

WINNING WITH MORALS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE IMPACT THAT  
COLLEGE COACHES HAVE ON THE CHARACTER  
OF THEIR ATHLETES

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

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## ABSTRACT

Through sports athletes are thought to build admirable character traits such as discipline, hard work, sportsmanship, and teamwork. Additionally, there are moral character traits like honesty, integrity, respect for others, and fair play. Research suggests that coaches can and do influence these characteristics both positively and negatively (Van Mullem, Brunner, & Stoll, 2008; Brown, 2003; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007). The purpose of this ethnographical, phenomenological study is to understand and describe the views and priorities that Division II and III varsity college coaches have toward the development of moral character of their athletes, as well as insight into the athlete's perspective of the coach's influence. Themes will be developed from all data through open coding by revisiting transcripts of the interviews and inductively analyzing the material, breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data (Creswell, 2007, p. 239-240). The hope is to gain a deeper, richer understanding of the coaches' definition of and perceived role concerning the development of the moral character of the athletes they coach: while also seeking the lived experience of character development from the athletes.

*Keywords*, Coach, Sports, Athletes, Morals, Character, sportsmanship, teamwork, fair play.

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## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Table of Contents.....	5
List of Tables .....	12
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	13
Background.....	13
Situation to Self.....	17
Problem Statement.....	18
Purpose Statement.....	18
Significance of the Study.....	19
Research Questions.....	19
Research Plan.....	20
Delimitations.....	22
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	23
Theoretical Framework.....	23
Social Cognitive Theory .....	24
Structural Development .....	27
Review of the Literature.....	31
Introduction.....	31
Define Character .....	31
Climate Defined.....	34
Coach's Role in Character Development.....	36

Responsible.....	36
Role Model .....	37
Philosophy .....	38
Coach Influences Climate .....	39
Coach's Philosophy about Winning .....	43
Athletes' Perceptions of Coaching Practices .....	48
Summary.....	51
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	54
Design.....	54
Research Questions.....	56
Participants.....	56
Setting .....	57
Procedures.....	57
The Researcher's Role .....	58
Data Collection.....	58
Written Documents .....	58
Semi-Structured Interviews .....	59
Questionnaires .....	60
Observations .....	61
Data Analysis.....	62
Bracketing .....	62
Coding.....	63
Trustworthiness.....	64

Credibility .....	65
Dependability .....	65
Transferability .....	66
Confirmability.....	66
Ethical Considerations.....	67
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	68
Procedures .....	69
Participants.....	70
Data .....	71
Written Documents.....	71
Coach Interviews.....	73
Question 1.....	73
Question 2.....	74
Question 3.....	74
Question 4.....	75
Question 5.....	75
Question 6.....	76
Question 7, 8 and 9.....	77
Question 10.....	77
Question 11.....	78
Question 12.....	79
Question 13.....	79
Question 14.....	80

Question 15.....	81
Observations.....	81
Questionnaires.....	83
Question 1.....	83
Question 2.....	83
Question 3.....	84
Question 4.....	84
Question 5.....	85
Question 6.....	86
Question 7.....	86
Question 8.....	87
Question 9.....	87
Question 10.....	88
Question 11.....	88
Question 12.....	89
Question 13.....	89
Question 14.....	90
Question 15.....	91
Data Analysis.....	91
Ethnography.....	92
Character Defined.....	92
Coaches Views on Character Development.....	93
Coach Created Climate.....	93



Phenomenology.....	95
Defining Character.....	95
Athletes' perceptions of Character Development.....	95
Positive character perceptions of the coach.....	96
Poor character perceptions of the coach.....	96
Athlete perceived team climate.....	97
Winning philosophy.....	97
Athletes' perception on discipline.....	97
Perceived influences on character development.....	97
Themes.....	98
Theme 1: Character is deeply ingrained within a person.....	98
Theme 2: Character is extrinsic reputation.....	99
Theme 3: Character is social over moral .....	100
Theme 4: Belief that character develops through sports .....	100
Theme 5: Winning Mentality.....	101
Theme 6: Winning is giving your best.....	102
Theme 7: Environmental factors affecting character .....	103
Research Questions .....	105
Question 1.....	105
Question 2.....	105
Question 3 .....	107
Question 4.....	108
Summary.....	109

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION .....	111
Overview .....	111
Discussion.....	111
Methodological findings.....	111
Defining character.....	111
Coaches' and athletes' view of character development.....	113
Responsible .....	114
Role model.....	114
Team Climate.....	115
Winning Philosophy.....	116
Implications.....	117
Theoretical Implications.....	117
Structural Development.....	117
Social Cognitive.....	118
Practical Implications.....	119
Character defined.....	119
Views on winning.....	120
Environmental factors.....	121
Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.....	122
Summary.....	123
REFERENCES .....	127
APPENDIX A - Interview Protocol.....	142
APPENDIX B – Athlete Consent Form .....	144

APPENDIX C – Questionnaires .....	145
APPENDIX D – Field Note Template .....	147
APPENDIX E – Coach’s Consent Form .....	148
APPENDIX F – IRB Approval .....	149

### **List of Tables**

Table 1. List of Character Traits (Lickona, 2004).....	14
Table 2. List of Character Traits (Brown, 2003).....	15
Table 3. Combining like terms used by coaches and athletes .....	69
Table 4 Demographics of the participants .....	71
Table 5. The coaches' written documents containing team rules and philosophies.....	72
Table 6. Character Traits Coaches Believe Sports can Build.....	76
Table 7. Character Traits Identified by Athletes .....	84
Table 8. Character traits that players feel sports can build in athletes .....	85
Table 9. Describe for me what it takes to produce a winning team.....	90
Table 10. A compilation of coaches views on character development.....	93
Table 11. Open Codes Supporting the Theme.....	104

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Character development through sports participation has been difficult to understand. One primary reason is that stakeholders such as coaches, media, parents, and administrators surrounding college varsity sports are not consistently defining character (Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006). Character development has been linked to the coach's influence (Bolter, 2010; Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Kaye & Ward, 2010; Peláez, 2011; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2011). Research suggests that a coach can contribute to the values adopted by athletes (Bolter, 2010; Miller, Roberts, & Ommundsen, 2005; Peláez, 2011). Certain coaches also view themselves as important and this is supported in the research. In a qualitative study by Vella et al., (2011) they concluded that coaches do view themselves as responsible for athletes' character development (p. 43). Moreover, in a study by Peláez (2011) there is further evidence of the importance of the coach as a moral influence on their players (p. 250). Peláez (2011) findings suggest that moral development can occur through sports, if purposefully addressed by the coach (p. 272). Peláez (2011) findings suggest that a coach is an agent of moral influence for their athletes through the coach-athlete relationship (p. 254). Even with these studies, there is lots of room to investigate how specific moral character traits are negatively or positively reinforced by coaches. This research seeks to acquire more insight into how both the coaches and players define, view, or experience character development, and what methods, if any, that coaches use to foster character development.

### Background

Character is defined in the dictionary as: The combination of qualities or traits that distinguishes an individual or group; Moral force, integrity (American Heritage Dictionary, 2003). A study of character reveals several traits as identified by Lickona (2004) as well as

Brown (2003) and is seen in Tables 1 and 2. However, there is ambiguity within the terms used when studying character development. For example, fair play (Sheridan, 2008), sportsmanship (Bolter, 2010; Sezen-Balcikanli, & Yildiran, 2012; Shields, LaVoi, Bredemeier, & Power, 2007), moral action (Kavussanu, 2008), and life skills (Dalton, 2009; Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008), are all terms used when studying character development through sport.

Table 1. List of *Character Traits*

Character Themes	Associated	Character Traits
Wisdom		Discernment
Justice	Fairness Respect for others Self-respect Responsibility	Honesty Courtesy Tolerance
Fortitude	Courage Resilience Patience	Perseverance Endurance Self-confidence
Self-Control	Self-discipline Emotional intelligence Delayed gratification	Resist temptation Moderation Sexual self-control
Love	Empathy Compassion Kindness Service	Generosity Loyalty Patriotism
Positive Attitude	Hope Enthusiasm	Sense of humor Diligence
Hard Work	Initiative Goal setting	Diligence Resourcefulness
Integrity	Adhering to moral principle Keeping one's word Being honest with oneself	Faithfulness to conscience Ethical consistency
Gratitude	The habit of thankfulness Acknowledging debts to others	Not complaining
Humility	Self-awareness Willing to admit mistakes	Desire to improve

(Lickona, 2004, p. 226-227)

Table 2. List of *Character Traits*

Character Themes	Associated Character Traits	
Enthusiasm	Shared experience with teammates	Love of the game
		Come ready everyday
Concentration	Listening	Respect for coaches and teammates
	Focus	
Selflessness	Put team needs above your own	Accept your team role
Accountability	Self-evaluate for improvements	Be responsible for outcomes
Consistency	Teammates can count on you	Reliable
Hard Work	Commit to improvement	Be productive
Discipline	Focused attention and effort	Accept and embrace consequences
	Self-control on and off the field	
Sportsmanship	Not complaining	The habit of thankfulness
Humility	Accept judgments of others	Respect the rules of the game
	React correctly at all times	Respect opponents
Determination	Show initiative	Self-motivation
	Fulfill obligations	Persevere after mistakes
Teachable Spirit	Seek new information	Eager to learn
		Accepts correction
Confidence	Feels prepared but not arrogant	Controlled aggressiveness
Pride	Values work and accomplishments of the team	Shared joy with team
	not special treatment	Sense of dignity
Integrity	Truthful and genuine	Pure intentions
		Worthy of respect
Competitive	Quick recovery from misfortune	Controlled determination
Mental Toughness	Maintain enthusiasm and confidence	Concentrate when under pressure
		Control emotions

(Brown, 2003, p. 62-63)

“We have heard since we were children that school athletic programs help students learn sportsmanship and unselfish team behavior, as well as helping build character, but does sports really do that anymore” (Voors 1997, p. 1)? Certain “evidence suggests that competitive activities not only fail to develop character, but also tend to bring out negative character traits and poor behaviors in participants, including cheating, name-calling, and violence” (Hager, 1995, p. 1). The literature is able to suggest that sports alone cannot build character positively

(Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Doty, 2006; Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Voors, 1997). In fact, without proper direction, sports may negatively affect character development (Rudd & Mondello, 2006). Moreover, Doty (2006) finds that “a sport experience can build character, but only if the environment is structured and a stated planned goal is to develop character” (p. 6).

