

A Closer Look at Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: Athletes Experiences with Coaches who have High and Low Expectations for Them

By

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine athletes' experiences with coaches who have either high or low expectations (i.e., as perceived by the athletes) for them. The present study employs a qualitative research design. Existential phenomenology is a qualitative research method that seeks to describe lived experiences. This research design provided the self-fulfilling prophecy framework to understand athletes' perceptions of high and low expectancy coaches' coaching style. The interview guide was created from Fiske and Taylor (1991) rendition of the Expectancy Confirmation Model. Participants (N = 20) were asked to describe their experience with both a high and low expectancy coach they encountered at some point in their sport career. All responses were recorded and transcribed, and the data were analyzed through a series of iterations, which led to the identification of five themes that constitute athletes' experiences with high and low expectancy coaches. The five themes derived from the athletes' reports were the following: overall coach approach, feedback, mistakes, team culture, and life beyond sport. These five themes were consistent in both high and low expectancy coaches. Athletes perceived that high expectancy coaches ultimately provided athletes with a positive sport experience while developing them into better athletes and better people, whereas low expectancy coaches ultimately provided athletes with a negative sport experience decreasing athletes' enjoyment, effort, and motivation. Future research should consider coaches' perceptions of their athletes to compare to the athletes' perceptions of their coaches.

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*“A coach is more than just a regular role model, they take on the role of parent, mentor, and friend. A coach’s impact cannot be overemphasized. Sport organizations need to make sure coaches are adequately prepared and able to take on all of these roles in order to develop well rounded athletes.” – Previous Collegiate Athlete*

Coaches play a key role in athletes’ sport experiences (Gearity, 2011). Through sport, coaches can help athletes increase self-esteem, develop leadership and teamwork skills, and enhance motivation and discipline (Watt & Moore, 2002). Not all athletes, unfortunately, have a positive sport experience. Some athletes experience negative, and even sometime abusive, coaching that can lead them to lose confidence, withdraw effort, and no longer find joy in their sport (Gearity, 2011). Limited research in sport psychology has employed a qualitative approach to understanding athletes’ experiences with coaches who they perceive have high or low expectations for their athletic development and sport performance. Understanding athletes’ experiences with coaches who they perceive believe in them and want to help them succeed, in comparison to coaches who they perceive to express low confidence in their ability and athletic potential is an important area of inquiry. Research on this topic could aid coaches in helping athletes have a more positive sport experience and capitalize on their athletic ability.

One framework that has been employed to examine athletes’ sport experience is self-fulfilling prophecy. Robert Merton, an American sociologist, first coined the term self-fulfilling prophecy in 1948. According to Merton a self-fulfilling prophecy is “in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation, evoking a new behavior, which makes the originally false conception come true” (Merton, 1948, pp.506). Merton was the first to demonstrate the power authority

figures' expectations have on individuals' behaviors, and how expectations can affect the outcome of a situation. An example from Merton's study is Black Wednesday at Last National Bank. The bank was a flourishing institution until a rumor of insolvency led many of their costumers to take their business elsewhere, resulting in the bank's demise. This example shows the integral role prophecies play in the outcome of a situation. The rumor of insolvency on First National bank affected the actual outcome, whereby in this case, the prophecy of collapse led to its own fulfillment (Merton, 1948). Merton was the first researcher to identify and define a self-fulfilling prophecy and the negative effects it can cause.

In the late 1900's researchers started to examine self-fulfilling prophecies in educational settings. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) were among the first to evaluate the interaction between elementary school teachers and students when teachers had high or low expectations for their students. The researchers randomly assigned students to be recognized as academic growth spurters and told teachers at the beginning of the school year which students they could expect to have high growth spurts across the year. Researchers found that teachers invested most of their time in students, who they were told, were going to have the most academic growth and success. Their results suggest that teachers are more likely to invest their time in the students who they perceive are going to have the most academic growth at the end of the year. It was not until this study in 1968 that research surrounding self-fulfilling prophecy became of major interest in social psychology.

While Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) identified the advantage of students being deemed high expectancy, Madon, Jussim, and Eccles (1997) later noted the disadvantage for students when self-fulfilling prophecies occur at the lower end of the achievement spectrum. They described the Golem hypothesis (Brophy, 1983; Brophy & Good, 1974), as occurring when

teachers expect students to achieve lower academic success, students perceive these low expectations, and in the end students' performances match the teachers' expectations. Madon et al., (1997) found that if teachers perceive a student is going to demonstrate low academic achievement, and the teacher reinforces that expectancy, the negative effect will be more significant than the positive benefit for those who are deemed high achievers. In addition, it is clear that children who are low academic achievers, in comparison to high academic achievers, are impacted the most by self-fulfilling prophecies. Specifically, low academic achievers benefit more than high academic achievers when they have a teacher who sets high expectations for their academic success. In turn, low academic achievers are more negatively impacted, compared to high academic achievers, when teachers set low expectations for their academic success. Thus, it may be that when teachers believe that low achievers can experience academic success, these students may develop higher levels of self-confidence and further enhance their academic skills, despite experiencing failure in the past.

More recently the framework of self-fulfilling prophecy has been applied to sport settings, highlighting the important role coaches play in athletes' sport experience. In sport, self-fulfilling prophecies occur when coaches' perceptions and formation of expectations for athletes, influence athletes' cognitions and subsequent behaviors (Horn & Lox, 1993). Darley and Fazio (1980) developed a six-stage model, called Expectancy Confirmation, applying self-fulfilling prophecy to social interactions between a coach and athlete. Specifically, the model is comprised of these stages in a sport context: 1) a coach forms an expectancy of an athlete, 2) the coach behaves in a manner that matches his/her expectancy, 3) the athlete perceives and interprets the coach's behavior, 4) the athlete responds to the coach's behavior, 5) the coach interprets the athlete's response, and 6) the athlete interprets his/her personal response to the coach's behavior.

Fiske and Taylor (1991) later adopted this model from Darley and Fazio, but also noted the coach is likely to retain the expectation of the athlete even after being presented with new information that contradicts the coach's original expectation.

Most of the current research pertaining to self-fulfilling prophecies in sport, examines how expectations coaches form affect their behavior (e.g., quality and quantity of praise and instructional feedback, playing time). Two important variables coaches consider when setting expectations for athletes is their ability and room for improvement. It is important for coaches to set flexible expectations for athletes, allowing room for expectations to change across the season. Solomon, et. al., (1998a) in their research with high school basketball coaches, found that expectations set by coaches pertaining to athletes' ability remained stable, while expectations related to improvement remained more flexible. Researchers found coaches often assume their high expectancy athletes have the most potential for improvement, but this was not always the case. Flexible expectations encourage coaches to remain open-minded to the growth and development of all athletes, both low and high expectancy, throughout the course of the season.

In addition to athletes' ability and potential for improvement, feedback is another important element in the development of well-rounded athletes. Solomon, et. al., (1998b) defines feedback as the verbal information a coach provides athletes regarding their physical ability. Coaches' feedback, specifically the type and amount athletes receive is instrumental to athletes physical and psychological growth. The type and amount of feedback coaches give can influence their athletes' physical and psychological growth. Solomon et. al., (1998b) reported that high expectancy high school male and female basketball players received more instructional feedback and praise from coaches compared to the low expectancy athletes. They also found that coaches responded more positively to mistakes made by high expectancy athletes, with increased

instructional feedback and encouragement, compared to the low expectancy athletes. If low expectancy athletes receive less instructional feedback and encouragement, they may become discouraged and lose confidence, increasing the likelihood that they would make more mistakes.

While Solomon et. al., (1998a&b) found distinct differences in the quality and quantity of feedback high and low expectancy athletes receive, they did not assess whether the athletes perceived these differences. For a self-fulfilling prophecy to occur, athletes must perceive coaches' differential treatment of high and low expectancy athletes. A study by Wilson and Stephens (2007) with high school basketball players is important because they specifically examined athletes' perceptions of their coaches' differential treatment. Specifically, when coaches identified low expectations for athletes, these athletes reported their coaches had lower expectations for them, gave them more negative feedback, and expected lower effort in comparison to athletes identified as high expectancy by coaches. These findings suggest athletes can identify differential coach treatment between high and low expectancy athletes, and this could set the self-fulfilling prophecy in place if athletes begin to conform to their coaches' expectations.

Research has clearly established how coaches may form high and low expectations for their athletes (Solomon, et. al., 1998a). In addition, researchers have verified that based on differential expectations, coaches may provide beneficial treatment to athletes they deem to have higher ability and greater athletic potential (Solomon, et. al., 1998b). It has also been noted that athletes are capable of identifying coaches' differential treatment between high and low expectancy athletes (Wilson & Stephens, 2007). An important component of Fiske & Taylor's (1991) six-staged self-fulfilling prophecy model lies in understanding athletes' perceptions of their coaches' expectations and subsequent behaviors. However, limited research has considered

athletes' point of view with regard to their coaches' expectations for their sport performance. The purpose of this study was to examine athletes' experiences with coaches who have either high or low expectations (i.e., as perceived by the athletes) for them. For this study, high school athletes were asked to identify and reflect upon a coach who they perceived had high expectations for their sport performance and overall sport development, as well as a coach who they perceived had low expectations in the same regard. These athletes were interviewed and invited to share and describe the impact these coaches had on their sport experience. Based on the literature, high expectancy coaches are expected to be perceived by athletes as facilitating their positive sport experience and development more so than low expectancy coaches.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Current high school athletes (N= 20; 10 females & 10 males; Mage= 17.05) in various sports were invited to participate in an interview. The sports in which these athletes compete in include swimming, volleyball, track & field, cross-country, softball, wrestling, baseball, basketball, soccer, gymnastics, bowling, golf, powerlifting, and football. Athletes were given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality in this study.

### **Procedure**

After receiving Institutional Research Board approval, individuals were contacted and invited to participate. Each athlete was asked to provide demographic information (i.e. gender, age, ethnicity, sport, year in school, and years of experience). All data was collected during individual interviews with each athlete. The interviews averaged out to be 24 minutes in length. Interviews took place in person or over the phone, when necessary, and were recorded and

transcribed. Each athlete was asked to identify a coach in sport who set high expectations for the athlete and a coach who set low expectations for the athlete.

