51–64). Routledge.

Jowett, S. (2003). When the "honeymoon" is over: A case study of a coach-athlete dyad in crisis. *The Sport Psychologist*, *17*(4), 444–460. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2003-10690-005.

Jowett, S. (2007). Coach-athlete relationships ignite sense of groupness. In M. R. Beauchamp (Ed.), *Group dynamics in exercise and sport psychology* (pp. 81–96). Routledge.

Jowett, S. (2017). Coaching effectiveness: The coach-athlete relationship at its heart. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *16*, 154–158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.05.006

Jowett, S., Adie, J. W., Bartholomew, K. J., Yang, S. X., Gustafsson, H., & Lopez-Jiménez, A. (2017a). Motivational processes in the coach-athlete relationship: A multi-cultural self-determination approach. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *32*, 143–152. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.06.004

Jowett, S., & Arthur, C. (2019). Effective coaching: The links between coach leadership and coach-athlete relationship - from theory to research to practice. In M. H. Anshel, T. Petrie, & J. A. Steinfeldt (Eds.), *APA handbook of sport and exercise psychology: Sport psychology* (pp. 419–449). American Psychological Association.

Jowett, S., & Clark-Carter, D. (2006). Perceptions of empathic accuracy and assumed similarity in the coach-athlete relationship. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *45*(3), 617–637.

Jowett, S., & Cockerill, I. M. (2003). Olympic medalists' perspective of the athlete–coach relationship. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *4*(4), 313–331. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1469-0292(02)00011-0

Jowett, S., & Felton, L. (2014). Coach-athlete relationships and attachment styles within sport teams. In *Group dynamics in exercise and sport psychology* (pp. 73–90). Routledge.

Jowett, S., & Frost, T. (2007). Race/ethnicity in the all-male coach-athlete relationship: Black footballers' narratives. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *5*(3), 255–269. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2007.9671835

Jowett, G. E., Hill, A. P., Hall, H. K., & Curran, T. (2013). Perfectionism and junior athlete burnout: The mediating role of autonomous and controlled motivation. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, *2*(1), 48.

Jowett, S., & Meek, G. A. (2000). The coach-athlete relationship in married couples: An exploratory content analysis. *The Sport Psychologist*, *14*(2), 157–175. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.14.2.157

Jowett, S., & Nezlek, J. (2012). Relationship interdependence and satisfaction with important outcomes in coach-athlete dyads. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *29*(3), 287–301. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407511420980

Jowett, S., Nicolas, M., & Yang, S. (2017b). Unravelling the links between coach behaviours and coach-athlete relationships. *European Journal of Sports & Exercise Science*, *5*(3), 10–19.

Jowett, S., & Ntoumanis, N. (2004). The Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART – Q): Development and initial validation. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, *14*(4), 245–257. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0838.2003.00338.x

Jowett, S., & Poczwardowski, A. (2007). Understanding the coach-athlete relationship. In S. Jowett & D. Lavallee (Eds.), *Social psychology in sport* (pp. 3–14). Human Kinetics.

Jowett, S., & Shanmugam, V. (2016). Relational coaching in sport: Its psychological underpinnings and practical effectiveness. In R. J. Schinke, K. R. McGannon, & B. Smith (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of sport psychology* (pp. 71–85). Routledge.

Jowett, S., & Timson-Katchis, M. (2005). Social networks in sport: Parental influence on the coach-athlete relationship. *Sport Psychologist*, *19*(3), 267–287. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.19.3.267

Jowett, S., Timson-Katchis, M., & Adams, R. (2007). Too close for comfort? Dependence in the dual role parent/coach-child/athlete relationship. *International Journal of Coaching Science*, *1*(1), 59–78.

Kavanagh, E., Adams, A., Lock, D., Stewart, C., & Cleland, J. (2020). Sport management review. *Managing Abuse and Integrity in Sport*, *23*(1), 1–7.