Theoretical frameworks and empirical studies (Bolter, 2010; Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Kaye & Ward, 2010; Peláez, 2011; Vella et al., 2011) have pointed to coaches as sources for fostering character development in athletes, but less research has focused on the lived experience by coaches and players in defining what a coach does to influence character. This is because the focus of research has been on actions that relate to coaches’ motivation rather than character development. Only Feltz, Chase, Moritz, and Sullivan (1999) have addressed coaching behaviors focused on character by developing the Coaching Efficacy Scale (CES). The scale measures coaches’ confidence in their behaviors related to motivating athletes to action, building character, devising game strategy, and teaching skills. While we have gained great insights from the development and use of the Coaches Efficacy Scale (CES), there are still questions about the coach’s role towards character development.

According to Bolter (2010) research (as seen in Weiss et al., 2008) suggests that coaches can make an impact on athletes’ character through modeling, social approval, and motivational climate. Certain research (Chu & Tingzon, 2009; Ntoumanis & Standage, 2009; Steinfeldt, Rutkowski, Vaughan, & Steinfeldt, 2011) suggests that the athletes’ attitudes and behaviors are affected by their perceptions of which actions that a coach approves or disapproves. These actions by the coach and perceptions by the athletes become what are known as the motivational climate (Steinfeldt, et al., 2011). According to Kavussanu (2007), the motivational climate of a team can influence the athletes’ character. This project will look to gain insight through a



phenomenology designed to further explore the lived experience of how athletes perceive the coaches actions that produce the motivational climate.

The research has been limited in findings that supply a good understanding of the relationship between coaches and an athletes' development of character. There is a lack of clarity in defining character by coaches. The four items for the character building subscale of the CES are grouped together, yet may be interpreted differently. The two related items noted on the character building subscale of the CES are "Instill an attitude of fair play" and "Promote good sportsmanship" (Feltz, Chase, Moritz, & Sullivan, 1999), which do not reflect actual behaviors. Moreover, these items do not indicate the coaches' perceptions toward instilling character.

Another limitation of the study of character development through sports is the lack of the athlete's perspective. Research (Chu & Tingzon, 2009; Ntoumanis & Standage, 2009; Steinfeldt, et al., 2011) suggests that the athlete's perceptions of the coaches' behaviors are instrumental in fostering character. While Boardley and Kavussanu (2009) have assessed athletes' insights about coaches' ability to build character, studies with this perspective are rare. Additionally, studies of athletes' character development (Chu & Tingzon, 2009; Dalton, 2009; Peláez, 2011) have been assessed mostly in relation to the coach-athlete relationship. Therefore, current research could benefit from guidance by moral development theory and conceptual approaches. For the purpose of the present study, we will more thoroughly examine how college coaches define character to accurately assess coaching behaviors that might influence moral outcomes.

### **Situation to Self**

This study is also addressing personal observation and experiences by me from coaching players for 28 years at the high school and college level. This experience has revealed themes or questions relating to character development. First, what are the different views that coaches have

on the character development of their athletes? Second, what are differences in the coach's philosophy of winning that might influence character development? Lastly, in what ways can athletes become over focused on personal superficial self-centered achievement and how does this relate to their poor character displays.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that college varsity team sports are perceived by many stakeholders such as parents, media, coaches, and administrators to have become riddled with a decline in morality, ethical behavior, integrity, and image over character development (Botta, 2006; Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Doty, 2006). Additionally, there is lack of principles or guidelines that can serve as a model that coaches can use to plan for character education through sports. Doty and Lumpkin (2010) describes several examples in which sports can build character, but also references cheating and other unethical behaviors that are done with the idea of "win at all cost" as the mindset (p. 28). Winning is a sound measure of success, but winning without appropriate integrity, and lack of character development, is a problem that often exists within the sports field (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Gill & Dzewaltowski, 1988; Ntoumanis & Standage, 2009). Therefore, understanding the roles of coaches is essential to recovering the true nature of sports and building acceptable moral character in athletes.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the ethnography is to explore Division II and III college coaches' understanding of character development through sports as it relates to their definition, methods of influence, and hindrances. Additionally, the phenomenology will explore the college varsity team sport athletes' perspectives and related themes. The focus will occur at universities in the

North Eastern United States. At this stage in the research, character will be generally defined as the positive life behaviors that are accepted by society and identified by research.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study will enhance the body of knowledge, by examining college coaches' and athletes' views about character development through sports. Additionally, this study will address the reasons why coaches either do or do not emphasize these character traits to their athletes. Moreover, the study will extract the views coaches find most critical in moral character development through coaching. Finally, the study will gain understanding into the essence of the lived experience of the athletes (Moustakas, 1994). This is not an attempt to place blame or find the cause of the problem, but to examine proven character building methods. The significance of this project is to build on current research to formulate a model of positive character building principles that coaches or administrators could use for training coaches and athletes.

### **Research Questions**

Research (Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006) sought out parents, coaches, and media to find how these stakeholders surrounding sports define character. The two major themes that developed through the studies revealed that character through sports contains social traits and moral traits. Consistent with findings from Bredemeier and Shields (2001) the results revealed that athletes did possess higher levels of social character than non-athletes, but that they possessed much lower moral character scores than non-athletes.

Research shows that when a coach measures success by winning some coaches may shift the balance of their teaching toward a performance climate and ego orientation that can often negatively impact the ability of coaches to teach character (Bredemeier & Shields, 2001; Eitzen, 1996; Romand & Pantaléon, 2007). However, research also finds that when coaches define

expectations and create a mastery motivational climate and a task orientation prosocial behaviors are positively predicted (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009; Kavussanu, 2008; Miller et al., 2005).

According to Miller, et al. (2005) players who perceive that their coach emphasizes a performance climate by prioritizing winning, view unsportsmanlike behaviors such as cheating or aggression as acceptable because the goal is to win. Conversely, research (Kavussanu & Spray, 2006; Miller et al., 2005) finds that players who perceive coaches as emphasizing a mastery climate by focusing on improvement and personal bests report higher levels of good sportsmanship. Based on these findings, the following research questions were set to guide the study:

1. How do Division II and III college coaches and athletes define, view, or experience character development through sports?
2. What contributes to the climate that Division II and III college coaches produce in their coaching philosophy concerning reconciling winning and character development?
3. How do Division II and III college athletes perceive the team climate concerning reconciling winning and character development?
4. What environmental and personal factors do Division II and III athletes perceive to influence their character development?

### **Research Plan**

This research topic will be explored using qualitative research methods. The primary reason for using these methods is to secure information from coaches that will be descriptive in nature. The study is not seeking to prove a hypothesis, but instead will qualitatively examine the coaches' views on developing character by gathering data and looking for commonalities. Specifically, this will be an ethnographical phenomenological study because the goal is to first

ascertain the group philosophical commonalities as it relates to moral character development and additionally, get a deeper richer understanding of the impact these philosophies have on athletes (Creswell, 2007).

There will be three primary methods of data collection for the ethnography. First will be the written coaches' philosophies. Each coach provides their team with a written philosophy that includes training schedules, the team vision, rules of conduct, and team standards. This document will provide great insight as to the ideals that coaches feel are important to convey to their teams. Secondly, interviews will be used. This will allow the opportunity to gain context about the coaches' philosophies and provide a way for them to express ideas and give examples. Lastly, observations of practices and matches will be done to determine what actions the coaches model and allow, as well as those displayed by the athletes. Additionally, this provides an opportunity for triangulation of data, which Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006) describe as using data from one procedure to confirm data from another procedure or instrument (p. 505).

Student athletes' character may best be understood from the athletes' perspective. Moustakas (1994) describes the goal of a phenomenology as "the understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation" (p. 14). Moreover, this involves obtaining a "comprehensive description that provides the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience" (p. 13). In practical terms then, the objective of this phenomenology is to attempt to make sense of Division II and III college varsity team athletes' character development experience based on the comprehensive descriptions from the athletes. Therefore, to complete the phenomenology the athletes will fill out questionnaires and be observed to collect their views about character development through sports. This will allow a comparison of themes to those of the coaches. As

has been discussed, character has been difficult to define. The use of a phenomenological approach is in order to gain understanding into the essence of the lived experiences of a group (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Since character has been difficult to define in the sports context gaining the essence of the lived experience from Division II and III college athletes is palpable.

### **Delimitations**

This study is including coaches and athletes from colleges in order to gain insight into the influences of coaches on emerging adult learners' moral character. The athletes' character, especially as it relates to sports would already be greatly defined by peers, parents, and coaches as they developed and grew to this age. The ethnographical phenomenological study was chosen because of the interrelation of the groups. The ethnography of coaches will supply a more complete understanding of the groups' philosophy toward the development of the athletes' character, at the same time the phenomenology will help obtain a deeper richer understanding of the essence of moral character development of athletes.

The focus of this research is on Division II and III college varsity athletes because a majority of the studies done involving character development is at the youth or high school level. While the study will offer information that will fill the gap in literature, there are notable limitations. The first is the geographic location of the study. While the study will cover a large radius in a tristate area, it still is containing colleges that are from the same general region and several from the same conference. Additionally, time and distance will restrict the study to only a few college programs and a limited number of coaches. Moreover, the college programs investigated will be limited to smaller schools in the region allowing for future opportunity involving larger universities.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature describes studies that have examined character and sports from several points of view, yet there are still ambiguous definitions and unclear methods for developing character through sports. Some have attempted to ascertain whether sports can build character. Others have looked at the definition of character as defined by stakeholders; while others have looked at the social influences on athletes. Moreover, research has investigated the coach's role in the process, while far less research has obtained the athletes' point of view. Additionally, there is research looking at the affect that an emphasis on winning has on character. The aim of this study is to compile a working definition of character from the coaches, explore any methods they use to develop the moral character, investigate the effect that pursuing wins has on character development as well as explore athletes' perspective about character development. Character development through sports will be viewed in this study through the frames of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Once the theoretical framework is defined, this review will explore foundational researchers, and then move on to the gaps in the literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Research studying character in sports (Bredemeier, 1985; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995) followed the moral development theory (Kohlberg, 1976) and the moral interaction theory (Haan, 1991), which both claim morality to be a result of moral development. Additionally, prevalent is the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1991), which believes moral learning occurs as part of adopting socially accepted behaviors. Within this framework, individuals learn through experiences, vicarious experiences, and self-reinforcement. Research (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Bolter, & Weiss, 2012; Bolter, 2010; Kavussanu, Stamp, Slade, & Ring, 2009)

has indicated that athletes learn and act based heavily on the constructs of Bandura's theory. Bandura (1986, 1991) believes self-regulation to an individual's capacity to translate rewards and punishments into an ability to mediate moral cognition and moral action. According to (Kohlberg, Scharf, & Hickey, 1971), moral development is influenced by social participation. Therefore, when individuals are exposed to cognitive moral conflict different to their own, moral development, or moral regression results (Kohlberg, Scharf, & Hickey 1971). Notably, some research references Kohlberg's theory and centers on the coach's influence when studying morality in sports (Kavussanu, 2008; Peláez, 2011; Van Mullem et al., 2009).