### **Interview Guide**

An interview guide was developed for this study based on Fiske & Taylor's (1991) Expectancy Confirmation Model. To begin each interview the primary investigator (who conducted the interviews) reminded the athlete of the purpose of the study. To build rapport with the athletes they were initially asked to share details about their current sport involvement. After this the interviewer continued using the interview guide. Athletes were first asked to recall a time they experienced a coach who set high expectations for them (e.g., "Have you ever experienced a coach who you felt set high expectations for you?") When helpful, probing questions were used to encourage athletes to share more details regarding their responses (e.g., "Tell me more about these expectations.", "What behaviors did the coach display that made you pick up on these expectations?"). Questions relating to the influence these high expectations had on the athlete's psychological and physical state were asked next (e.g. "How did these expectations make you feel?", "What impact did this have on you?", "How did this impact your performance?", "How did this impact your experience on the team?"). Questions related to the athlete's behavior subsequent to the coach's expectations came next (e.g. "Do you feel the coach's expectations changed across the season?", "How did it affect your sport experience/personal experience?"). The interview guide was then repeated with the athlete, so that the athlete could describe a coach who had low expectations for him/her. See Appendix D for the full interview guide.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using existential phenomenological methods described by Pollio et al. (1997). The constant comparative method was used during analysis to code and categorize the data into themes and subthemes. The transcribed interviews were reviewed by the researcher multiple times to gain familiarity with the athletes' responses. First athletes' responses about coaches who had high expectations for them were considered. In a similar manner, athletes' responses regarding coaches who had low expectations for them were considered next. The researcher then took the first interview transcript to another trained research assistant to analyze. Next, each individual transcript was analyzed individually identifying different meanings which were categorized into different themes. Lastly, the researcher compared the different themes across all the transcripts reflecting on athletes' responses for high expectancy coaches and identified similar themes. In a similar manner, the researcher compared the different themes across all the transcripts reflecting athletes' responses for low expectancy coaches identifying like themes. The researcher conducted two separate coding tables. Table 1 reflects athletes' perceptions of their low expectancy coaches' coaching style and the subsequent effects those low expectancy coaches had on the athletes' sport experience and overall development. Table 2 reflects athletes' perceptions of their high expectancy coaches' coaching style and the subsequent effects those high expectancy coaches had on the athletes' sport experience and overall development. After the researcher completed the final stage, she took the results back to the research assistants for their interpretation of the analysis. Based off of the groups feedback, no changes were made to the content of the themes.

### **Dependability and Trustworthiness**

Several procedures were incorporated into the study to enhance its dependability and trustworthiness, which included semi-structured interviews, transcription of data, coding tables,

storage of transcripts, use of research assistants in data analysis, and a detailed description of athletes' experiences.

## **Results**

Within the interviews, athletes provided a description of their coaches' behaviors and approach to working with the team, as well as the impact the coaches had on the athletes' sport experience and overall development. Specifically, five themes were identified that described the coaches' behaviors and approach to coaching: a) coaches' overall approach, b) coaches' approach to providing feedback, c) coaches' approach to responding to mistakes, d) coaches' influence on team culture, and e) coaches' view of athletes beyond sport. These five themes were consistent across athletes' experiences with low and high expectancy coaches. Within each of these themes athletes also described the impact these coaches' particular behaviors/approaches had on their experience on the team. A more in-depth description of each theme will follow.

### **Athletes' Perceptions of their Low Expectancy Coaches**

To begin, athletes described their low expectancy coaches in very negative terms. Male athletes described their low expectancy coaches as pessimistic, disrespectful, mean, overly competitive, and discouraging. In a similar vein, female athletes described their low expectancy coaches as bullies, hostile, unfair, dramatic, critical, intense, and stubborn. No athletes used positive adjectives to describe their low expectancy coaches.

#### **Theme 1: Overview descriptors of coaches' approach.**

As seen in Table 1, athletes characterized their low expectancy coaches as lacking warmth and a desire to build relationships. Athletes went on to describe their coaches as failing to make eye contact, lacking interaction, and mocking their athletes. Expectations coaches had

for athletes were perceived as unclear or unrealistic (athletes felt confused and inadequate in striving to meet those expectations). Clearly these athletes did not feel that their coach believed in their athletic ability and potential to contribute to the team and were not providing guidance on how to technically improve as an athlete. In terms of gender differences males clearly noted that their coaches did not initiate or seem to value interaction with them (*“It took my coach almost three months to make eye contact when talking to me, the season was almost over.”*). The female athletes did not describe their coaches in this way, although approximately half the females described their coaches as untrustworthy. Amber gave an example of this behavior in her volleyball coach when saying:

*“My coach always put on a front she was open to athlete feedback and always willing to lend a helping hand. Little did I know what I thought I was telling my coach in confidentiality she was telling some of my teammates behind closed doors. She was a worse gossip than the high school girls that played for her”.*

### **Theme 1: Overview effect on athletes.**

Athletes described their experience with low expectancy coaches as frustrating and unenjoyable, often resulting in an unsuccessful season. Athletes experienced little playing time and few improvements throughout the season. Troy summarized the effect his cross-country coach had on athletes’ development by saying:

*” Having a low expectation coach who lacks motivation and positivity prevents us athletes from improving, and quite frankly I think it reflects badly on the school/organization. If you want to have good athletes, a coach has to have a positive*

*attitude (and be a person) who encourages their athletes to get the most out of them, not mock them.”*

Further, female athletes reported feelings of defeat and mental and emotional exhaustion leading them to dread attending practice and competitions. For example, Sarah had this to say about her volleyball coach:

*“It was rare if someone did not cry during or after practice because the coach made us feel incapable of meeting his expectations, incapable of getting better, and made us question why we were even playing the sport if we were not any good. We were in fifth grade”.*

In contrast, male athletes more often described that they initially wanted to prove their low expectancy coaches wrong (*“At the start of the season my motivation was to prove him wrong, that motivation quickly ran out”*), but ultimately gave up believing they could change their coach’s mind. The athletes described themselves as ending up going through the motions of their sport season. Both male and female athletes reported losing interest halfway through the season. In summary, both females and males described low expectancy coaches as being ineffective in building relationships, enhancing motivation, and helping athletes become the best they can be. One athlete’s description of her volleyball coach described the overall sentiment across the board for athletes as she said:

*“She had the worst coaching style that I have ever experienced. It was a shock to be me because I’d never seen someone interact with their players the way she did. I could not believe what I was seeing on a daily occurrence. It was just a shock to me that I could*

*have such a bad coach. It was frustrating and disheartening.... I'm sorry but I still think I am in shock thinking about it".*

### **Theme 2: Coaches' feedback.**

The second theme that emerged from athletes' descriptions of their coaches was centered around the feedback they give with regard to technical instruction, positive reinforcement, and in particular, reactions to athletes' mistakes (which is Theme 3). As seen in Table 1, athletes characterized their low expectancy coaches' feedback as negative with little technical instruction and no positive reinforcement. Athletes went on to say sometimes their low expectancy coaches would give them no feedback, something some of them described as the silent treatment. Interestingly, females reported high levels of cussing (e.g., in practice, after game talks) from their low expectancy coaches, while male athletes reported experiencing high levels of critical screaming and yelling from their low expectancy coaches (*"I dreaded going to practice because I felt every move I made was reprimanded and I knew I was going to be yelled at multiple times"*). Female athletes also reported coaches receiving athletes' feedback but then ignoring it, so that meaningful responses to athlete feedback never occurred. For example, Jordan said this when reflecting on her basketball coach:

*"I went to my coach more than once with concerns and suggestions about issues on the team and every time she would nod and tell me she would do something, but pretty soon the season ended and the coach still had yet to act in the manner she said she was going to".*

In contrast, male athletes highlighted the lack of knowledge their low expectancy coaches had for the sport (*"It was as if at times the coach was unsure how to fix certain mechanics of the*

*game so he just shied away from any feedback due to lack of knowledge*”). Overall, the low expectancy coaches’ feedback never came, and if it did, it was not helpful.

### **Theme 2: Effect of coaches’ feedback on athletes.**

The low expectancy coaches’ manner of giving feedback had definite consistent outcomes for athletes. Athletes described experiencing decreased self-confidence, effort, and motivation in response to the type of feedback they experienced from their low expectancy coaches. Both male and female athletes reported being closed off to any type of feedback their coaches provided them with, resulting in athletes being less coachable (*“I became closed off to all forms of feedback from my coach because of the mental effects it was taking on me as an athlete”*). Female athletes feared feedback from the coach and felt they had no voice on the team. Sarah said: *“I reached the point where anytime the coach said my name in practice I was overcome by anxiety because I knew she was not going to have anything positive or helpful to say”*. Male athletes felt invisible and found themselves questioning their low expectancy coaches’ qualifications. Jeremy said his basketball coach made him feel *“as though he was a ghost floating around practice”*, he perceived that he was unseen and unheard from which made him question the point of even showing up. Overall, the athletes described how their coaches’ feedback (or lack of) resulted in them not being able to maximize their development in their sports. Nathan said, *“When it came to the end of the season, I had seen no growth as a baseball player. If anything, I felt like I was almost worse.”*

### **Theme 3: Coaches’ approach to mistakes.**

As seen in Table 1, athletes reported their low expectancy coaches felt athletes should be called out and punished when making mistakes. Mistakes were viewed as unacceptable and

rarely went unpunished when playing for a low expectancy coach, and players were often pulled out during competition when they made a mistake. Athletes also stated most of the time their low expectancy coaches would draw attention to any mistakes that were made in practice or a competition.

### **Theme 3: Effects of mistakes on athletes.**

As a result of low expectancy coaches' approach to responding to mistakes, athletes described being unable to learn from and move past their mistakes and less likely to accept challenges moving forward. Female athletes reported they were playing out of fear, while male athletes reported they were playing not to lose. For example, Zoey had this to say about her soccer coach's view on mistakes:

*“Because the coach made it such a negative learning environment, we were not a winning team. In practice we never worked on improving as an athlete, we just worked on trying to stay where we were at and not making mistakes. We were never good at communicating because everyone was in their own head trying to not make the coach mad. Because of this we didn't have a winning season”.*

Females athletes also pointed out they experienced increased anxiety and nervousness when playing for low expectancy coaches. Annie explained the effect her basketball coach had on her mental toughness:

*“I had been conditioned while playing for my low expectation coach to think that when I made a mistake it was my fault and the whole team was mad at me. It affected the way that I played for years to come after that coach. I had to figure out how to get myself out*

*of this conditioned response when making a mistake and learn to take risks again when playing”.*

It should be noted that male athletes did not mention feeling nervous and anxious about receiving feedback, although it does not mean they did not experience these feelings. For the females, these outcomes were prevalent and lead to their decreased enjoyment of the sport (“*It got to the point where I found no enjoyment in participating in the sport, it felt like a job*”).