Kim, J., Godfrey, M., & Eys, M. (2020). The antecedents and outcomes of informal roles in interdependent sport teams. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, *9*(3), 277.

Kim, H., Sefcik, J. S., & Bradway, C. (2017). Characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies: A systematic review. *Research in Nursing & Health*, *40*(1), 23–42.

König, S. (2013). Coaching performance and leadership behaviours in team sports. *Sportwissenschaft*, *43*(4), 253–263. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12662-013-0309-5

Lafrenière, M. A. K., Jowett, S., Vallerand, R. J., Donahue, E. G., & Lorimer, R. (2008). Passion in sport: On the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *30*(5), 541–560. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.30.5.541

Lapadat, J. C., & Lindsay, A. C. (1999). Transcription in research and practice: From standardization of technique to interpretive positionings. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *5*(1), 64–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049900500104

Lefebvre, J. S., Evans, M. B., Turnnidge, J., Gainforth, H. L., & Côté, J. (2016). Describing and classifying coach development programmes: A synthesis of empirical research and applied practice. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *11*(6), 887–899. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954116676116

Lorimer, R., & Jowett, S. (2009). Empathic accuracy, meta-perspective, and satisfaction in the coach-athlete relationship. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *21*(2), 201–212. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200902777289

Lyle, J. (2020). Coaching effectiveness: A personal discourse on bringing clarity to an overused concept. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, *8*(2), 270–274. https://doi.org/10.1123/iscj.2020-0025

Lyle, J., & Cushion, C. (2016). *Sport coaching concepts: A framework for coaching practice*. Routledge.

MacCoun, R. J., Kier, E., & Belkin, A. (2006). Does social cohesion determine motivation in combat? An old question with an old answer. *Armed Forces & Society*, *32*(4), 646–654. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X05279181

Mageau, G. A., & Vallerand, R. J. (2003). The coach-athlete relationship: A motivational model. *Journal of Sports Science*, *21*(11), 883–904.

McEwan, D., & Beauchamp, M. R. (2014). Teamwork in sport: A theoretical and integrative review. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *7*(1), 229–250. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2014.932423

McMullin, C. (2023). Transcription and qualitative methods: Implications for third sector research. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *34*(1), 140–153. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00400-3

Morse, J. M. (2015). Data were saturated. *Qualitative Health Research*, *25*(5), 587–588. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315576699

Myers, N. D., Vargas-Tonsing, T. M., & Feltz, D. L. (2005). Coaching efficacy in intercollegiate coaches: Sources, coaching behavior, and team variables. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *6*(1), 129–143. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2003.10.007

Neergaard, M. A., Olesen, F., Andersen, R. S., & Sondergaard, J. (2009). Qualitative description - the poor cousin of health research? *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *9*(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-9-52

Nelson, L., James, N., Nicholls, S., Parmar, N., & Groom, R. (2025). The importance of appearing trustworthy in the workplace: Performance analysts' perspectives. *Sport, Education and Society*, *30*(2), 249–265. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2023.2288844

Nelson, L., Potrac, P., & Groom, R. (2014). The place of theory. In L. Nelson, R. Groom, & P. Potrac (Eds.), *Research methods in sports coaching* (pp. 76–85). Routledge.

North, J., Piggott, D., Lara-Bercial, S., Abraham, A., & Muir, B. (2018). The professionalization of sport coaching. In R. Thelwell & M. Dicks (Eds.), *Professional advances in sports coaching* (pp. 3–21). Routledge.