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Sports are a social event in which participants interact and influence each other. During competition sports will provide opportunities for actions that have positive and negative consequences. For example, an athlete can play by the rules, help an injured opponent, and/or show respect for authority. However, an athlete can also cheat, try to injure an opponent, and disrespect authority. Therefore, the social aspect of sports has led to much research (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010; Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011; Kavussanu, 2008) being grounded in the social cognitive theory of moral thought and action. According to Bandura (1989), people learn through social skills such as their experiences. Bandura (1989) notes that human development occurs socially and vicariously more than through direct experience. This is essential because learning only through experience would be tedious and hazardous. Another part of human development is the ability of forethought. "People anticipate the likely consequences of prospective actions, they set goals for themselves, and they plan courses of action that are likely to produce desired outcomes and avoid detrimental ones" (Bandura 1989, p. 1179), which is the primary theory underlying this study.



All athletics have rules of the game and codes of conduct that are social in nature. Though each person may have their own sense of right and wrong, society can greatly influence acceptable behaviors. According to Bandura (1977), morality reflects displays of appropriate behaviors that align with society's values and norms. Thus individuals learn morally appropriate or inappropriate behaviors through observation of and reinforcement. Bandura (2002) concluded:

People do not operate as autonomous moral agents, impervious to the social realities in which they are enmeshed. Social cognitive theory adopts an interaction perspective to morality. Moral actions are the product of the reciprocal interplay of cognitive, affective and social influences (p. 102).

Through this process, as people interact they begin to develop a concept of right and wrong. According to Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory, individuals' moral cognitions and behavior are influenced by both external and internal sources. What an athlete's coach and teammates accept will become a part of their moral action. "In this self-regulatory process, people monitor their conduct and the conditions under which it occurs, judge it in relation to their moral standards and perceived circumstances, and then regulate their actions by the consequences they apply to themselves" (Bandura, 2002, p. 102).

Moral disengagement is best defined as the process of a person convincing themselves that ethical standards do not apply to them in certain situations. Bandura (2002) describes the disengagement as moral justification, stating that people will not act immorally unless they can justify the action. Moral disengagement has been seen in athletics research (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Cumming, Smoll, Smith, & Grossbard, 2007; Doty & Lumpkin, 2010; Ntoumanis, Thogersen-Ntoumani, & Taylor, 2011) where findings suggest that coaches and

athletes may justify playing outside the rules or with poor sportsmanship if they can win the game.

Moral agency is known to be the ability of a person to act morally based on the definition of right or wrong, denoting accountability. “In the development of a moral self, individuals adopt standards of right and wrong that serve as guides and deterrents for conduct” (Bandura, 2002, p. 102). According to Bandura (2002) people will then perform actions that bring satisfaction and avoid those that bring self-condemnation (p. 102). Moral agency is rooted in a wider self-regulation and personal standards. The exercise of moral agency has dual aspects— inhibitive and proactive (Bandura, 1999). The inhibitive form is manifested in the power to refrain from behaving inhumanely. The proactive form of morality is expressed in the power to behave humanely (Bandura, 2002, p.111). In this way moral agency is socially situated. “Social cognitive theory, therefore, adopts an interactionist perspective to morality. Moral actions are the products of the reciprocal interplay of personal and social influences” (Bandura, 2002, p. 115).

Social cognitive theory holds that people learn behaviors through observations, modeling, and motivation. According to Bandura (1989), this type of social learning was strengthened when the observer identified with the model. Research (Bolter, 2010; Peláez, 2011) has acknowledged that the coach athlete relationship is a primary source of influence. Moreover, research (Bolter, 2010; Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Kaye & Ward, 2010; Peláez, 2011; Vella et al., 2011) has indicated that athletes are influenced by the coaches’ actions in both through their own experiences with them and vicariously through teammates’ experiences. Bandura (1989) claimed that individuals were likely to learn and repeat behaviors that they saw others model. This means that athletes learn lessons by watching the coaches’ actions toward their teammates

and opponents. In the end, they are able to apply the human characteristic of forethought. According to Bandura (1989) individuals can reason the consequences of actions and plan accordingly to achieve desired and avoid detrimental results (p. 39).

Research has provided theories and conceptual approaches concerning the methods by which coaches may impact the character of athletes. One primary source is the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1989, 2002), which proposes that individuals learn moral attitudes and behaviors through observations and social reinforcement. This theory suggests that coaches can both serve as a role model and distribute rewards or punishments for behaviors. Research (Ntoumanis, Taylor, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2012) using this theory in sports, suggests that the relationship between coaches and their athletes will more positively predict outcomes of moral atmosphere over time. According to Bandura (1991) “people form personal standards partly on the basis of how significant persons in their lives have reacted to their behavior. Eventually they may come to judge themselves by the standards reflected in the social sanctions of others” (p. 253). Tractlet, Romand, Moret, and Kavussanu (2011) offer supportive research when they found that athletes will displace responsibility for their antisocial acts to their coaches and teammates (p. 152).

### **Structural Development**

Structural developmental theorists define morality as expressing care and concern for others' well-being as well as centering on forethought when reasoning about moral dilemmas (Bolter, 2010; as seen in M. R. Weiss et al., 2008). Therefore, structural developmental theorists believe that moral development occurs by the advancement of thought processes. For example, Kohlberg (1977) described the development of moral reasoning as a progression through six sequential stages. According to Higgins, Power, and Kohlberg (1984), the moral atmosphere is

important because “individual moral decisions in real life are almost always made in the context of group norms” (p. 75). This concept is why looking at the moral atmosphere of a team within team sports is worthwhile.

Gilligan (1977) advanced the structural developmental theory by arguing from a feminist perspective. Gilligan built on Kohlberg’s moral development studies by arguing that women do not reach the same levels of moral reasoning as men. Gilligan found that women’s moral reasoning revolved around responsibility to others. Gilligan (1977) argued that moral judgments based on concerns for others are as valid as those based on justice. This is supported by research in the physical activity field when Fisher and Bredemeier (2000) found that female bodybuilders considered their personal responsibility to others when making judgments about using performance-enhancing drugs. Gilligan (1977) enhanced Kohlberg’s initial conceptions of moral development by highlighting the interpersonal aspects of moral development. Collectively, these structural development theorists find that moral reasoning occurs through a progression of stages and both cognitive and interpersonal factors contribute to morality.

Kohlberg’s beginning stage involves punishment and obedience. According to Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) at this stage, the physical consequence of an action not the values of the individual determines the behavior. This denotes a fear of punishment being more present than an individual concern for righteous behavior. Athletes may fear the punishment from the coach enough to not break rules, but may still desire the disallowed activity. Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) claim that in stage two of moral development, the individual is less concerned about punishment, and judges their actions based more on how their own needs are met. In team sports this could occur as athletes are concerned less about the punishment from the coach and more about the enjoyment and value of participation. According to Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) stage

three of moral development is focused on living up to social expectations. The emphasis is on conformity and consideration of how choices influence relationships or how athletes would want to please their coach or teammates and will act accordingly.

According to Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) at the fourth stage of moral development people consider society when making judgments. The focus at this stage is on maintaining law and order or following rules. Therefore, in the sports context the authority of the coach is respected and athletes will conform to the rules of the team and game at this stage. In stage five of the theory Kohlberg (1977) states that the, moral development is that which is agreed upon by society. The team atmosphere is a subset of society and at this level, the coach and team members will agree on the right actions for the team, but will consider society as a whole in their decisions. Finally, will be stage six, which Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) describe as people developing into the kind of person they become. At this level, there is a sense of justice that is developed and moral reasoning is based upon universal ethical principles.

Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) is framed around the “cognitive moral development theory” and expresses that schools try to stay neutral in the development of morals, leaving the onus on the family and church. Kohlberg and Hersh (1977), conclude that schools are less concerned about how students are thinking and are more concerned on telling them what to think. In this way schools operate in stages one and four while students are living in stages two and three of Kohlberg’s moral development model, which then creates disconnect. “In keeping family, church and school separate, however, educators have assumed naively that schools have been harbors of value neutrality”(Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p.54). Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) write that schools need to be settled on principle rather than power and need to take moral questions seriously. This may be increasingly true when dealing with athletics. Interestingly, the results

from Zelenka (2009) revealed that there is a disconnect between coaches' abilities to develop the morals of athletes and this study consisted of 117 coaches within Catholic schools, who wanted to achieve such a goal. Accordingly, Zelenka (2009) suggested that coaches may need training to help them connect moral principles to their coaching philosophy.