#### **Theme 4: Coaches’ influence on team culture.**

The fourth theme that emerged from the athletes’ responses focused on how the coaches influenced the team culture. As seen in Table 1, athletes reported their low expectancy coaches did not value or strive to create a positive team cohesion and gave preferential treatment to select athlete(s). Low expectancy coaches also made it clear that some athletes were more important than others on the team. One athlete explained in the following way:

*“My coach made it clear if you were not a starter your impact on the team was not as important. One practice she went as far as to say maybe I should just focus on being the water girl for the remainder of the season ensuring all the starters water bottles remained filled through practice”.*

All athletes described their team environment in negative terms, but female athletes used harsher language to characterize their team climate (e.g, toxic). Females also noted that their low expectancy coaches would promote inter-team rivalry and liked to pin failures on individual athletes within the team. Jenny noted:

*“When I was competing for a starting spot, against my best friend I might add, I remember my coach pulling me into her office and asking me to talk down my best friend*

*to explain why I should play over her. Because of the rivalry promoted by our coach my best friend and I did not talk for almost three months”.*

#### **Theme 4: Effect on team culture.**

Although female and male athletes’ low expectancy coaches influenced their team culture in a similar manner, they reported vastly different outcomes on the effects their low expectancy coaches had on their team culture. Female athletes reported a team divide that resulted in lots of tension and feuding between teammates causing ineffective communication on and off the court. Amber had this to say about the inter-team rivalry between her and another teammate (who were both liberos):

*“Walking into a practice or competition you never knew if the coach was going to play you or the other teammate you were competing against for the spot. One match our coach switched us in and out after every set. How am I supposed to play my best when I am constantly being pulled out and put back in. I found myself rooting against my teammate to play bad so I could go back in. I was rooting for my team to lose. That is not what a good teammate is”.*

Female athletes feared letting down, or disappointing, their teammates and coach, while also pointing out not every athlete felt a sense of belonging within the team. For example, Morgan explained: *“There was a clear divide between the players on the team. A stranger could walk in and sense the team divide; it was that obvious, not everyone was welcomed there”.* Of interest was that male athletes described their team culture as remaining virtually unaffected by the influence of their low expectancy coaches. That is, male athletes reported it was the bond they had with their teammates that kept them from quitting when experiencing a low expectation

coach (“*It was because of my teammates that I did not walk away that season*”). When playing for a low expectation coach they were more likely to turn to their teammates for technical instruction as opposed to the coach. Josh explained:

*“I remember really looking up to the senior athletes on my team and because my coach lacked any technical instruction, every time I had a question I turned to the seniors on the team because they responded with support and encouragement in contrast to our coach”.*

Male athletes did report they felt they were not contributing to their team when playing for low expectancy coaches (“*Even though I had supportive teammates, I felt I had no contribution to team successes because a majority of my time was spent on the bench*”). Overall the low expectancy coaches’ responses to mistakes made athletes feel insignificant to the team and less connected to their peers.

#### **Theme 5: Coaches’ view of athletes beyond sport.**

The final theme that emerged from the athletes’ responses about their coaches represented their views about the coaches’ lack of concern for the athletes outside of sport. As seen in Table 1, athletes viewed their coaches as not caring about them as human beings in this world. Further, female athletes added their low expectancy coaches did not provide guidance nor tangible assistance when exploring the option of playing their sport in college.

#### **Theme 5: Effects on athletes in life beyond sport.**

Similar to team culture, female and male athletes reported different outcomes their low expectancy coaches had on their life outside of sport. Females reported their low expectancy coach started to affect their academic, home, and work life. Carrie had this to say about her experience with her swim coach:

*“Having a low expectation coach was a horrible experience. And it honestly made me question if I wanted to continue playing. I found the school days getting longer because I knew I had practice at the end of the day. I started to question myself both when playing the sport and in academics. My low expectation coach took away enjoyment from my life in general”.*

A handful of the female athletes interviewed admitted to quitting the sport because of their experience with their low expectancy coach. Kara quit after her experience with her varsity volleyball coach:

*“Having a low expectation coach made me completely lose my love for the game, it was not worth the physical and emotion exhaustion anymore. Now thinking back about the sport, I cannot even think about all of the fun times I had, all I can think about is how miserable I was when playing for my low expectation coach. That’s ten years of memories tainted by one coach.”*

While male athletes experienced negative outcomes directly related to playing for their low expectancy coaches, they were more likely to let go of those negative experiences as they moved into a new season, whereas a majority of the female athletes reported still carrying the experience of their low expectancy coach with them.

### **Athletes’ Perceptions of their High Expectancy Coaches**

Athletes described their high expectancy coaches in a very positive light. Male athletes described their high expectancy coaches as tough, uplifting, positive, and motivational. In a similar manner, female athletes described their high expectancy coaches as trustworthy, compassionate, honest, inspiring, and exemplary.

### **Theme 1: Overview descriptors of coaches' approach.**

As seen in Table 2, athletes characterized their high expectancy coaches as welcoming and having a desire to foster relationships with each individual athlete. Athletes went on to describe their coaches as approachable and supportive. Expectations coaches had for athletes were perceived as clear and attainable (athletes felt they were capable of striving to meet their coaches' expectations). Jeremy had this to say about his high expectancy coach's expectations, *"I always knew what my coach expected from me as a leader of the team. He always created a clear path to follow to help reach the expectations he set for me individually and all of us as a team"*. Clearly these athletes felt their coach believed in their athletic ability and knew the appropriate level for which they could push each of their athletes to achieve their personal best (*"Having a coach who believed in me unconditionally empowered me to believe in myself as an athlete in a way I never had before"*). Athletes also testified to the amount of effort their high expectancy coaches exerted to both focus on identifying and developing leadership qualities within their athletes. Hannah said her softball coach identified different qualities each athlete had that made them an important asset to the team,

*"My coach was able to identify different leadership qualities each athlete had to contribute to the team. This made all of us feel we had our own unique impact on the team. He helped me identify leadership qualities I did not know I possessed"*.

### **Theme 1: Overview effect on athletes.**

Athletes reported increased enjoyment and a greater passion for the sport when playing for their high expectancy coaches. It was also noted athletes saw major improvements over the course of the season and looked forward to practice and competitions when playing for high

expectancy coaches. High expectancy coaches made effort to always be on the same page with their players which increased the interaction between athletes with the coaches. Athletes also reported pushing themselves to further limits when playing for high expectancy coaches. Adam said, *“Seeing firsthand all the time and effort a good coach puts into the athletes on their team made me want to push myself to further limits in order to reach the potential my coach saw in me”*. Females found they had an increased respect for all their coaches and the work they dedicate to their athletes when interacting with a high expectancy coach. For example, Kara said:

*“Having a high expectation coach and seeing how much he influenced me on and off the field has given me a high respect for coaches in general after experiencing firsthand the hard work they put in [...] and travel [...] when some of them are volunteers”*.

### **Theme 2: Coaches’ feedback.**

With Theme 2 athletes described the type and quality of feedback their coaches gave (See Table 2). Specifically, athletes characterized their high expectancy coaches’ feedback as positive with a focus on effort and improvement. High expectancy coaches were also reported to pay attention to the small details of athletes’ performances (*“My coach did a wonderful job of breaking down his technical instruction into steps, which allowed me to focus on one detail at a time”*). Females additionally reported their high expectancy coaches gave lots of positive reinforcement and had open channels of communication in regard to athlete feedback. One athlete stated this best when saying, *“My coach always had an open-door policy, and even if she did not always apply my suggestions, I always knew they were taken into consideration”*. Males reported they received extensive constructive technical instruction, and that their high expectancy coaches were knowledgeable about the sport (*“I trusted the feedback my coach was*

*giving me because he seemed so knowledgeable about football, after all he had played it his whole life”).*

### **Theme 2: Effect of coaches’ feedback on athletes.**

Athletes experienced increased self-confidence, effort, and motivation in response to the type of feedback they experienced from their high expectancy coaches. Hannah stated: *“Having a coach who believes in and who makes the sport fun not only increased the enjoyment I experience from playing softball but also increases my motivation to try my best”*. Both male and female athletes reported seeking feedback from their coach (i.e., being more coachable). For example, William said his swimming coach’s feedback made him believe more in himself:

*“As an athlete, sometimes it can be hard to believe in yourself, but when you have a high expectation coach it helps to have another person guide you, and believe in your potential, when you feel like you do not have anything left to give”*.

Female athletes expressed how they felt they had a voice when playing for their high expectancy coaches, while male athletes described how they trusted the feedback from their coaches and knew exactly what their high expectancy coaches expected from them. Henry explained, *“My coach and I were always on the same page and I always knew what to expect. If I did something wrong, I would know exactly how to fix it. This allowed me to feel more prepared for practice and competition”*.

### **Theme 3: Coaches’ approach to mistakes.**

Coaches approach to responding to athletes’ mistakes was the third theme (seen in Table 2). Athletes reported their high expectancy coaches viewed mistakes as a part of learning.

Mistakes were rarely punished and often resulted in coaches providing a helpful drill that would

set the athletes up to learn from the mistakes that were made. Chris said this about his football coach: *“When I would make a mistake it was never, “Get on the line we are running ladders”, it resulted in my running the drill, or another drill, multiple more times until I became comfortable enough to not make the same mistake again”*. Athletes also stated that their high expectancy coaches responded to mistakes with support and encouragement moving forward (i.e., *“You’ll get it next time!”*, *“You got this!”*).

### **Theme 3: Effects of mistakes on athletes.**

As a result of high expectancy coaches’ approach to mistakes, athletes were able to learn and move past their mistakes making them more likely to try new challenges moving forward.

Annie said:

*“Having a high expectation coach was refreshing because I learned if I made a mistake it was going to alright. Making a mistake was not the end of the world. This was a lesson I wish I would’ve learned earlier in my sport career”*.

Females athletes reported they experienced less anxiety and nervousness surrounding mistakes while male athletes reported feeling less pressure when playing for high expectancy coaches. One athlete explained: *“It was nice because I never had to worry about making a mistake. I could focus on improving as an athlete and if I made a mistake in the process it was ok”*. All athletes communicated that playing for high expectancy coaches allowed them to strictly focus on improving and playing to win. For example, Noah compared his experiences of playing for a high expectancy coach versus a low expectancy coach:

*“When I played for my high expectation coach I was playing for fun and playing to win.*

*When I played for my low expectation coach I was playing not to lose, out of fear of*

*being embarrassed. I did not want to be seen as more of a failure in my low expectation coach's eyes. With my high expectation coach, I could focus on improving more every day without the fear of embarrassing myself in the process”.*

#### **Theme 4: Coaches' influence on team culture.**

Theme 4 includes athletes' perceptions of how their coaches influenced the team culture (See Table 2). Athletes reported their high expectancy coaches promoted positive team cohesion through the creation of a positive learning environment. High expectancy coaches made it clear that all athletes on the team were valued and had something important to contribute to the team's success (*“Our coach always made it clear everyone had something to contribute”*). Female athletes went on to describe how their high expectancy coaches did not promote inter-team rivalry and stressed the importance of winning and losing as a team. Zoey noted: *“It did not matter if we won or lost in competition; the coach always made it clear we won as a team and lost as a team. If we gave our best effort that's all we could do”*. Male athletes noted that their high expectancy coaches fostered communication and leadership within the team culture (*“Our coach made it clear from day one in order to be a successful team, we had to communicate effectively and work together”*).