Olusoga, P., Butt, J., Maynard, I., & Hays, K. (2010). Stress and coping: A study of world- class coaches. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *22*(3), 274–293. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413201003760968

Olympiou, A., Jowett, S., & Duda, J. L. (2008). The psychological interface between the coach-created motivational climate and the coach-athlete relationship in team sports. *The Sport Psychologist*, *22*(4), 423–438. https://doi.org/10.1123/tsp.22.4.423

Partridge, J. A., & Knapp, B. A. (2016). Mean girls: Adolescent female athletes and peer conflict in sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *28*(1), 113–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2015.1076088

Philippe, R. A., Schiavio, A., & Biasutti, M. (2020). Adaptation and destabilization of interpersonal relationships in sport and music during the COVID-19 lockdown. *Heliyon*, *6*(10), e05212. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05212

Pot, N., & Van Hilvoorde, I. (2013). Generalizing the effects of school sports: Comparing the cultural contexts of school sports in the Netherlands and the United States. *Sport in Society*, *16*(9), 1146–1175.

Prior, M. T. (2018). Accomplishing "rapport" in qualitative research interviews: Empathic moments in interaction. *Applied Linguistics Review*, *9*(4), 487–511. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2017-0029

Rhind, D. J., Jowett, S., & Yang, S. X. (2012). A comparison of athletes' perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship in team and individual sports. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, *35*(4), 433–452.

Silva, E. J. D., Evans, M. B., Lefebvre, J. S., Allan, V., Côté, J., & Palmeira, A. (2020). A systematic review of intrapersonal coach development programs: Examining the development and evaluation of programs to elicit coach reflection. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *15*(5-6), 818–837. https://doi.org/10.1177/1747954120943508

Smith, A. L., Erickson, K., & Malete, L. (2019). Advancing youth sport scholarship: Selected directions and considerations. *Kinesiology Review*, *8*(3), 269–277.

Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018). Developing rigor in qualitative research: Problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, *11*(1), 101–121. https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357

Smith, A. L., & Mellano, K. T. (2022). Three ways that peer's matter in youth sport. *Front Young Minds*, *10*, 685811. https://doi.org/10.3389/frym.2022.685811

Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2020). Qualitative research. In G. Tenenbaum, R. C. Eklund, & N. Boiangin (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology: Exercise, methodologies, & special topics* (4th ed., pp. 1001–1019). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. C. (2020). Qualitative research. *Handbook of Sport Psychology*, 999–1019.

Smith, A. L., & Ullrich-French, S. (2020). Peers and the sport experience. In G. Tenenbaum, R. C. Eklund, & N. Boiangin (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology: Social perspectives, cognition, and applications* (4th ed., pp. 410–428). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Stajkovic, A. D., Lee, D., & Nyberg, A. J. (2009). Collective efficacy, group potency, and group performance: Meta-analyses of their relationships, and test of a mediation model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *94*(3), 814–828. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015659

Tsai, A. C., Kohrt, B. A., Matthews, L. T., Betancourt, T. S., Lee, J. K., Papachristos, A. V., & Dworkin, S. L. (2016). Promises and pitfalls of data sharing in qualitative research. *Social Science & Medicine*, *169*, 191–198.

Vallerand, R. J. (2015). *The psychology of passion: A dualistic model*. Series in Positive Psychology.

Van de Pol, P. K., & Kavussanu, M. (2011). Achievement goals and motivational responses in tennis: Does the context matter? *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *12*(2), 176–183. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2010.09.005

Wachsmuth, S., Jowett, S., & Harwood, C. G. (2022). Third party interventions in coach- athlete conflict: Can sport psychology practitioners offer the necessary support? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *34*(1), 178–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2020.1723737

Wagstaff, C. R., Martin, L. J., & Thelwell, R. C. (2017). Subgroups and cliques in sport: A longitudinal case study of a rugby union team. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *30*, 164–172. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.03.006

Weiss, M., Moehnke, H., & Kipp, L. (2021). A united front: Coach and teammate motivational climate and team cohesion among female adolescent athletes. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *16*(4), 875–885.

Weiss, M. R., & Stuntz, C. P. (2004). A little friendly competition: Peer relationships and psychosocial development in youth sport and physical activity contexts. In M. R. Weiss (Ed.), *Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective* (pp. 165–196). Fitness Information Technology.