The Structural developmental theory (Kohlberg, 1977) is prevalent in sports research (Bolter, 2010; Miller et al., 2005; Peláez, 2011) and suggests that individuals reach higher levels of moral reasoning by experiencing moral dilemmas and finding solutions. In this context, coaches could use teachable moments to engage athletes in discussions that challenge them to consider resolution to moral dilemmas. According to Bolter (2010) research (as seen in Weiss et al., 2008) suggests that coaches can make an impact on athletes' character through modeling, social approval, and motivational climate. This is consistent with the social learning theory (Bandura, 1991) in that through sports, coaches modeling of moral or inappropriate behaviors will likely influence players' moral actions. Secondly, research (Chu & Tingzon, 2009; Ntoumanis & Standage, 2009; Steinfeldt, Rutkowski, Vaughan, & Steinfeldt, 2011) suggests that the athletes' attitudes and behaviors are affected by their perceptions of which actions that a coach approves or disapproves. This influences the athletes' character through affecting the motivational climate (Kavussanu, 2007). Kohlberg's stages of moral development considers that moral stages precede cognitive stages, and also accepts that there is a universal development of justice reasoning underlying moral behavior (Kohlberg, 1977). Gilligan (1977) would make the same argument for females, but would reason that it could be due to a genuine concern for others instead of justice. In either case, moral stages precede cognitive stages. According to Kohlberg (1976), viewing morality from a social perspective requires distinguishing between individual perceptions and the universal view of what is good.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

The concept that sports builds character seems timeless, but it has been repeatedly challenged through the past decades. The commonality of the literature suggests that sports can offer character building opportunity, but participation alone may not build character (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Ponzo, 1990; Rudd & Stoll, 2004). Research from Voors (1997) uncovered incidences of poor character and challenged the theory that sports participation builds character. Rudd and Mondello (2006) concluded that there are continual displays of cheating, violence, and other unsportsmanlike or scandalous behaviors by athletes. In fact, Rudd and Stoll (2004) concludes that “. . . there is evidence to suggest that sport may build social character. . . In opposition, there is little evidence to suggest sport builds moral character . . .” (p. 8). Doty (2006) offered related research. There are those that posed the question, “Does sports build character?” (Doty, 2006; Stoll & Beller, 2000). Doty (2006) considered character from the avenues of respect or how one treats others, and integrity or doing what is right in word and deed. Doty (2006) concluded that a sports setting can offer an opportunity for character development, but only if there is an existence of a planned goal to develop character (p. 6). These researchers’ findings support the idea that while sport has positive character building traits; on its own it may not enhance moral character.

### **Defining Character**

One primary concern with studying building character through sports is that character is difficult to define. Though a true definition is unclear, most experts do agree on certain traits. The following experts may provide suggestions for universally accepted traits as character. Thomas Lickona, developmental psychologist and author of seven books about character or

moral development compiled an extensive list of traits that have 10 major themes, which are listed in Table 1. Similarly, Sinnott-Armstrong (2009) examined various religions and identifies many of the traits expressed and listed by Thomas Lickona (p. 24). Moreover, Bruce Brown the director of Proactive Coaching, author, teacher, coach, and athletic administrator of 35 years, compiled a list of sports related character traits found in Table 2, which also contains many of the same traits expressed by Thomas Lickona and Sinnott-Armstrong. While it could be argued that these tables are not all inclusive of character traits, it does offer a working model that can be accepted and compared against.

Vella, Oades, and Crowe's (2011) qualitative research developed the following list for character within sports: Respect for team mates, Loyalty, sportsmanship, Respect for officials, Self-control, Pro-social behavior, Discipline, Coping with success, Moral values, Honesty, Coping with failure, Maturity, Respect for the opposition, Responsibility, and Commitment (p. 37). Jim Thompson, founder and Chief Executive Officer of Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) and author of several books related to character, added traits such as winning or losing with class, courage, and commitment to goals. Elements of character listed in sports research (Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995; Vella, et al., 2011) are also identified and supported by character development experts (Lickona, 1991, 2004; Brown, 2003; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2009). Again, though it could be argued that these lists do not compile a complete listing of character traits, they do supply a working model for comparison.

One of the keys to study character development through sports may be to look at the source of those defining character. Rudd (2005) suggests that character in sports, is defined by sources such as developmental literature, secular media, coaches, and parents. Related research (Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006) sought out to define character from



some of these sources. The findings from these studies suggest that there are multiple definitions of character in the sports context. According to research (Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006) social values are concepts like teamwork, strong hard work, loyalty, and self-sacrifice.

Consistent with character development research (Arnold, 1992; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995), concepts like respect, honesty, fairness, and responsibility are referred to as moral values. Rudd and Mondello (2006) repeated the Rudd (2005) study which sought the perceived definition of character from parents, coaches, and media. Rudd and Mondello (2006) conducted the same study using only Division I A college coaches. In the end, “coaches definitions of character produced two major themes; one related to moral character and the other related to social character” (Rudd & Mondello, 2006, p. 8). These confirmed findings from Rudd (2005) and have provided an acceptable view of defining character development through sports participation.

The notion of character development through sports is generally understood as important, but there is still ambiguity within the terms or traits of study. For example when studying character development through sports participation, fair play is a term used in research (Sheridan, 2008). Some researchers consider the concept of sportsmanship (Bolter, 2010; Sezen-Balcikanli & Yildiran, 2012; Shields et al., 2007) when studying character building through sports. Kavussanu (2008) used the term moral action and others have used the term life skills (Dalton, 2009; Holt et al., 2008). While these are all valid studies, they represent only a part of an individual’s character.

Similarly, other research has admittedly taken only a few specific character traits and studied character development through sports from that particular facet. For example, Doty and Pim (2010) studied only respect and integrity in their longitudinal study of athletes at West Point

designed to determine if character education programs work. Similarly, Malinauskas (2009) studied the value of social training for athletes and considered only responsibility, sincerity, modesty, tact, dutifulness, and attitude. Romand and Pantaléon (2007) did a qualitative study of rugby coaches and examined abiding by rules, prosocial rules during matches, attitude toward referees, role of coach, morality, and competition. Finally, Long, Pantale, and Brout (2008) looked only at responsibility when comparing institutional and self-regulating athletes. Thus to study character development through sports requires a compellation of these terms.

### **Climate Defined**

The coaches' philosophy towards training and the game's outcome may be a key factor in the type of climate produced on his teams. Research shows that there are two primary philosophies of coaching that affect climate. The first is performance or ego and the second is mastery or task. According to Nicholls (1989) there are differences in the how individuals strive to demonstrate competence. First, Nichols (1989) identifies mastery (task) orientation which involves the purposes of gaining skill or knowledge and performing one's best resulting in perceptions of competence being self-referenced. In this setting athletes success is based on their ability to set and reach goals and winning may be a measurement that the goals are achieved and/or need reassessed. On the other hand Nicholls (1989) claims that an performance (ego) orientation is when people are more preoccupied with their ability and perceive that the personal demonstration of superior competence is fundamental to success. Ego-oriented individuals tend to judge their own competence by comparison to others. When coaches create a performance climate, skill development is only important because the result is winning.

According to Smith, Smoll, and Cumming (2009) "coach initiated motivational climate can play an important role in the experiences and psychosocial development of young athletes"

(p. 179). That is to say, that their findings confirm that if the coach has an ego philosophy, he will produce an ego climate and the athlete will have an ego goal orientation. Therefore, coaches and athletes measure success through their ability to show superiority or by winning.

Subsequently, if the coach has a mastery philosophy, he will produce a mastery climate and the athlete will develop a task goal orientation. According to Ntoumanis and Biddle (1999) “perceptions of mastery climate are important if enjoyment, learning, and long-term commitment to an activity are sought” (p. 123). Ntoumanis and Standage (2009) findings indicated that athletes who are motivated by feelings of enjoyment, who value sport participation for affiliation, or engage in sports for good health, have nothing to gain by cheating, or engaging in psychological warfare with their opponents (p. 375). These athletes enjoy their sport for the benefits of participation. They achieve their goal by playing the game and showing appropriate respect to everyone involved. Conversely, athletes motivated by internal or external pressures, or the desire to attain extrinsic rewards, are more likely to engage in gamesmanship, cheating, and show disrespect for others involved (p. 375). This supports literature (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Crone, 1999; Duda, Olson, & Templin, 1991; Pfister, 1998) that an emphasis on winning will often cause tension with moral character development through sports.

According to Bolter (2010) higher performance climates that define success through winning have been associated with players who endorse unsportsmanlike attitudes and behaviors, while higher mastery climates that emphasize personal improvement consistently relate to displays of good sportsmanship (as cited in Boixados, Cruz, Torregrosa, & Valiente, 2004; Gano-Overway, Guivernau, Magyar, Waldron, & Ewing, 2005; Miller et al., 2005). It is important to note that no study suggests that a mastery climate coach does not try to win or does not find winning important. On the contrary these coaches feel that winning is an expected result

of mastering their systems, processes, and skills. In fact, according to Dalton (2009) coaches view the relationship between the importance of winning and teaching life skills as complementary. Nevertheless, several of these coaches recognized that when they give priority to teaching life skills, they often face difficult decisions that potentially compromise their efforts to win (p. 50).

### **The Coach's Role in Character Development**

**Responsible.** In the context of developing character, it is difficult to talk with any coach and ask if he or she promotes character building among their athletes and find one that would say no. The coach may be the primary person responsible to impact character growth. The following statement offers support that it takes a conscious effort by those surrounding the athletes to build character:

To filling up the empty spaces of character building, perhaps, the intentions, planning and strategies reinforced by the environments (coaches, parents, participants, spectators, etc.) should work together to ensure that positive character can be built” (as seen in Doty, 2006). This is true when leadership and verbal persuasion from coaching staffs were identified as two main reasons why students participate in sports (Omar-Fauzee, et al., 2009a). This shows that coaching staffs did influence athletes to participate and can motivate athletes to pursue excellence (Omar-Fauzee, Nazarudin, Saputra, Sutresna, Taweasuk, Chansem, Latif, & Geok, 2012. p. 51).

Research (Dalton, 2009; Kay & Ward, 2010; Peláez, 2011) finds that coaches recognized the impact they have on the players that cross their path. Additionally, research (Dalton, 2009; Kay & Ward, 2010; Peláez, 2011; Romand & Pantaléon, 2007; Vella et al., 2011) reveals that coaches

view themselves as responsible for developing character in athletes. Specifically, Vella et al. (2011) found that:

Outcomes of character were the most easily recognized and most often articulated outcomes. These outcomes centered on the development of moral, respectful, and pro-social behaviors, as well as desirable character traits such as honesty, loyalty, responsibility, and self-control. There was a strong emphasis placed on sporting behaviors, as well as an authentic respect for team mates, opposition, and officials. Coaches saw this as within their range of influence and as a construct that lends itself to purposeful development (p. 38).

This is consistent with findings (Doty, 2006) suggesting that the coach is among those that foster character growth in athletes. Some of the ways that research suggests that coaches are responsible are by being a role model, and through their philosophies.