#### **Theme 4: Effect on team culture.**

When considering the impact on team culture of playing for high expectancy coaches, all athletes reported a greater sense of contribution, no matter the role they played, to the team. For example, Morgan described this lesson learned from her basketball coach, *“Just because there are only five starting spots does not mean that any other players are less valuable to the team's success”*. Female athletes reported teammates were more supportive of one another and worked

as a cohesive unit with effective communication on and off the court. Further, they were clear in noting that no one athlete ever felt a loss was their fault, and they did not fear letting down their teammates or coach (*"I always knew no matter what the outcome as long as I gave my best I had all the support from my teammates and coach"*). In turn, male athletes reported increased trust and mutual respect between all athletes and the coach. For example, Dustin said this in regard to the team culture on his baseball team:

*"The biggest take away from my high expectation coach was I cannot hold my teammates to a high standard if I do not hold myself to those same standards. He not only inspired me, but pushed, to be the best athlete and teammate I could be"*.

They also described how athletes were more likely to accept feedback from teammates in a positive manner. For example, Morgan said this about her softball teammates, *"I always knew my teammates had my best interest so when they did give me technical feedback I knew it was not coming from a place of criticism"*.

#### **Theme 5: Coaches' view of athletes beyond sport.**

A major finding was that athletes consistently reported how their high expectancy coaches cared for them as human beings, not just as athletes (See Table 2). Jordan said that in reference to her swim coach:

*"My coach always made an effort to ask how everything in life was going outside of swimming, He knew when there was something going on outside the pool that affected the way I was performing inside the pool. He made me feel valued as a person, not just a swimmer"*.

High expectancy coaches were always willing to lend support when athletes wanted to compete at the collegiate level. Female athletes described how their high expectation coaches taught them life lessons through sport and set them up for success in life. Sarah stated:

*“Now as I am a senior getting ready to go to college and be on my own, it has become clear to me all the lessons my golf coach has taught me are just as applicable to taking this next step in my life as they were to my gold career”.*

Female athletes also characterized their high expectancy coaches as role models. Males drew attention to the dedication their high expectancy coaches had to their athletes both inside and outside of practice. Nathan said this about the dedication of his track coach:

*“Every time I was at a meet my coach knew the stats of every athlete I was racing against. He knew their running styles and was able to tell me who to stick with throughout the race and how to play on each of each of my opponents’ weaknesses throughout the race. It was clear the time he put in after practice was over each night”.*

#### **Theme 5: Effects on athletes in life beyond sport.**

High expectancy coaches have a positive impact on their athletes beyond the athletic field. Athletes stated their high expectancy coaches inspired them to become the best version of themselves. Additionally, female athletes reported exerting increased effort in academic and employment life. For example, Jenny said her this about her volleyball coach, *“Having a high expectation coach helped me build confidence in not only my sport, but also in academics, and encouraged me to be a leader in other areas of my life, outside of my sport”.* Athletes also indicated they applied lessons learned from sport to the real world, and they adapted their high expectancy coaches’ qualities to the way they lived their own life. For example, Hannah said this

about her softball coach, *“I have looked up to my softball coach ever since I was little. She was a big college athlete/coach and I remember thinking it would be so cool to be a college athlete just like her.”* Females athletes remained in contact with their high expectancy coaches once the season concluded. One athlete said it best when she stated, *“It has been 5 years since I last competed for my swim coach, but whenever I need advice, I still reach out to her, no matter if it is swim advice or life”*. Male athletes reported taking the advice and lessons learned from their high expectancy coaches moving forward to different teams (*“I still reflect on advice my baseball coach gave me from last season”*).

### **Discussion**

A majority of the self-fulfilling prophecy literature has directly examined coaches' behaviors but has not considered athletes' perceptions of their coaches' behaviors or the impact it had on their development. This study allowed athletes the opportunity to share their specific experiences with coaches who had either high or low expectations for their athletic development and performance. Previous research has highlighted the benefits for athletes having coaches who have high, in contrast to low, expectations for them. Wilson and Stephens (2007) reported athletes whose coaches identified them with low, in contrast to high, expectations perceived an increase in negative feedback and a decrease in praise and encouragement from the coach, resulting in a less fulfilling sport experience in comparison to athletes deemed high expectancy. Results of this study aligned with previous research and indicate athletes who they perceived had coaches that formed high expectations for them had a more fulfilling sport experience. In contrast, when athletes described a coach who had low expectations for them, they experienced more problems with motivation and self-confidence.

Interestingly, the 20 high school athletes interviewed found it easy to identify and share memories about coaches who they perceived had high and low expectations for them. All athletes were able to provide a sharp distinction between the low expectancy and high expectancy coach they identified. Also, of interest was how clear-cut athletes' high expectancy coaches helped athletes reap many positive benefits both inside and outside sport. Whereas athletes' low expectancy coaches had a strong negative impact on their overall sport performance and experience.

Athletes responses across the interviews conducted for this study revealed five themes; the first being the coaches' overall approach to the season. Athletes who benefitted from high expectancy coaches reported a positive start to the season, describing their coaches as welcoming and receptive with high expectations for their individual and overall team development. Athletes responded to this positive approach with increased enjoyment and eagerness to push themselves to further limits, and an early personal connection to the coach. Thesis findings parallel Watt and Moore (2002) who found that high expectancy coaches can help athletes increase self-esteem, develop leadership and teamwork skills, and enhance motivation and discipline. In contrast, athletes were barely into the season with their low expectancy coaches when athletes reported feeling they had no voice and however they performed, the coach viewed it as inadequate. Athletes described feeling frustrated, defeated, exhausted, and without purpose. These descriptions align with previous research that shows athletes who experience negative coaching can lead them to lose confidence, withdraw effort, and no longer find joy in their sport (Gearity, 2011). The contrast of male and female athletes was quite noticeable. Females were passionate and animated when reflecting on their low expectancy coaches; clearly these memories elicited a strong negative emotional response. The male athletes also described their low expectancy

coaches with negative terminology but with lower emotional response than female athletes displayed.

The second and third theme revealed across the interviews described the channel in which coaches provided feedback and responded to mistakes. Athletes perceived feedback from high expectancy coaches to be high in technical instruction and positive reinforcement with an emphasis on effort and improvement. This led to an increase in self-confidence, effort, and enjoyment, as described by the athletes. High expectancy coaches were perceived as viewing mistakes as part of learning and responding with support and encouragement. In turn, athletes with high expectancy coaches reported a decrease in anxiety and nervousness allowing them to move past their mistakes and seek challenge. In comparison, athletes' perceived feedback from low expectancy coaches as negative with no technical instruction or positive reinforcement which led to a decrease in self-confidence, effort, and motivation in athletes. Low expectancy coaches were perceived as viewing mistakes as unacceptable, often resulting in punishment. This resulted in low expectancy athletes' feeling an increase in anxiety, nervousness, and pressure, which made it hard for athletes to move past their mistakes. This aligns with findings from Solomon et. al., (1998, a & b) who reported that high expectancy athletes received more instructional feedback and praise from coaches compared to low expectancy athletes. Solomon also found that coaches responded more positively to mistakes made by high expectancy athletes with increased instructional feedback and encouragement, compared to low expectancy athletes. Female and male athletes interviewed in the current study perceived their coaches' feedback and view on mistakes in a similar vein, reporting how their high expectancy coaches' feedback helped them maximize their athletic development and performance.

The fourth theme identified in this study was coaches' effect on team culture. Athletes perceived high expectancy coaches to foster a positive learning environment where every athlete was of equal value. This led to effective communication between teammates which resulted in all athletes on the team playing together as a cohesive unit. Athletes' also reported feelings of greater contribution and trust between teammates. Athletes' perceptions of their high expectancy coaches' emphasis on team climate aligns with Nicholls (1989) description of a task-involving motivational climate. In a task-involving climate athletes' perceive the coach values and recognizes high effort and improvement, encourages cooperation among teammates, and strives to make everyone feel they play an important role on the team (Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000). This aspect of motivational climate aligns with the perceptions athletes had of their high expectancy coaches' approach to building a supportive team culture found within this study.

There were substantial differences in female and male athletes' perception of their low expectancy coaches' emphasis on team culture and the effect that emphasis had on their team culture. Athletes perceived their low expectancy coaches created a negative learning environment in which not every athlete on the team was valued, with little to no emphasis placed on team cohesion. Female athletes additionally reported their low expectancy coaches promoted inter-team rivalry, even describing the learning environment within the team as toxic. Athletes' perceptions of their low expectancy coaches' emphasis on team culture aligns with Nicholls (1989) description of an ego involving climate. In an ego involving climate the coach values ability and performance, punishes mistakes, and creates team rivalry, giving praise and recognition to a small number of the athletes (Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000). This aspect of motivational climate aligns with the perception athletes had of their low expectancy coaches impact on team culture.

Female and male athletes reported similar perceptions and effects of high expectancy coaches' influence on team culture. However, there is a glaring contrast between the way low expectancy coaches affected female athletes team culture compared to male athletes. Female athletes reported numerous negative consequences tied to their low expectancy coaches' emphasis on team culture, while male athletes' team culture, regarding interaction with teammates, remained virtually unaffected. Female athletes reported there being a team divide which created tension and feuding between players. Male athletes reported it was because of their teammates that they did not quit the sport when playing for a low expectancy coach. While female athletes turned against one another, male athletes came together to rise above the negative energy of their low expectancy coaches.

The final theme identified was life beyond sport. Short and Short (2005) state an important research finding is that successful coaches seek to improve athletes' life both inside and outside of sport. Athletes' perceived their high expectancy coaches cared for them as individuals, teaching them life lessons through sport, and setting them up for success after their sport involvement ended. Female athletes even went on to describe their high expectation coaches as role models. High expectancy coaches inspired athletes to become the best version of themselves. These results are consistent with Newland et. al., (2019) who found that transformational coach behaviors are related to athletes' positive experiences in sport and help develop athletes' 5Cs (Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring). Clearly, athletes develop holistically when experiencing a high expectancy coach with transformation leadership qualities. The findings were quite different for athletes' description of their low expectancy coaches, as they were perceived as not caring for athletes as individuals.

Low expectancy coaches' effect on life beyond sport was also different for female and male athletes. Female athletes said they started to experience those negative emotions inflicted on them from their low expectancy coaches in other areas of their lives (i.e., confidence in academics, social life, and work life). Female athletes also carried the experience of their low expectancy coaches moving forward. However, male athletes were more likely to let the negative experiences with their low expectancy coaches go, moving forward into a new season. Male athletes did not let their low expectancy coaches define their worth in the way female athletes did. When athletes experience low expectancy coaches they are simply not developing in the same manner. It is incredible to consider all the positive benefits athletes would reap if all they experienced was high expectancy coaches throughout their sport career.

### **Limitations & Future Directions**

While this study makes an important contribution to the sport psychology of self-fulfilling prophecy literature, within sport psychology due to its qualitative approach and in-depth perspectives of athletes, it is not without its limitations. First, the study design that was employed called for athletes to recall their experiences with low and high expectancy coaches. While most athletes were reflecting on coaches they had currently or within the last two years, a few athletes went back further in their sport experience to describe their high and low expectancy coaches. One athlete recalled a coach she had six years prior to the interview. Even though three to six years had passed since the experience with those specific coaches, the athletes' memories appeared to be quite vivid and easy to recall for athletes. A second limitation of this study is the limited number of sport that athletes identified their low and high expectancy coaches. Athletes who were selected to participate in the study intentionally selected from a wide array of sports. Even so, when athletes were asked to identify low and high expectancy coaches, the array of

sports was reduced. Still, athletes' descriptions of their coaches high and low expectations for them remained consistent and suggests that coaches can engage in very distinct behaviors across a variety of sports. A third limitation of this study is that athletes were recalling coaches at one point in time. Lastly, this study solely examined athletes' perceptions of both their high and low expectancy coaches, but the perspective of the coaches was not explored. In this study, a full understanding of the self-fulfilling prophecy cannot be obtained without a more inclusive approach.

This study opens the door for more research on this topic. Future studies could examine the coaches' perspectives of the athletes in addition to the athletes' perspectives of the coaches; such a design would allow for a comparison to be made between the two viewpoints and a greater insight into the interaction of coaches' and athletes' experiences and the ways in which their views align. There is also limited qualitative research examining athletes' perceptions of their coaches' coaching style, or coaches' perceptions of their behaviors and the subsequent impact their behaviors have on athletes. Future studies could include different sport populations (i.e., youth sport, middle school, college) and see how the viewpoints athletes and coaches of different age ranges compare. Additionally, case studies including coaches and players on a single team across a season taking into consideration perceptions of all involved could provide rich insight into how dynamics take shape throughout a season. Finally, an intervention to train coaches on the benefits of being perceived as high expectancy coaches and the subsequent effects that coaching approach would have on their team is a promising area of inquiry. Both experimental and longitudinal studies would propel the self-fulfilling prophecy area of research moving forward and including a qualitative approach would allow athletes' and coaches' to better describe their perceptions of the extent to which they are able to optimize the best sport

experience. This study highlighted the valuable role coaches play in either helping athletes' maximize their sport involvement or ruin it.

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**Table 1: Athletes' Perception of their Low Expectancy Coaches'**

<b>Athletes' Perceptions of Coaching Style</b>	<b>Outcomes on Athletes</b>
<p><b>Overview Descriptors of Coach's Approach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unapproachable</li> <li>• Lacks belief in athlete(s)</li> <li>• Unrealistic expectations</li> <li>• Expectations remain stable through the season</li> <li>• Unpredictable behaviors</li> <li>• Push athletes to the breaking point</li> <li>• Untrustworthy (F)</li> <li>• Little/No interaction (M)</li> <li>• No eye contact (M)</li> <li>• Mocks the athletes (M)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Overview Effect on Athlete(s)</b></p> <p>Practice/Competition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often leads to an unsuccessful season</li> <li>• Experience little/no playing time</li> <li>• Experience little/no improvement through season</li> <li>• Athletes and coach are not on the same page</li> <li>• Lost interest halfway through the season</li> <li>• Dread going to practice and competition (F)</li> <li>• Taints athletes sport experience (F)</li> </ul> <p>Emotional Responses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease enjoyment</li> <li>• Increased frustration</li> <li>• Mental &amp; Emotional Defeat/Exhaustion (F)</li> <li>• Athletes perceived they had no role to play OR be the punching bag (F)</li> <li>• Athletes feel defeated (F)</li> <li>• Athletes want to prove the coach wrong (M)</li> <li>• Athletes feel their role is to be the "practice dummy" (M)</li> <li>• Athletes go through the motions (M)</li> <li>• Athletes never feel prepared (M)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Type(s) of Feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little/No technical instruction</li> <li>• No positive reinforcement/No reinforcement</li> <li>• Negative feedback OR Silent treatment</li> <li>• Cussing (F)</li> <li>• Tune out athletes' feedback (F)</li> <li>• Lots of critical yelling/screaming (M)</li> <li>• Lack knowledge of sport (M)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects of Feedback on Athletes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease self-confidence</li> <li>• Decrease effort &amp; motivation</li> <li>• Athletes become less coachable</li> <li>• Athletes fear feedback from the coach (F)</li> <li>• Athletes feel they have no voice (F)</li> <li>• Athletes feel invisible (M)</li> <li>• Athletes question the coach's qualification (M)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mistakes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mistakes are viewed as unacceptable</li> <li>• Mistakes are punished</li> <li>• Draws attention to mistake(s)</li> <li>• Players are pulled out during competition for mistakes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects of Mistakes on Athletes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Athletes are unable to move past mistakes</li> <li>• Athletes are unable to learn from mistakes</li> <li>• Athletes are less likely to accept challenges</li> <li>• Athletes are playing out of fear (F)/ Athletes are playing not to lose (M)</li> <li>• Increase anxiety &amp; nervousness (F)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Team Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates a toxic learning environment (F)/ Creates a negative learning environment (M)</li> <li>• Places no emphasis on team cohesion</li> <li>• Not every athlete on the team is valued</li> <li>• Gives preferential treatment to select athlete(s)</li> <li>• Promotes inter-team rivalry (F)</li> <li>• Pins failures on individual athletes (F)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects on Team Culture</b></p> <p>Females</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates a team divide</li> <li>• Creates tension/feuding between athletes</li> <li>• Athletes fear disappointing teammates &amp; coach</li> <li>• Athletes communicate ineffectively</li> <li>• Not all athletes feel a sense of belonging</li> </ul> <p>Males</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team culture remains virtually unaffected</li> <li>• Teammates keep athlete(s) from quitting</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Athletes are more likely to turn to teammates for feedback</li> <li>• Athletes feel they do not contribute</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Life Beyond Sport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach lacks concern for athletes as individuals</li> <li>• Coach overlooks collegiate potential if athletes are interested (F)</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Effects on Athletes in Life Beyond Sport</b></p> <p>Females</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starts to negatively affect athletes' academic, home, and work life</li> <li>• Athletes quit the sport</li> <li>• Athletes develop "tough skin"</li> <li>• Athletes still carry the experience with them</li> </ul> <p>Males</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Males are more likely to let go of the negative experiences with a coach moving into a new season</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Athletes' Perception of their High Expectancy Coaches**

<b>Athletes' Perceptions of Coaching Style</b>	<b>Outcomes on Athletes</b>
<p><b>Overview Descriptors of Coach's Approach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcoming/Approachable</li> <li>• Strict but fun</li> <li>• Believes in athlete(s)</li> <li>• Realistic/Attainable expectations</li> <li>• Expectations grew through the season</li> <li>• Pushes athletes to their personal best</li> <li>• Develops leadership qualities</li> </ul>	<p><b>Overview Effects on Athlete(s)</b></p> <p>View on Season</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saw major improvements through the season</li> <li>• Increased enjoyment</li> <li>• Looks forward to practice &amp; competition</li> <li>• Develops greater passion for the game</li> </ul> <p>Connection to Coach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Athletes feel more comfortable interacting with the coach</li> <li>• Athletes are more likely to push themselves to further limits</li> <li>• Athletes and coach are on the same page</li> <li>• Increase respect for all coaches (F)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Type(s) Feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High technical instruction</li> <li>• Focuses on effort &amp; improvement</li> <li>• Pay attention to detail</li> <li>• Positive reinforcement (F)</li> <li>• Open to athletes' feedback/suggestions (F)</li> <li>• Constructive criticism (M)</li> <li>• Knowledgeable about the sport (M)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects of Feedback on Athletes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase self-confidence</li> <li>• Increase effort &amp; motivation</li> <li>• Athletes become more coachable</li> <li>• Athletes feel they have a voice (F)</li> <li>• Athletes know what the coach expects of them (M)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mistakes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mistakes are viewed as a part of learning</li> <li>• Mistakes are not punished</li> <li>• Coach provides support &amp; encouragement</li> <li>• Coach provides helpful drills to correct mistakes</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects of Mistakes on Athletes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease anxiety, pressure, &amp; nervousness</li> <li>• Athletes can move past mistakes</li> <li>• Athletes are more likely to seek new challenges</li> <li>• Athletes are playing to win</li> <li>• Athletes can strictly focus on improving (M)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Team Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates a positive learning environment</li> <li>• Every athlete plays an important role</li> <li>• Promotes positive team cohesion</li> <li>• Does not promote inter-team rivalry (F)</li> <li>• Win &amp; lose as a team (F)</li> <li>• Promotes communication and leadership (M)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects on Team Culture</b></p> <p>Females</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teammates are more supportive of each other</li> <li>• Teammates do not fear letting their team down</li> <li>• Teammates work as a cohesive unit</li> <li>• Teammates communicate effectively</li> <li>• Every athletes feels they contribute</li> <li>• No individual athlete feels a loss is their fault</li> </ul> <p>Males</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every athlete feels they contribute</li> <li>• Positively take feedback from teammates</li> <li>• Increase trust between teammates</li> <li>• Mutual respect between teammates and coach</li> </ul>
<p><b>Life Beyond Sport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach cares for athletes as human beings</li> <li>• Coach assists in the recruiting process</li> <li>• Coach teaches life lessons through sport (F)</li> <li>• Coach sets athletes up for success in life (F)</li> <li>• Coach serves as role model (F)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Effects on Athletes in Life Beyond Sport</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspires athletes to become best version of themselves</li> <li>• Increase effort in academic/work life (F)</li> <li>• Apply lessons from sport to real world (F)</li> <li>• Athletes adapt coach's life practices/qualities (F)</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coach dedicates time inside and outside of practice to better the team (M)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Athletes remain in contact with the coach after the season has concluded (F)</li><li>• Athletes carry coach's advice moving forward to different teams (M)</li></ul>
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## Appendices

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## **Appendix A: Extended Literature Review**

The power of the self-fulfilling prophecy to influence individuals' ability, and belief in themselves, is evident in much of the research conducted throughout classrooms and sport settings. A self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when a person forms an inaccurate expectation about another person that leads them behave in an inaccurate manner. The purpose of this study is to explore the direct positive and negative effects self-fulfilling prophecy has on athletes when they experience coaches who either forms a high or low expectation for the athlete and the impact that has on the athlete. Inaccurate expectations formed from self-fulfilling prophecies are harmful because of the direct impact those expectations have on the athlete's performance ability and confidence. A major way to overcome the false expectations addressed with self-fulfilling prophecy in sport is through building a strong coach-athlete relationship. Coaches who take the time to get to know their athletes on a personal level helps them view their athletes as individuals, decreasing the chances of coaches forming false expectations before fully interacting with each of their athletes. The goal is to look into the amount of power a coaches' belief plays in the amount of confidence and success athletes experience through the promotion of an open coach-athlete relationship. This paper will allow deeper exploration into the theory behind self-fulfilling prophecy and the affect self-fulfilling prophecy has on athletes' sport experience and overall confidence.