**Role model.** Omar-Fauzee, et al., (2012) recommends several strategies for building character through sports participation, starting with the coach modeling behaviors. Gould, Collins, Lauer, and Chung (2007) make similar claims when they found that coaches feel building relationships with their athletes is a key component to teaching life skills, and a primary component of this was being a role model. According to Thompson (1995, 2003) being a role model is a key element of coaching. Moreover, Bolter and Wiese (2012) concluded that athletes learn in the context of the “Social learning theory” (Bandura, 1991) which proposes that individuals learn moral attitudes and behaviors through observational learning and social reinforcement, accordingly, coaches can serve as role model (p. 75). Furthermore, Dalton (2009) findings indicated that all of the coaches in her study considered themselves role models for their athletes (p. 78). Additionally, Nichols, Zillifro, Nichols, and Hull (2012) concluded that

“coaches are an important part of an athlete’s life, and arguably serve as a role model for how to conduct oneself both on and off the field (p. 9). Consequently, all of these researchers lend a great deal of support to the idea that the coach is an effective role model.

**Philosophy.** According to Lumpkin (2011), a coaching philosophy can be a set of principles that guide an individual’s practice. Without a definitive philosophy, behavior can become too situation-specific, too reactive. A philosophy provides boundaries within which the coach–athlete relationship can be located (p. 57). Moreover, Lumpkin (2011) found that writing a personal philosophy gives coaches the opportunity to identify and clarify what is important to them at the personal level (p. 64). According to Jones (2004) “Coaches cannot communicate the standards of behavior they expect from their athletes or coaching staff if they have not identified the priorities and values associated with their coaching philosophy” (p. 23). Therefore, the coaching philosophy allows coaches to convey the principles, boundaries, standards of behavior, goals, and practices of their team.

According to Wehner (2012), textbooks consider having a well-developed coaching philosophy to be fundamental to coach success. Additionally, empirical literature that explores coaching and philosophy has closely followed textbooks in definitions of philosophy—and, in some cases, has directly adopted them (p. 28). Subsequently, “coaches have viewed their philosophy as the basis of their effectiveness (Bennie & O’Connor, 2010; Fredenburg, Lutz, & Miller, 2012), ability to build a successful program (Vallee & Bloom, 2005) and overall success as a coach themselves (Frey, 2007)” (Wehner, 2012, p. 30-31). Likewise, Collins, Barber, Moore, and Laws (2011) found that “the development of a coaching philosophy has been highly touted as a key to success in coaching” (p. 27). Jones (2004) may have summed it up best by

stating that “developing a sound coaching philosophy and displaying ethical behavior is the backbone of effective coaching at any level” (p. 23).

According to Van Mullem, Brunner, and Stoll (2009) “a coach has an opportunity to leave a lasting legacy with an established coaching philosophy. A coaching philosophy is built on a set of standards by which a coach influences, teaches, and models” (p. 2). Some of the ways that coaches’ philosophy will come out is through the way they structure practices, conduct meetings, give feedback, and act as a role model. Concerning philosophies, Camiré, Trudel, and Forneris (2012) findings indicated that coaches “had well established coaching philosophies” that were athlete centered (p. 256). Moreover, they found that “coaches made it clear that their philosophies were aimed at coaching life skills and using sport as a tool to prepare student-athletes for life” (Camiré et al., 2012, p. 251). Collins et al. (2011) did a qualitative study of coaches’ written philosophy statements and found that the coaches derived the following higher order themes concerning creating their coaching philosophy: “Coaching Behavior, Defining Success, Development Expectations, Fun, Life Lessons Learned Through Sport, and Relationships” (p. 23). Related factors that might have the most impact to the character of athletes are a coach’s philosophy on winning as to whether it is ego or task driven, and also how the coaches measure their success.

### **Coach influences Climate**

Many studies (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Bolter & Weiss, 2012; Bolter, 2010; Kavussanu et al., 2009) have looked at athletics and moral development from the standpoint of moral climate. Researchers (Carron, Colman, Wheeler, & Stevens, 2002; Carron, Hausenblas, & Mack, 1996; Malinauskas, 2009; Steinfeldt et al., 2011) have looked at the social aspect of sports and address the concept that teams form their own climate or group dynamic. When this occurs

the group can influence each other socially and morally. Carron et al. (1996) stated that social influence is pressure to change one's behavior. The results indicated that social influences to the participants had a positive influence on both adherence, which the authors define as self-selected activity and compliance, which they define as activity required by others (Carron et al., 1996, p. 7). In the team sport setting, both of these variables exist. The athlete is playing a sport of choice or a self-selected activity and also the athlete is required by coaches and teammates to perform activities. Therefore, according to the findings from Carron et al. (1996) the pressure to change can exist (p. 7).

A major premise throughout the literature is that the team develops a climate (Carron et al., 2002; Miller et al., 2005; Ntoumanis et al., 2011; Steinfeldt et al., 2011) and the coach's philosophies and actions will be the guide (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006; Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007; Van Mullem et al., 2009). Steinfeldt et al. (2011) studied 204 football players to determine their moral climate and moral functioning. The results suggest that the on-field moral functioning process of high school football players is closely related to the moral climate they perceive to exist on their team. This moral climate is embodied by player perceptions of how coaches think they should behave, as well as perceptions of how fellow teammates would act in similar situations (Steinfeldt, et al., p. 231). In other words every athlete is watching their coaches' and athletes' behaviors for that which appears acceptable. This is in line with the constructs from the theory from Bandura (2002) that moral action is learned socially through both personal experience and vicariously through others' experiences. Subsequently, athletes will learn both from their own experiences and vicariously through their teammate's experiences. Therefore, what these coaches do and allow becomes the climate. Collins et al. (2011) supports



this concept with their findings that one way coaches create climate is through their coaching behaviors (p. 23).

Ntoumanis et al. (2012) examined coach and peer motivational climates in youth sports. Moral attitudes were measured using the two moral factors of cheating and gamesmanship. Gamesmanship is the use of strategic behavior or tactics of questionable fairness that are not strictly illegal but designed to gain an advantage in a competitive game. Ntoumanis et al. (2012) reported that a positive relationship existed between coach created ego-climate for both cheating and gamesmanship (219). Coach created ego-climate referred to the coach paying special attention to the best players or those producing desired results. Furthermore, the relation was stronger the longer athletes played for the coach (219). Literature supports this finding (Doty & Lumpkin, 2010; Doty & Pim, 2010; Ntoumanis et al., 2012) reveals that the longer an athlete is involved in sport the lower the moral scores achieved. Additionally, this type of finding supports the theory that coaches influence athletes moral decisions related to sports. For instance, Kaye and Ward (2010) found that older high school participants hold more unsportsmanlike beliefs than younger (p. 8).

Some have looked at a team climate based on the athletes' perception of team norms (Stephens, 2001), and others view the tacit belief that the coach either condones or encourages unsportsmanlike behavior (Dodge & Robertson, 2004; Gould et al., 2006). Researchers have tied this climate to athletes reporting poor sportsmanship behavior if they believe teammates would behave a certain way in the same situation (Dodge & Robertson, 2004; Steinfeldt et al., 2011; Stephens, 2001). Stephens (2001) used hypothetical situations where their coach requests poor sportsmanship behaviors and found that athletes will rationalize certain actions if requested by the coach. Additionally, Dodge and Robertson (2004) studied Canadian collegiate athletes,

and found that some athletes would justify unethical actions, if their coach suggested certain behavior. For example, Dodge and Robertson (2004) reveal that males stated that using performance-enhancing drugs is justifiable if the coach suggests it, while females reported that bending the rules is justifiable if suggested by the coach. According to Bandura (2002), “people will behave in ways they normally repudiate if a legitimate authority accepts responsibility” (p. 106). This is known as displacement of responsibility by Bandura (2002) and “in sport, displacement of responsibility occurs when athletes view aggressive acts as resulting from coaches’ social pressures” (Tractlet, A. et al., 2011, p. 144). Another study indicated that the longer female soccer players spent with their youth soccer team, the more likely they were to be aggressive (Stephens, 2000). These findings suggest that coaches are contributors in both establishing and maintaining a climate of acceptable behavior.

Some research suggests that the athletes’ perception of the coach will affect the athletes’ moral actions. For example, Ommundsen, Roberts, and Kavussanu (1998) found that the perception of the motivational climate also plays an important role in shaping the athletes’ views (p. 162). Additionally, Gould, and Carson (2010) results show that positive development is influenced by the types of behaviors that are perceived to be used by coaches (P. 309). This supports research by Shields et al. (2007) who found that the self-reported unsportsmanlike behaviors of young athletes were best predicted by perceived poor sportsmanship behaviors of their coach. Moreover, perceptions of the coach’s actions can produce negative outcomes even when they consist of positive activity. For example, Kenworthy, (2010) found that athletes’ perception of their coaches’ negative approach toward sport participation then predicted athletes’ negative approach toward sport participation (p. 53). Lastly, the perceived relationship between the coach and athlete has an affect on moral outcomes. According to Gould and Carson (2010)

life skills gains were associated with whether coaches were perceived to have developed positive versus negative rapport with athletes (p. 310). Overall, research does show a relationship to the athletes actions and the perception of the coach's motivational climate.

### **Coach's Philosophies about Winning**

“Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing” is a well-known quotation in sports. Though the true originator of the quote is not proven, it is attributed to UCLA Bruins football coach Henry Russell ("Red") Sanders, but came to be identified with American football coach Vince Lombardi (Overman, 1999). According to Overman (1999) this quote may have “been the object lesson of UCLA's suspension for pay rolling football players followed by Red Sanders' imminent death: A coach who, in the final analysis, may have taken his own words too seriously” (p. 90). Additionally, Overman (1999) noted:

Vince Lombardi's late regrets that his slogan on winning was being used to ‘crush human values and morality’. A mature Lombardi seemed to take less seriously his unequivocal statement on winning. Of all the versions of the quote which Lombardi offered, he came closest to getting it right when he said, “Winning is not everything – but making the effort to win is” (p. 90).

A pivotal concept of this study is the coaches' philosophy towards the importance of winning and whether the coaches believe that winning isn't everything it is the only thing, or if making the effort to win is enough. It is essential to consider the importance of winning at the college level because it may influence coaching practices.

According to Crone (1999) once winning is emphasized, the extrinsic rewards outweigh the intrinsic reward of being involved in the sport for its own sake (p. 5). Winning is important for coaches since a winning record is a reflection of the coach. Coaches are responsible for the

selection of athletes, preparation of their team, deciding who plays as well as directing game strategy. Winning is therefore, the most visible sign of successfully completing these coaching practices.