### **Theory Behind Self-Fulfilling Prophecy**

Robert Merton, an American sociologist, first coined the term self-fulfilling prophecy in 1948; he defined self -fulfilling prophecy as "in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation, evoking a new behavior, which makes the originally false conception come true" (Merton, 1948, pp. 506). Through Merton's definition it becomes apparent the power an individual, or group of

individuals held in high regards, have on the outcome of a situation. Merton's term of self-fulfilling prophecy comes from W.I. Thomas theorem, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Merton, 1948, pp. 504). Preconceived notions, or predictions can play a vital role on a situation thus directly affecting subsequent developments and outcomes of that situation. Merton uses the example of testing anxiety in preparation for an exam. When professors tell their students how difficult an exam is going to be, the students may start to focus more on their anxieties surrounding how hard the exam is going to be as opposed to their preparation for the exam. The student's initial thoughts surrounding their success on the exam may shift fears of testing anxiety allowing testing anxiety to take over, making the initial fallacious testing anxiety a true justified fear (Merton, 1948). A direct example specific to sport would be an athlete preparing for a big competition. In practice coaches can have their athletes run through different scenarios that could possibly take place during competition. During practice the coach proceeds to pick out and show lack of confidence in one specific athlete. Through the dismissal of confidence that specific athlete will proceed to lack confidence in himself allowing fear and anxiety to set in. When competition day comes, and the previous fake scenarios become real life the athlete fails to perform, making the previously false failure become a reality.

For self-fulfilling prophecies to be broken the previous viewpoint, or expectation, placed on the situation needs to be broken and a new viewpoint, or expectation, needs to be introduced. Through sport this takes place when coaches taking time to invest in their athletes as individuals first and as athletes second. By coaches taking the time to invest in their athletes it allows them to open up on a more personal level, This helps the coach to see more of who they are possibly changing coaches previous opinion about any specific athlete. Merton's study was the first study

to identify what self-fulfilling prophecy is, the negative effects that can come from it, and how reinforcing fear can be broken through the introduction of a new viewpoint or expectation which breaks the continuous cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) *Pygmalion in the Classroom* is one of the first major studies to apply Merton's self-fulfilling prophecy, examining how one person's expectation of another person's behavior directly affects that person's performance. The authors wanted to determine if there was any degree of change in teacher's expectations about students' academic achievements when they had preconceived beliefs about which students were going to have the most growth. This study took place in a public elementary school where teachers were told certain students were expected to be "growth spurters" based on the students' results on the Harvard Test of Influenced Acquisitions (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). In reality researchers had made the test up and the children reported as "spurters" were picked at random. This study took place over a period of one year with 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grades. Through this study they discuss which group had greater intellectual growth over the year: the group of children who were expected by their teachers to have greater intellectual growth or the undesignated control group. The major variables of focus in this study were age, ability (i.e. fast track, medium track, or slow track), sex (i.e. male or female), and minority group status.

Intellectual growth happened across all ages; however there were major differences between IG (intellectual growth) gains in the control group and experiment group for 2<sup>nd</sup> graders, no significant differences were found between the three different tracks a student could be on, and children in the minority group received more advantage by favorable expectations than were the other children, though the differences were not statistically significant. Self-fulfilling prophecy was more evident in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. There is much speculation as to why this was the case.

Perhaps younger children are more impressionable, less set in their ways, and open more to the opportunity of change, thus making it easier to change their ways. This is not to say that fifth and sixth graders are not open to change because their IQ levels did go up, there was just not a major difference between the control and experimental groups in favor of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The results from this experiment showed further evidence that one person's expectations of another's behavior may come to serve as self-fulfilling prophecy (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). This study shows the power belief has on the reality of the outcome just as Merton talked about in his 1948 article. Teachers wanted to work with the students who they believed were going to have the most academic growth and success. The same can be translated into coaching and sport. Coaches are going to spend more time working with the players they believe are going to be the most successful to ensure they, as coaches, have a winning team. The problem with personal opinions and beliefs is that athletes who have potential can get left behind because of the coaches' false expectation they have associated with them.

Self-fulfilling prophecy became a powerful and persuasive movement, especially during the 1980's, though there was not strong convincing evidence supporting the powerful effect of self-fulfilling prophecy. Madon, Jussim, and Eccles (1997) conducted a follow-up study tying directly to Merton's 1948 study and Rosenthal and Jacobson's 1968 study. As previously discussed, Merton's 1948 study introduced the term of self-fulfilling prophecy about situations in which previously false beliefs became true. However, it was not until Rosenthal and Jacobson's experiment in 1968 that self-fulfilling prophecies became a major area of research in social psychology. This study builds off of Rosenthal and Jacobson's study taking place in the classroom setting. This study dives deeper into positive and negative self-fulfilling prophecies examining which type of self-fulfilling prophecy is more powerful, addressing if certain students

are more susceptible to self-fulfilling prophecies because of their self-belief in particular areas of achievements and previous academic records.

Through Madon, Jussim, and Eccles (1997) study, the golem hypothesis was brought to light in the classroom not previously studied. The golem hypothesis examines the question of negative expectations producing a more powerful self-fulfilling prophecy. Historically it would have been considered unethical to introduce negative expectations in a real-world classroom. However, leading up to this study several reviews had speculated that under naturalistic conditions expectations lead to more powerful self-fulfilling prophecies when they were negative compared to when they are positive (e.g, Brophy, 1983; Brophy & Good, 1974; Eccles & Wigfield, 1985). Due to this proclamation, Madon, Jussim, and Eccles (1997) examined whether positive and negative expectations produce a more powerful self-fulfilling prophecy. They addressed whether students with low self-belief in a particular achievement domain and poor previous academic records were more susceptible to self-fulfilling prophecies compared to students with high self-beliefs and positive previous academic achievements.

Mason, Jussim, and Eccles (1997) study involved nearly 100 teachers and more than 1,500 sixth-grade students in public school math classes. In this study four hypotheses are examined: 1) Golem: negative expectations produce more powerful self-fulfilling prophecies than do positive expectations, 2) Self-enhancement: positive expectations produce more powerful self-fulfilling prophecies than do negative expectations, 3) Self-consistency: expectations produce more powerful self-fulfilling prophecies when they match a student's self-belief in a particular achievement domain, and 4) Susceptibility: expectations produce more powerful self-fulfilling prophecies for students with low self-belief in a particular achievement domain than for students with high self-belief in a particular achievement domain (Madon,

Jussim, & Eccles, 1997). Results from this study revealed self-fulfilling prophecies were more powerful for low achievers. Some of the results from this study aligned with previous naturalistic studies showing relatively small effect sizes on the power of self-fulfilling prophecies. However, just because this study supports previous naturalistic studies on self-fulfilling prophecy does not mean the effect of naturally occurring self-fulfilling prophecies is always small. Under certain conditions, and for certain targets, self-fulfilling prophecies can be more powerful than the average effect size as this study points out. One condition was exposed through this study under which self-fulfilling prophecies were more powerful than usual; that being when teachers overestimate low achievers. This study points out the positive effects that come from believing in those who are viewed as underachievers. Although this study takes place in the classroom this can take place in a sport setting. An example in sport would be when coaches zone in on the athletes that show the most potential overlooking one or two athletes who have star potential but need some guidance along the way. When those specific teachers showed belief in their previously low achieving students, they rose to the challenge perhaps because an outside source of belief increased their self-confidence, making it possible to succeed in an academic realm where historically they had experienced minimal success. Although this specific study does support that most self-fulfilling prophecies are often small, there are certain cases under which self-fulfilling prophecies are quite powerful. The revelation of this study points out the positive effects that self-fulfilling prophecy can have when a teacher shows belief and confidence in students who historically have not experienced a lot of academic success.

### **Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Sport**

There is considerable literature describing the effects of self-fulfilling prophecy on students in the classroom, but there is limited research relating the effects of self-fulfilling

prophecy on athletes in sport settings. Self-fulfilling prophecy has been defined in a sport setting as a coach's expectations of an athlete's ability that can serve as prophecies that may ultimately influence the athlete's level of performance (Horn & Lox, 1993). The cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy within sport mirrors the self-fulfilling prophecy circle Merton described in 1948. Starting with the pre-season, coaches can develop certain expectations and pre-conceived notions about each individual athlete on their team. These expectations affect the amount, and type, of interaction a coach has with each athlete directly affecting the type, and amount, of feedback a coach gives to each athlete. Also affected are motivation and learning opportunities for each individual athlete, therefore conforming the athletes' performance ability to the coaches' initial expectations for that individual athlete at the start of the season completing the continuous cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy. The only way to stop false beliefs from turning into a reality is to break this continuous circle. Something or someone must step in and restructure the way a coach views an individual athlete, in turn changing the interaction and feedback the coach has with that specific athlete.

Solomon is a leading researcher on the effects self-fulfilling prophecy can have within a sports setting. Solomon (1998) examined the destruction of this continuous cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy in sport by examining if a coaches' perception of an athlete's ability and improvement potential at the start of the season is flexible, able to change, or remained stable and concrete, throughout the season as well as the predicted affect this had on the amount and type of feedback the coach gave to each athlete. This study included 49 high school male basketball athletes and four male AA head basketball coaches examining the coach-athlete dynamic during practice. Coaches were asked to rank each individual athlete's playing ability and chance for improvement at the start and end of season. Basketball practices were then

observed nine times over the course of a 12-week regular season, with researchers observing the dynamic of the coach-athlete interaction.