The athletes are also affected by the importance of winning. Athletes compete to win a spot on the team, to win a position, to win playing time, and to win the games. Therefore, winning is important for the athletes in a competitive setting. As athletes reach higher levels of competition their approach becomes more serious (Crone, 1999; Pfister, 1998), which may lead to their being increasingly motivated by winning (Duda, Olson, & Templin, 1991, p. 83). Subsequently, higher aggression and strategic rule violations can develop into acceptable forms of behavior at these competitive levels (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Pfister, 1998). For example, Stephens (2000) finds that competition and the importance placed on winning lead some athletes and coaches to violate rules (p. 318). Therefore, it may be imperative to properly balance the importance of winning with maintaining integrity.

Winning is a key element of college varsity team sports. The idea is to determine the best player or team through wins, but when winning becomes the emphasis, moral character could be challenged. Chandler and Goldberg (1990) support this position with the following statement:

Critics do not blame sports as an entity, but instead blame the emphasis on competition and the importance placed on winning. . . they contend that the overemphasis on winning has led to the inability of sports to serve as a medium for building and displaying character (p. 172).

Additionally, Jim Thompson the founder of the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) and author of several books about building character through sports claims that “Competition and trying to win are not the villains in sports. The enemy, the source of negativity, and virtually all problems in

sports (and I realize this is a sweeping claim) is the win-at-all-cost mentality” (Thompson, 2003, p. 4). The win cannot supersede the character that a coach should emphasize to the athletes, because when this happens poor character may be developed and the true winner may not be rewarded. An example is found in the 1998 Women’s World Cup finals.

The world championship was in the balance when Briana Scurry, the American goalkeeper, strode to the goal line. . . . By her own admission, Scurry decided to improve her chances by ignoring the rules of the penalty kick. In a quick and practiced move, Scurry bolted two steps forward—in violation of the rule—and cut off the angle for Liu Ying, her opponent. With superb reflexes, Scurry then dived to her left and tipped Liu’s shot wide of the goal. . . . Scurry’s position was staked out soon after the final game when she told *The Los Angeles Times*: ‘Everybody does it. It’s only cheating if you get caught’ (Doty, 2006, p. 2; Vecsey, 1999, p. 13).

The noticeably implied message here is that she will do what it takes to win, including playing outside the rules, and if the referee does not call the foul it is justified by the win.

Literature identifies at least two viewpoints on winning in sports. The first is “winning defined as consequence, prize, or victory [and] is the major source of the philosophy of winning at all cost” (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990, p. 172). The Briana Scurry story above is an example of winning as consequence, and the type of winning that lends to the moral character conflict within the athletes. The second type of winning is “winning as experience, which stresses not “whether you win or lose” but “how you play the game” (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990, p. 173). “This definition comes closest to the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideal of competition for its own sake”

(Chandler & Goldberg, 1990, p. 173). This idea is not belittling winning, but considers winning an expected outcome of proper preparation.

Early research from Chandler and Goldberg (1990) explained the attitude toward winning that should exist. Chandler and Goldberg (1990) account of winning as experience or winning as consequence gives a measuring device for researchers. Some (DiCicco & Hacker, 2002; Dungy & Whitaker, 2007; Thompson, 2003; Wooden, 2003) have found that coaches can teach their teams to be disciplined to the game plan and be good motivators toward getting the maximum effort from their teams, which often results in wins. This can be done within the rules allowing the team to set their own standards and play toward measurable goals. In this context, “playing to win doesn’t mean that winning is the end-all, but it’s an important component of success. And yet the game is still just that, a game” (DiCicco & Hacker, 2002, p. 3). These thoughts were quoted from Tony DiCicco, a soccer coach that won 108 games with only 8 loses and 8 ties over a five year period. Clearly Coach DiCicco was a successful coach if wins are a measurement, and his words suggest that his coaching philosophy is one of winning as experience.

Additionally, coaches like John Wooden and Tony Dungy have reached the highest level of success in their respective sport and also have held to the principle of winning as experience. A study of coaches like these reveals that they hold their teams accountable for their actions and train them to play at perfection so that winning is expected.

It seems then that winning and character development are two goals of sports, but at times can be at tension with one another. “To displace the win-at-all-cost model of coaching, PCA developed the “Double-Goal Coach” who wants to win (Goal #1), but even more importantly, is committed to using sports to teach positive character traits and life lessons (Goal #2),” (Thompson, 2003, p. 7). Combining these goals may be difficult to accomplish within

coaching because coaches are often judged by their ability to win. According to Cumming et al., (2007) “coaches who produce winning teams generally receive greater recognition and reinforcement. As a result, many coaches feel that they are being evaluated on the basis of their won-lost record and not on the individual development of their athletes” (p. 331). Additionally they found that “coaches who feel pressured to win, or who believe they are being evaluated on the basis of their won-lost record, are more likely to adopt ego-involving coaching styles where the primary focus is to produce winning teams” (Cumming et al., 2007, p.331). This leads to them having what Chandler and Goldberg (1990) refer to as ‘winning as consequence’ coaching style. Conversely, Cumming et al. (2007) found that “Mastery climate related positively and significantly to won-lost percentage and all of the evaluative measures, including enjoyment, coach evaluations, and perceived parental liking of the coach” (p. 328). Therefore, a mastery climate or what Chandler and Goldberg (1990) call ‘winning as experience’ could produce both athlete development and a good win loss percentage.

Some coaches have exposed learning to win is a life skill and part of character development. Dalton (2009) findings stated it best:

Trying to win was not in my original interpretation of the term, life skills. At the onset, I described winning as being incongruous with teaching life skills.

Therefore, it came as a surprise that when I asked these coaches how they reconcile their goal to win with teaching life skills, they consistently said they were compatible and in fact, they articulated the importance of “trying” to win as a life skill (p. 74).

This is in line with what Overman (1999) revealed as Vince Lombardi’s true philosophy that “Winning is not everything – but making the effort to win is” (p. 90). Additionally, Dalton

(2009) findings indicated that the studied “coaches all believed that teaching life skills to their athletes promotes winning” (p. 76).

The commonalities in the literature thus far (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Doty, 2006; Ponzo, 1990; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Voors, 1997) suggest that sports alone cannot build positive character. In fact, the literature suggests that, without proper direction, sports will negatively affect character development (Doty, 2006; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Voors, 1997). This knowledge supports the idea that coaches are the key catalyst for guiding the expectations and behaviors of college athletes during their sports experience. Super Bowl winning coach, Tony Dungy supports this idea by stating:

– the significant difference our lives can make in the lives of others. The significance does not show up in wins and losses. . . It’s found in the hearts and lives of those we come across who are in some way better because of the way we live (Dungy & Whitaker 2007, p. 144).

Wooden (2003) makes similar claims in his book. Studying these coaches reveals that their coaching philosophy included the idea that personal development of their athletes was more important than anything; and this is from two of the most successful coaches in their respected sports if wins are the measurement.

### **Athletes’ Perceptions of Coaching Practices**

Aldous Huxley once said, “There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.” In the context of sports coaches may have philosophies, concepts, ideals, goals, and objectives to get across to their teams, but in the end it may be what the athletes perceive that matters. For this reason it is worth exploring the athletes’ perceptions of coaching practices.



One key element of study is the affect that coaches have on the athletes' motivational climate orientation. For example Smith et al. (2009) found that coaches with an ego philosophy will produce an ego climate and the athlete will have an ego goal orientation, while a coach with a mastery philosophy will produce a mastery climate and the athlete will develop a task goal orientation. Therefore, the athletes' perception of the coaching motivational orientation may be important in determining their own motivational orientation.

There are certain coaching practices that have been perceived by athletes as ego-orientation motivational climate. For example Stein, Bloom, and Sabiston (2012) indicated that "athletes interpret non reinforcement (i.e., ignoring) from the coach as detrimental to a task-involving motivational climate and supportive of an ego-involving motivational climate" (p.488). Moreover, Stein et al. (2012) reported "ego-involving motivational climate was higher when athletes' wanted more positive and informational feedback than they felt they were getting," and also found that "ego-involved motivational climate was higher when athletes perceived their coaches to be ignoring their good performances" (p. 488). Finally, Vazou, Ntoumanis, and Duda (2005) reported when athletes perceive that the coach has a negative view of their effort an intra-team conflict occurs, which is a lower order factor of ego-involving climate (p. 23).

Similarly, there are certain coaching practices that are associated with a task-involving (mastery-oriented) motivational climate. For example Stein et al. (2012) reported that "perceived reinforcement for good performance maintained task-involved motivational climate" (p. 488). Additionally, Vazou et al. (2005) "results also show that coach ratings of athletes' effort were significantly predicted by a perceived coach task-involving higher order motivational climate factor" (p. 23). Moreover, Horn, Byrd, Martin, and Young (2012) found that coaches that achieve good team cohesion are positively associated with task-involving (mastery-oriented)

motivational climate (p. 37). Another practice that research indicates as being associated with a task-involving (mastery-oriented) climate is the coach defining their expectations (Boardley, & Kavussanu, 2009; Kavussanu, 2008; Miller et al., 2005). Specifically, research (Kavussanu & Spray, 2006; Miller, Roberts, & Ommundsen, 2005) finds that players perceive coaches as emphasizing a mastery climate by focusing on improvement and personal bests.

There are some factors that research has uncovered that are related to the type of coach created climate and/or athlete orientation. For example, a performance or ego-involving climate is associated with lower moral functioning in sports (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010; Kavussanu & Ntoumanis, 2003; Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998; Wells, Ellis, Arthur-Banning, & Roark, 2006). Conversely, a mastery or task-involving climate is associated with higher levels of moral functioning in athletes (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010; Kavussanu & Ntoumanis, 2003; Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1998; Wells et al., 2006). For this reason which motivational climate an athlete adopts is factor in the moral code they may accept. This is why Kavussanu and Ntoumanis (2003) stated that “sport is an achievement context, and as such it elicits feelings of success and failure. How athletes are socialized to interpret success and failure is crucial” (p. 515). They went on to say that coaches need to help the athlete focus on self-improvement instead of achievement so that the mastery or task-involving orientation is in the social setting of the team and there will be a better chance of higher level of moral functioning (p. 515). While this statement may be true, based on related research declaring the importance of athlete perceptions (Miller et al., 2005; Stein et al., 2012; Vazou et al., 2005), it will not only be important that the coaches help the athletes focus on mastery or task-involving orientation, but also be sure they are perceiving such a climate.

## Summary

Since research suggests that coaches are responsible for influencing character of athletes (Dalton, 2009; Doty, 2006; Peláez, 2011; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2011), it is worth investigating potential causes for moral character short falls of athletes. One reason may be because coaches are still defining character from a social and not moral perspective (Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Rudd, (1995, 2005)). In this way, coaches may see themselves as successful conduits of positive character development in that they are focused on traits like self-sacrifice, hard work, and overcoming adversity, but not honesty, integrity, and strict rules adherence. This study will look to explore the coaches' definition of character related to sports in an attempt to add to the existing body of knowledge.

The literature has covered this subject from various avenues over several years. There are progresses that have been made on the subject, but character development through sports is still a concern and still open to be studied. The overall consensus is that sport alone does not build moral character (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990; Doty, 2006; Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Voors, 1997). The literature suggests that it takes intentional fostering from others for sport to enhance moral character in athletes (Doty, 2006; Peláez, 2011). Specifically the coach would be most responsible since he or she is directly in charge of the team and their actions. Most literature agrees that a coach is a role model and mentor to athletes (Dalton, 2009; Gould et al., 2007; Jones, Harris, & Miles, 2009; Omar-Fauzee et al., 2012; Romand & Pantaléon, 2007). Jones, Harris, and Miles (2009) describe how mentoring is an expected practice in nursing, education and business, but in the sports context it is done from coach to player, but not coach to coach. This strengthens the argument that a coach has the ability to develop players' character. However, there is little study to determine the impact that coaches have on the athletes' moral

character, especially at the college level. Moreover, there is little study to determine the degree of importance these coaches place on character development. For these reason this study will look to gain insights from coaches as to how they see themselves as responsible and what methods if any that they use to help teach character to their athletes.

We have seen that coaches can serve as a role model for good or poor behavior. Romand and Pantaléon (2007) revealed that coaches all spoke of the importance of character building, but the observations uncovered that this was not as important as winning when the match started. The findings from Romand and Pantaléon (2007) revealed that unfair tactics, gamesmanship, and overly aggressive behavior were tolerated and sometimes praised by coaches if the end result was winning the match (p. 73). Romand and Pantaléon (2007) found that coaches are very permissive about rule transgressions. The coaches claimed to abide by the rules, but when these behaviors occurred during matches, they would go unpunished (Romand and Pantaléon, 2007, p. 73). Additionally, coaches spoke of the referees each having their own style and the players should respect their decisions, but further probing indicated that respecting referees is not taught because it is right, but rather because it increases the chance of winning (Romand & Pantaléon, 2007, p. 70-71). Coaches recognized the importance of their role to the athletes and consider competitive value something to be taught to players and yet find it difficult to reconcile winning and rule abidance (Romand & Pantaléon, 2007, p. 71).

Klug (2006) reveals that “the emphasis on the outcome rather than the individuals who are competing distorts the total experience of the athletic competition”( p. 36). This statement falls in line with the thoughts of Tony DiCicco, Tony Dungy, and John Wooden. Coaches that see success as developing the whole athlete will often find that they get results as well. According to Klug (2006) this can be done by coaches eliminating as much external control as

possible, allowing athletes to make choices and giving them the opportunity to assess themselves accordingly, in this way they can see the consequences of choices and adjust. Kohlberg (1976) supports this idea. Additionally, the concept is in line with the idea that the coach is in charge of his or her program and defines what is going to be deemed as success, how it will be managed, and what climate will be formed, performance or mastery. Therefore, this study will explore the coaches' philosophy on winning and gain insights into the effect of performance verses mastery climate; followed by pursuing the lived experience of the athletes' perceptions as they relate to the defined climate.

### **CHAPER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

There have been many studies and articles written about moral character development through sports. Several researchers have been involved in study designs of various types. Still the questions are being asked about the ability for sports to build character and to what extent is the coach responsible? This project attempts to provide some answers. The chapter will thoroughly cover the design of the study and how it will contribute to the present knowledge. The purpose for this design and the procedures will be detailed as well. Next, the constructs, paradigms, and rationales will be described. No study comes without some bias or assumptions. Therefore, it will be necessary to outline the researcher's role in the study. This will be followed by data collection and analysis methods and final thoughts.

#### **Design**

This is a qualitative study looking to explore the views that college coaches have on developing the moral character of the athletes they coach. Social scientist Norman Denzin (1989) defined ethnography as “the study of lived experiences, involving descriptions and interpretations” (p. 141). Creswell's (2007) definition of ethnography is looking to interpret and describe the shared patterns of a culture. The purpose is the interpretation of a cultural or social group or system. Therefore ethnography is an appropriate design because a goal is to gain a better understanding of the shared cultural group of Division II and III varsity college coaches as they relate to their athletes. Past research provides a model. Davidson and Moran-Miller (2005) did an ethnographic study of character development in an elite prep-school basketball program. They studied the players and coaches as one culture. Davidson and Moran-Miller (2005) used semi-structured interviews and observations to collect data. This study will mirror theirs in that concerns for a holistic perspective will drive the philosophy and methodology. Creswell (2007)

describes holistic approach as the ethnographer gaining a comprehensive and complete picture of a social group. This study will employ this when studying the social group of Division II and III team sport varsity college coaches.

Phenomenological research is designed to guide human science research by establishing what a certain phenomenon means and how it is experienced (Moustakas 1994). Thus researchers using the method have a different paradigm and research tradition from their quantitative colleagues (Creswell 2007). Additionally, Creswell (2007) explains that a phenomenology will describe the essence of a lived phenomenon. In this way, “phenomenology concentrates on the need to study human consciousness by focusing on the world that the study participants subjectively experience” (Maggs-Rapport, 2000, p. 221). Therefore, this design is appropriate since the study will look to gain a deeper, richer understanding of the athletes lived experiences.

This study used certain strategies of the ethnographical approach. Because this study contains coaches’ shared opinions concerning character development and winning philosophy. The strategies derived from an ethnographical approach are appropriate to get a collective view. Furthermore, because I examined the essence of the athletes’ perspectives, a phenomenological approach was also appropriate. Moreover, combined methods have been useful for this type of research. Because ethnography is concerned with the cultural group (Cresswell, 2007) and phenomenology is concerned with the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), neither of the methodologies alone could adequately address the areas of interest. According to Maggs-Rapport (2000) combining ethnographic and phenomenological data, enables the researcher to highlight their interpretation of the phenomenon under review, whilst at the same time considering that

phenomenon in terms of the participant group, their cultural background and day-to-day experiences (p. 219). This is the goal of this study, to highlight the interpretation of the athletes' perceptions and responses while considering the cultural background of the coaches. The best example of the use of this combination of methodologies in prior research was Dalton (2003) who used both methods to better understand Principals' problem solving practices in urban public schools.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do Division II and III college coaches and athletes define, view, or experience character development through sports?
2. What contributes to the climate that Division II and III college coaches produce in their coaching philosophy concerning reconciling winning and character development?
3. How do Division II and III college athletes perceive the team climate concerning reconciling winning and character development?
4. What environmental and personal factors do Division II and III athletes perceive to influence their character development?

### **Participants**

A purposeful sampling of 10 to 14 Division II and Division III college coaches will be selected based on geographical convenience and willingness to participate. These levels were chosen to avoid high profile programs with less to no scholarship athletes. The sampling is purposeful because the inquirer is looking for individuals and sites that will purposefully inform an understanding of the cultural group and phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). The demographic of the coaches will cover both men and women coaches with a wide range in age



and experience. Additionally, athletes from each of these teams will be questioned and observed to explore their lived experience. Given the nature of qualitative research, pseudonyms will be provided to maintain anonymity.

### **Setting**

The primary sports involved will be men's and women's soccer, women's volleyball, and men's football. These sports will be selected from Division II and III college team varsity sports from colleges in the North Eastern United States. The coaches selected will have been with their programs at least four years and the athletes will have played for the coach for at least one full year, thus no freshman will be invited. The types of information being processed are the coaches' written coaching philosophy, interviews with the coaches, questionnaires to the athletes, and observations of the coaches' encounters with athletes through meetings, practices, and matches. Therefore, the setting will be the office, meeting room, training field, and stadium of each coach involved in the study.

### **Procedures**

Approval from Liberty University, the participating colleges, the Institutional Review Board and the participants themselves will all be obtained. Once these are in place, the coaching philosophies of each coach will be requested and obtained. Coding and bracketing will be done on the documents. Coaches will be called and emailed to schedule interviews at their convenience. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted, recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Member checking will be completed in order to assure accuracy of the transcriptions. This will be followed by coding for major themes. A schedule of practices, meetings, and matches will be obtained along with permission to observe. Observations of practices and matches will be done and recorded. All notes, recorded messages and other comments will be transcribed into one

document and bracketed and coded for major themes. Axial coding will be done to draw major concepts from the data. Triangulation of the methods will then occur for final conclusions.

### **The Researcher's Role**

I have been highly involved in sports for several years and through this time have witnessed both good and poor character displays. There appears to be a decline in moral behavior of athletes. Therefore, I enter this qualitative study with a passion to discover why this is occurring and how it can be improved.

Because of being involved in soccer as a coach and player, I have some knowledge of a few of the participants. One school's coach has been a teammate, and coach that I assisted for four years. Other schools will have coaches that I coached against or have refereed their teams in matches. Therefore there is some knowledge of their coaching styles and actions over the years. Other coaches that have agreed to participate are in sports other than soccer and therefore there is no real working knowledge of their coaching styles or personalities.

Some biases and assumptions made are that the philosophy on winning has an effect on the coaches' priority on moral development, and also that athletes will watch the coach to determine what he or she will allow as acceptable behaviors. This comes from the concept that the coach is in charge and what he or she says goes. It then stands to reason that as the interpreter of the data, these biases, assumptions and relationships can influence the themes that are found in the data as well as the interpretation of results.