Solomon (1998) reported that the relationship between rankings of ability and improvement had different patterns. At the start of the season coaches assumed their athletes with high ability would improve most over the course of the season. Showing coaches predicted the measures of ability and improvement would be related. At the end of the season the two ratings, ability and improvement, were in fact unrelated. This suggests the higher ability and players has does not predict high improvement as coaches thought at the start of the study. There were also differences between pre-season and post-season coach rankings of ability and improvement. Through the comparison of coach-rankings it was observed that coaches maintained flexible perceptions of an athlete's ability to improve, but stable views on which athlete's had the most ability. There was a small relationship discovered between an athlete's improvement and ability related to coach feedback. However, specific athletes who coaches perceived low in improvement potential received more management feedback (e.g. make sure to retrieve your ball after shooting free-throws) while those deemed high in potential improvement received more instructional feedback (e.g. make sure you keep your hips square to the basket when shooting your free-throw) (Solomon, Golden, Ciapponi, & Martin, 1998). This study supports the circular model of self-fulfilling prophecy in sport in regard to athletes' ability and the type of feedback they receive from their coach. Results from this study suggest when a coach has pre-conceived beliefs of high ability within an athlete, they take the time to give them more instructional feedback to help them improve while those who are not perceived to have high ability by the coach tend to become overlooked receiving less instructional feedback from the coach to increase the chances of improvement. To disrupt the continuous cycle of self-fulfilling

prophecy in sport, changing a coach's view on an athlete's ability is crucial so athletes are receiving the instructional feedback they need from coaches to improve.

As previously pointed out, feedback plays a crucial role in the development of self-fulfilling prophecy becoming true regarding athletes' performance. Without feedback and praise from coaches, athletes may become discouraged and lose confidence within themselves, conforming to the beliefs of their coaches. Solomon (1998) later focused on the amount of feedback an athlete receives based on a coaches pre-conceived notion about their performance ability in relation to coaches' years of experience. Solomon assesses the influence coaching experience has on feedback and athletes' perception of coach feedback, and the direct affect that has on the coach-athlete dynamic. Is it possible for coaches to grow out of self-fulfilling prophecies they develop coaching in their younger years or do they fall deeper into creating self-fulfilling prophecies as their experience increases?

Feedback is a major factor, that can mediate a self-fulfilling prophecy. Feedback refers to the verbal information a teacher/coach issues a student/athlete regarding academic achievement or physical ability (Solomon, DiMarco, et. al., 1998). When analyzing the amount and type of coach feedback it is important to study coaches' behavior and athletes' perceptions of their coaches' behavior. Athletes pick up on the confidence, or lack thereof, their coach has in them, making self-fulfilling prophecies in sport a frequent occurrence. Coaches tend to focus most of their time, efforts, and feedback on high expectancy athletes leaving the low expectancy athletes to feel overlooked. It is also important to note in Solomon (1998) coaches responded more positively with instruction feedback to mistakes made by high expectancy athletes in comparison to low expectancy athletes.

Solomon's 1998 study consisted of a pilot study and a main study. The pilot study consisted of two Division I collegiate basketball teams' coaches and players. The main study included eight high school basketball teams' coaches and players. Coaches were asked to rank their athletes from most skilled to least skilled. The top one-third represented high expectancy athletes and the bottom one-third represented the low expectancy athletes in this study. In the pilot study it was indicated that high expectancy athletes received more praise and viewed all coaches favorably, regardless of the years of experience coaches had. The main study revealed that high expectancy athletes received more praise and instruction than low expectancy athletes, and it also showed that high expectancy athletes favored low experience coaches. On the flip side, low expectancy athletes preferred more experienced coaches because they tended to receive more instructional feedback although still less compared to high expectancy athletes. Results from this study show how self-fulfilling prophecy effects the difference between the type and amount of feedback high and low expectancy athletes receive from coaches.

The purpose of Solomon's (1998) experiment was two-fold addressing the relationship between coaching experience and feedback patterns but also the effect of coaching experience on athletes' perceptions. There was no significant difference found between the type of feedback a coach gives based on their years of experience. The type and quality of feedback a coach gives stays consistent throughout their years of coaching. For long-term team success it is important for athletes to understand and interpret their coach's feedback in the right manner. It is vital for coaches to give clear and precise feedback to their athletes ensuring the athletes understand what their coaches are asking of them. When athletes receive minimal or no feedback, it can leave athletes in a gray area lacking motivation, doubting their ability, and feeling a disconnect from their team and their coach.

A study by Wilson and Stephens (2007) builds from Solomon's work on coaches' expectations and the affects self-fulfilling prophecies play on the amount and type of feedback athletes receive. Through this study the authors examined the differences between high and low expectancy athletes on perceived coach treatment, using a six-step Expectancy Confirmation Model to examine these differences. The results confirm previous results showing the effects of self-fulfilling prophecies in sport on athletes. Self-fulfilling prophecy in relation to sport is a coach's perception and formation of high or low expectations of athletes which influences athletes' cognitions and subsequent behavior, similar to Merton's definition in 1948. The complete process of self-fulfilling prophecy has been identified as a six-stage model called Expectancy Confirmation (Darley & Fazio, 1980). The model involves these specific stages in a sport context: 1) a coach forms an expectancy of an athlete, 2) the coach behaves in a manner that matches his/her expectancy, 3) the athlete interrupts the coach's behavior, 4) the athlete responds to the coach's behavior, 5) the coach interprets the athlete's response, 6) the athlete interprets his/her personal response to the coach's behavior. Darley and Fazio adopted this model from Fiske and Taylor's (1991) study, but also included the possibility of coaches retaining their original expectations of an athlete even after being presented with new information that contradicts a coach's original expectation.

Wilson and Stephens (2007) study focuses specifically on the first three stages of the Expectancy Confirmation Model. This study consisted of 108 basketball athletes (i.e. 105 males, 79 females) and their 16 head coaches, both male and female coaches, from four high schools across the Midwest area of the United States. These specific high schools were selected because they consisted of athletes having a wide range of abilities. The coaches were asked to rate their athletes' competence using the Expectancy Rating Scale (ERS; Solomon, 1993). In order for the

authors to examine coaches' expectations, negative feedback, and work/rule orientation, athletes were asked to complete a modified version of the Teacher Treatment Inventory.

The authors reported that high expectancy athletes perceived their coaches held high expectations, greater work and rule orientation, and provided less negative feedback in comparison to the low expectancy athletes on their team. Through this study stage three of the Expectancy Confirmation model is evidence showing athletes are able to identify differential coach treatment to the extent that athletes begin to adapt to their coach's behavior cues. In comparison, results showed low expectancy athletes perceived they got more negative feedback from their coaches and were given less of an opportunity to master/improve their basketball skills (Wilson & Stephens, 2007). This supports the results of Solomon's studies showing the different treatment received between high and low expectancy athletes. Specifically, high expectancy athletes receive more communication, instruction and praise, while low expectancy athletes receive little praise and negative feedback with little technical instruction on how to enhance their performance ability.

Self-fulfilling prophecy is prevalent within sport and has a direct effect on an athlete's performance and experience with sport. High expectancy athletes likely excel and enjoy sport more because their coaches provide them with technical instruction, positive feedback, and confidence. While low expectancy athletes are given a limited chance due to pre-conceived beliefs a coach has about their character or playing ability leading to a lack of confidence and self-worth within low expectancy athletes.

## **Coach-Athlete Relationship**

The coach athlete relationship has the potential to be important and powerful. Coaches have this unique opportunity to set-up many athletes they encounter on a successful path for life, inside and outside of sport, due to the major influence they have on the physical and psychological development of their athletes. A beneficial way to disrupt the cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy in sport is through the coach-athlete relationship. A self-fulfilling prophecy cycle becomes complete when an athlete's performance confirms the coach's expectancy of them (Short & Short, 2005). By coaches taking the time to develop those interpersonal relationships with their athletes they can form accurate and effective expectations for each athlete based on their performance.

Placing an importance on effort in the coach-athlete relationship in both an athletic and personal manner can help enhance the chances of coaches forming accurate expectations avoiding the effects of self-fulfilling prophecy. Every coach should take the time to learn about his or her athletes on a more intimate level. By coaches showing an interest in their athletes the more the athletes will trust their coaches' expectations in them are accurate.

Hunhyuk (2013) focus solely on the importance an individual athlete has with their coach and how that specific relationship is associated to the three basic psychological needs an athlete must feel are met to optimize their performance. The three basic psychological factors important to the coach-athlete relationship are autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Specifically, commitment and closeness were significantly correlated with competence and autonomy, whereas complementarity was significantly correlated with competence and relatedness (Hunhyuk, Seongkwan, & Jinyoung, 2013). Coaches' individual relationships with their athletes can either enhance or inhibit their performance. Inhibitions and doubt surrounding an athlete's

performance set in when coaches form false notions surrounding the ability of an athlete. It is important for coaches to realize that taking the time to relate to their athletes not only helps their athletes feel more competent and related but also allows the opportunity for change surrounding previous thoughts or the formation of false expectations surrounding their athletes.

Many coaches are unsure of what steps they should be taking to ensure their athletes wellbeing and development as both individuals and athletes. There is one type of leadership style coaches of any age level should exemplify to foster a positive imprint on their athletes. Transformation leadership takes place when coaches positively work with their athletes in certain groups to identify positive changes that need to be made through inspiring those working with them to take action and execute positive changes as a team. When coaches exemplify this specific type of leadership, self-fulfilling prophecies are less likely to occur. Through the execution of transformational leadership, coaches are taking charge by inspiring each of their athletes, equipping them with the confidence they need to become a successful athlete and teammate. The key to transformation leadership is the balancing act of working with athletes on a more individualized level while also stressing the importance of team cohesion and working together to help everyone reach their full potential. In a study by Bormann and team (2016) they examine the effects of transformation leadership within coaches in relation to the affect it has on player performance. They looked at both individual and team performance in cohesion with effects of players' win orientation and team's competitive performance through the creation of articulating a vision and providing an appropriate model. They found through the articulation of a vision individual performance improved along with team performance. This study expands the insight into the potential of transformational leadership with a strong focus on the role of situational contingencies (Bormann, et. al., 2016). By taking the time as coaches to work with

your athletes to identify a game plan and then inspire athletes to carry out those changes that need to happen for a team to be successful pushes athletes to want to make a change within themselves and the culture of the team. Coaches who take the time to work with their athletes on an individual level know better how to best maximize the effort and focus of each athlete by catering to their needs as an individual. Each athlete brings their own strength to make a successful team, when coaches take the time to bring out those specific strengths by knowing their athletes on a more personal level the more likely their team will be successful.

Transformational leadership allows a coach to look past the formation of pre-conceived notions helping athletes find their role on the team no matter the level of their physical talent.

Transformational leadership can assist coaches in forming accurate expectations surrounding each of their athletes equipping coaches with the knowledge they need to ensure the growth they want to see in each athlete.

A coach caring for their athletes on a personal level is something rarely seen throughout the sport world. It is important for coaches to take the time to get to know all of their athletes on a more personal level, not only to make the athlete more comfortable, but also making sure the athlete feels more valued by their coach. Taking time to understand athletes on a more personal level allows for a more open relationship between players and their coach. When a coach gets to know their athletes on a more personal level it allows them to see how individual athletes best improve on their performance for the game. This allows them to maximize each athlete's playing ability by catering to the individualized way each of them excels best. The promotion of a positive coach-athlete relationship decreases the chances of false pre-dispositions to formulate on the coaches' behalf, decreasing the amount of self-fulfilling prophecy taking place in sport.

## **Self-Fulfilling Prophecies Effects on Confidence**

The amount of confidence an athlete exudes directly ties into their athletic performance. Self-fulfilling prophecies have the power to build or inhibit the amount of confidence athletes have in their athletic ability. Low expectancy athletes' confidence is directly affected by the type of feedback coaches give to their low expectancy athletes based on the high or low expectations they form. When coaches do not show confidence within certain athletes those low expectancy athletes will be more likely to play hesitantly and fearful making those self-fulfilling prophecies more likely to become true. There is a direct correlation between high expectancy athletes and coaches' expectations from them. Coaches expectations surrounding high expectancy athletes lead them to offer more instructional feedback, praise, and confidence in high expectancy athletes' abilities from high expectancy athletes' coaches increasing the amount of confidence high expectancy athletes have in their abilities.

Confidence is a key ingredient to being successful in life. Individuals who portray more confidence in their ability tend to be more successful in their job, mental health, business, combat, and sport (Johnson & Fowler 2011). Often in sport it is easy to notice which athletes display confidence in their performance ability and which athletes do not. However, there is this idea of overconfidence, displaying too much confidence, leading to negative outcomes. Some researchers believe overconfidence, individuals believing they are better than they really are, sets an individual up for more success because it increases individuals' ambition, morale, persistence, and so forth. Overconfidence can generate a self-fulfilling prophecy in which exaggerated confidence increases the probability of success (Johnson & Fowler, 2011). Authors look into the idea of over confidence as a positive self-fulfilling prophecy that leads athletes, and individuals, to believe in the impossible possibly overcoming the odds of failure.

Overconfidence has a chance to affect different populations as long as the benefits seen from overconfidence are sufficiently larger compared to the costs of overconfidence.

Overconfidence has been prevalent in humans for many years leading some researchers to believe there must be some direct positive benefits or why else do people continue to be overconfident (Johnson & Fowler, 2011). However, it has been shown overconfidence can lead to judgment error in decision-making because of the underestimation of our competition. For example, an overconfident team could underestimate the ability of an underdog team they are going to play leading them to slack in practice and not take that specific game seriously. This could lead to the outcome of them losing because they were not adequately prepared to play this team. There is a fine line between confidence and being too confident when preparing for a competition. Also, when athletes are too confident, they can fall victim to self-fulfilling prophecies from their coach. Displaying overconfidence as athletes can make it hard for those athletes' teammates and coaches to work with them.

Just as overconfidence can be damaging, too little confidence can be just as damaging. To evaluate the role of confidence it is important to ask individuals to rate their own confidence. When individuals rate themselves to be more confident than their ability their perception error is seen to be sufficiently high. When individuals rate their confidence to be lower than their ability their perception error is seen to be sufficiently low. When individuals rated themselves to have confidence matching their ability, their perception error is a moderate amount of uncertainty. In sport it is beneficial for athletes to have confidence in their performance ability to show their coach they are confident in their own ability, but as an athlete it is also important to recognize there is always room for growth. Johnson and Fowler describe this as, "Individuals choose whether or not to claim a resource on the basis of their perceived capability relative to the

capability of other claimants” (Johnson & Fowler, 2011). When athletes believe they can beat out someone else for their spot on a team or believe they can beat an opponent they are going to work harder to experience that success. Therefore, self-fulfilling prophecy can be detrimental to the confidence of an athlete because when they see, or believe, their coach does not believe in them they may not have the confidence to believe in themselves.

The mental state of an athlete prior to competitive play is crucial to the amount of success they see in competition. The amount of self-confidence an athlete has ties directly to the amount of anxiety and positive or negative mental state each individual athlete experiences before competition play. Anxiety can be a direct side effect stemming from the amount of confidence an athlete has in their performance ability. Coaches play a vital role in the formation or destruction of self-confidence in each of their athletes. Covassin and Pero (2004) examined the relationship between self-confidence and anxiety in collegiate tennis players. Twenty-four collegiate tennis players filled out a thirty-minute survey prior to their tennis match during the NCAA Regional (VII) Team Tennis Tournament. Results showed winning tennis players had significantly higher self-confidence and lower somatic anxiety levels compared to tennis players who lost. They also spoke to the testament of their coach and the belief their coaches had within them as an athlete. In addition to those findings, winning athletes who have higher self-confidence and lower anxiety levels were able to remain calmer and more relaxed under pressure moments throughout their match (Covassin & Pero, 2004). This study speaks to the important role self-confidence plays in the amount of success an athlete can experience. When coaches choose to build up their athletes, showing athletes trust, their self-confidence soars. On the flip side this study shows the detrimental effects low self-confidence has on an athlete’s performance ability leading to high somatic anxiety during competition play. Many of these athlete’s experience coaches who do

not believe in them as an athlete causing them to receive less praise, poor feedback, and no technical instruction from their coaches allowing them to improve in their athletic ability.

The powerful role of self-fulfilling prophecy within sport is evident and must be changed. Self-fulfilling prophecy was first coined by Merton in 1948, a *false* definition of the situation, evoking a new behavior, which makes the originally false expectation come true. Within sport contexts self-fulfilling prophecy is when a coach's expectations of an athlete's ability ultimately influence the athlete's level of performance. The coach-athlete relationship can help coaches to overcome negative self-fulfilling prophecies within sport. Coaches taking the time to get to know their players on a more personal level will allow them to resist forming high or low expectations surrounding their athletes. Self-fulfilling prophecies seen within sport take a direct effect on an athlete's self-confidence within their ability to perform. The purpose of this paper is to allow deeper exploration into the theory behind self-fulfilling prophecy and the affect self-fulfilling prophecy has on an athlete's experience, and the role a coach-athlete relationship can have on the amount of confidence coaches instill in each of their athletes directly affecting athletes' sport experience.

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## Appendix B: Assent Form

My name is Samantha Foley. I am interested in learning about athletes' experiences with coaches' expectations, as perceived by the high school athlete, examining the influences coaches and their expectations have on high school athletes sport experience and overall development. If you would like to participate in my study, you would be asked to take part in a onetime only interview that will last approximately 30 minutes. During this interview high school athletes will be asked to reflect upon a coach they felt set high expectations for them sometime across their sport career, and a coach who they felt set low expectations for them sometime across their sport career.

If you decide you want to be in my study, you will be asked to reflect upon a coach who you felt set high expectations for your sport performance and overall sport development, as well as a coach who you perceive had low expectations in this regard.

This will be a onetime only interview in which all interviews will be recorded. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes depending on the length of participants answers. Recordings are necessary for analysis of data following the conclusion of the interview. All interview recordings will be kept in a locked closet to which only the primary researcher and faculty supervisor will have access. All recordings will be destroyed once the study has been published.

No risks are anticipated for this study.

Other people will not know if you are in my study. I will put things I learn about you together with things I learn about other high school athletes, so no one can tell what things came from you. When I tell other people about my research, I will not use your name, so no one can tell who I am talking about.

Your parents or guardian have to say it's OK for you to be in the study. After they decide, you get to choose if you want to do it too. If you don't want to be in the study, no one will be mad at you. If you want to be in the study now and change your mind later, that's OK. You can stop at any time.

If you don't feel like answering any questions, you don't have to, and you can stop speaking with me anytime and that will be all right. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have now or when we are talking together. Do you want to take part in this project?

For more information feel free to contact me at [samantha.foley@ku.edu](mailto:samantha.foley@ku.edu). I appreciate your consideration.

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## **Appendix C: Parent Consent Form**

Title of Study: A Closer Look at Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: Athletes Experiences with Coaches who have High and Low Expectations for Them

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Department of Health, Sport, and Exercise Sciences at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish your child to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not allow your child to participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw your child from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to examine athletes' experiences with coaches who have either high or low expectations (i.e., as perceived by the athletes) for them.

### **PROCEDURES**

For this study, high school athletes will be asked to identify and reflect upon a coach who they perceive had high expectations for their sport performance and overall sport development, as well as a coach who they perceive had low expectations in this regard.

This will be a onetime only interview in which all interviews will be recorded. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes depending on the length of participants answers. Recordings are necessary for analysis of data following the conclusion of the interview. All interview recordings will be kept in a locked closet to which only the primary researcher and faculty supervisor will have access. All recordings will be destroyed once the study has been published.

### **RISKS**

No risks are anticipated for this study.

### **PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your child's name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about your child or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher(s) will use a study number or a pseudonym rather than your child's name. Your child's identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form, you give permission for the use and disclosure of your child's information, excluding your child's name, for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

### **REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION**

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, your child cannot participate in this study.

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

#### PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my child's rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429, write to the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to allow my child to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name	Date
Parent/Guardian Signature	

#### Researcher Contact Information

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## **Appendix D: Interview Guide**

**Intro:** Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study, I really appreciate it. Like you have been briefed before you started the interview today, we are going to discuss how different coaches have impacted your sport experience and overall development. To start off I would like you to tell me a little bit more about your sport experiences and why you enjoy playing sport(s). Coaches play an important role to all athletes' sport experience. Today I want you to reflect on different coaches you have experienced throughout your sport career. First, I want you to reflect on a time you had a coach who you felt set high expectations for you as an athlete. When I say high expectations, I am referring to a coach who you felt believed you had potential in the sport and believed you would have a lot to contribute to the team.

### **Formation of Coach Expectations:**

Tell me more about those expectations.

Tell me about how your coach acted that made you pick up on his/her expectations.

### **Athlete's Perception of Coach's Behavior:**

What different behaviors did the coach show that made you pick up on him/her having high expectations for you?

Do you think the coach was intentionally showing these behaviors or do you think he/she wanted you to pick up on these expectations?

### **Influence on Athlete:**

How did this make you feel?

What impact did this have on you?

### **Results of Coach's Expectation on Athlete:**

Do you feel the coaches' expectations changed/appropriate through the course of the season?

How did these high/low expectations set by your coach influence your personal experience?

How did these high/low expectations set by your coach influence your sport experience?

**\*\*Now, I would like you to reflect on a time you had a coach who you felt set low expectations for you as an athlete. When I say low expectations, I am referring to a coach who you felt thought you did not have a lot of potential within the sport and didn't think you had as much to contribute to the team as others.**