### **Data Collection**

#### **Written Documents**

First will be the collection of written documents. According to Ary et al. (2006), one of the ways to collect data in qualitative research is examining (p. 549-550). Every coach has an

extensive coaching philosophy that is consistent with the types of the documents identified by Ary et al. (2006) as acceptable for examining (p. 550). Coaches write team rules, philosophies, game plans, work-out schedules, goals, team mission statements, and team vision statements. These documents are generally sent to the team yearly or semi-annually. Coaches will list within this documents pertinent information to this study like, team expectations as well as rules of conduct for the team when at practice, on the bus, at school, within the locker room, and during games. Consequences may also be listed. By collecting the written documents, and coding them for major themes, the research will ascertain the priority that these coaches place on teaching moral development through sports. The intent of collecting this data and performing the subsequent coding is to gain insight into the type of climate the coach emphasizes. The hope is to collect data that will begin to answer the research question; what contributes to the climate that Division II and III college coaches produce in their coaching philosophy concerning reconciling winning and character development?

### **Semi-Structured interviews**

After the collection of the written documents will be the semi-structured interviews of the coaches. These interviews will be scheduled at the coaches' offices for their convenience and to allow them to be more comfortable. The open-ended questions listed in Appendix A will last between 20 and 25 minutes. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. Two audio devices will be used, a primary device and a backup. Ary et al. (2006) define semi-structured interviews as those where the researcher has an area of interest and chosen questions, but has some latitude to modify the format during the interview. Since there is no way to know what will be important to the ethnic group, this type of interview will be useful.

The questions used will be piloted in this study, but are also grounded in literature (Bolter, 2010; Davidson & Moran-Miller, 2005; Davidson, Khmelkov, & Moran-Miller, 2006; Davidson, Moran-Miller, & Beedy, 2006; Peláez, 2011; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Vella et al., 2011). That is to say, that while I developed questions that will produce answers toward the information I will be seeking, many of the questions are derivatives of other studies seeking similar data. The intention of these interviews will be to explore the coaches' definition, views, and any experiences related to character development of their athletes. Additionally, the interview will address the coaches' philosophy toward winning and the type of climate emphasized. In this way it is expected that the interview will produce data that will be coded (Creswell, 2007; Ary et al., 2006) with the intention to find themes related to the coach's definitions, views, and experiences toward character development, which will answer the research question; how do Division II and III college coaches and athletes define, view, or experience character development through sports? Additionally, the interviews are expected to draw out the coach's philosophy toward winning and the subsequent climate thus answering the research question; what contributes to the climate that Division II and III college coaches produce in their coaching philosophy concerning reconciling winning and character development?

### **Questionnaires**

To complete the phenomenology, questionnaires will be filled out by the athletes. According to Ary et al. (2006) questionnaires are a viable option when large amounts of data are required due to the number of participants and it is therefore not practical to use the interview process (p. 428). The questions will be open ended and designed for the athletes to describe situations related to their lived experience of playing for their coach. These will also be

questions piloted in this study, but many were developed from literature (Bolter, 2010; Davidson & Moran-Miller, 2005; Davidson, Khmelkov, & Moran-Miller, 2006; Davidson, Moran-Miller, & Beedy, 2006; Peláez, 2011; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Vella et al., 2011). The consent forms, and questionnaires will be given to the athletes at a practice or team meeting in person (see Appendixes B and C). The athletes will be given time to complete the questionnaires and they will be collected immediately after they are completed. This method will allow me to be available for questions, confirm data, and be assured that the athletes' data is connected to their own coach for comparison purposes. This data will then be coded accordingly and should supply answers to two research questions. First, how do Division II and III college athletes perceive the team climate concerning reconciling winning and character development? Second, what environmental and personal factors do Division II and III athletes perceive to influence their character development?

### **Observations**

Lastly, will be observations. Time will not allow the ability to see everything, but to at least observe one practice and/or one match for each coach and their team. Descriptive notes will be taken to allow for an opportunity to review events for clarity. Moreover, I will have an audio recording device to take verbal notations for researcher comments. Creswell (2007) states that observations are a method employed to uncover possible deceptions of interviewees. This will be one philosophy of the observations. Additionally, the study will have as the goal of the observations to gain a complete description of behaviors in the groups' natural settings as defined by Ary et al. (2006). Therefore, the observations will be to observe the coach and athletes in their natural settings to determine if their actions are consistent with their respective

answers. All of this will then be transcribed, coded, bracketed, and axial coded for major themes.

To get the most out of the observations it will be essential to take quality notes. The field note template in Appendix D will be used. The details of what is being observed will be written out, while observer notes will be listed in the margin area on the right. Observer notes may also be audio recorded to assure the ability to continue observing action during practices and matches. I will write out the notes as the observations occur.

### **Data Analysis**

Data collection will occur in four ways, collection of written documents, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Each type of data will be bracketed and coded for major themes. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) qualitative ethnography is theory generating intended to result in a rich description of the contextual views of a cultural group, in this case Division II and III college varsity coaches. The ethnography will call for analyzing data by describing the culture-sharing group, looking for themes that develop about the group and how they work (Creswell, 2007, p. 78). The phenomenology will call for analyzing data for significant statements, meaning units, and descriptions of the essence of the shared lived experience (Creswell, 2007). This phenomenology seeks to gain the truth of these experiences through the consciousness of Division II and III college varsity team sport athletes. Bracketing, coding, axial coding, and selective coding will occur to extract the major themes of the data.

### **Bracketing**

Creswell (2007) states that bracketing is the first step of a phenomenological data analysis where the researcher sets aside preconceived experiences to gain a better understanding of the experiences of the participants. This is also referred to by Moustakas (1994) as the

epoche. The epoche is being cognizant of what is really there and avoiding the familiarity of everyday happenings, events, and people (Moustakas, 1994). It is a reflective-meditative procedure to allow preconceptions to enter and exit our consciousness freely and, once ready, the prejudgments are to be written down, or bracketed (Moustakas, 1994). Each area of data collection will go through the bracketing process or epoche to assure that my own bias has been set aside and only the true data is being processed.

### **Coding**

Creswell (2007) suggests that ethnographic coding will contain theoretic lens, culture descriptions, theme analysis, field issues, and interpretations. According to Ary et al. (2006) coding is the “core of qualitative analysis and includes the identification of categories and themes and their refinement” (p. 492). “The first step in coding is referred to as open coding” and generally begins with reading and rereading the data looking for words, phrases, sentences, subjects, ways of thinking, and patterns of behavior that appear regularly (Ary et al., 2006, p. 492). Open coding is followed by axial coding, which Ary et al. (2006) describes as putting the data back together making connections between categories (p. 553). According to Creswell (2007) axial coding is making connections across categories and then gaining a selective focus by systematically reviewing the data for specific categories called selective coding. Each type of data collected will go through this process. These methods are what are referred to in this study as coding.

The phenomenological method of data analysis is comprised of intertwining steps, the epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994) the epoche is the setting aside of predispositions and prejudices, which allows data to be seen just like the first time. Like with the ethnography, researchers

bracket the focus of the research and set aside all preconceived notions to allow a sole spotlight on the research.

Moustakas (1994) described the steps of phenomenological reduction. First the researcher will horizontalize the data, which is giving equal value to each statement and providing an opportunity to review the experience to determine the condition of the phenomenon. Afterwards, repetitive and irrelevant statements are deleted and the remaining horizons are grouped into themes. To construct a textural description one must repeat a pattern of looking and describing, while constantly referencing textural descriptions that illustrate a range of intensities, sizes, shapes, colors all within an experiential background (Moustakas, 1994). Eventually, themes will emerge that had not been seen before.

The next step is imaginative variation, which is when the researcher seeks possible meanings through differing perspectives, roles, and functions (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers use imaginative variation to construct structural themes and descriptions from the textural meanings that go into the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The final step is the synthesis of meanings and essences from the perspective of a researcher's comprehensive reflective and imaginative study of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Triangulation as described by Ary et al. (2006) as using multiple sources of data to enhance corroboration of the findings and will be enacted on the three sources of data collected in this study.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) trustworthiness is the term used when discussing criteria concerning the scientific merit of a qualitative method. Trustworthiness addresses credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Methods for increasing



trustworthiness in this study include multiple uses of audit trail, detailed design, sample-selection, thick description, triangulation, and member checks..

### **Credibility**

Credibility depends on the fullness of the information gathered as well as the analytical abilities of the researcher. According to Ary et al. (2006), it is the truthfulness of the findings. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) credibility may be affected by sample-selection and lack of validation of participants as being representative of the culture. Sample size is not predetermined, but it is important that the sample be truly reflective of the group, not merely the most articulate, accessible, or outgoing members of the group. Consequently, this study will be represented by coaches from multiple schools and across multiple sports to assure a credible representation of the cultural group.

Credibility also refers to the degree a researcher's analyses find participant agreement. Member check is therefore a critical credibility technique in which each participant will be given exclusive access to their interview transcripts and invited to read them thoroughly for clarity, accuracy, and to provide additional information (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). This process will be used for credibility of data for both the coach interviews and athlete questionnaires.

### **Dependability**

Dependability deals with consistency, which is addressed through the provision of prolific detail about the context and setting of the study. Ary et al. (2006) refer to this type of thick description as having reproducible and consistent methods and procedures. Specifically, Ary et al. (2006) refer to thick description as providing vivid images of the setting and behaviors being observed (p. 639). Therefore, my role in the study is to describe the environment as it is being experienced by those being observed. Dependability is also established through an audit

trail. According to Ary et al. (2006) audit trails stipulate a way for others to know how decisions were made by providing specifics about how the study was conducted (p. 509). To accomplish this I will journal thorough notes and records of all activities, as well as keep all data well organized.

### **Transferability**

According to Ary et al. (2006), transferability refers to the degree to which the findings in one context are applicable to another context. Transferability is created by full descriptions with the potential for findings to have relevance when transferred to a similar setting, or culture. Like with credibility, transferability is enhanced by thick descriptions. It is my responsibility to provide rich, detailed descriptions of the context so that potential users can make the necessary comparisons and judgments that result in transferability (Ary et al., 2006, p. 507). Therefore, during all phases of the study, it will be necessary to fully disclose as many details about the process as possible.

### **Confirmability**

According to Ary et al. (2006) confirmability in qualitative research is “related to the degree to which findings in a study can be corroborated by others investigating the same situation” (p. 630). Confirmability is established by verbatim documentation of conversations and direct observation. Interviews are recorded and then transcribed. Notes will be added to the transcription to report on body language, indications, or actions that may not have been captured. Data include the tapes, transcriptions with notes, and information acquired during the research. Like with dependability, an audit trail and the subsequent journal will help confirmability. Additionally, triangulation is useful for confirmability. Triangulation as described by Ary et al. (2006) is using multiple sources of data to enhance corroboration of the findings. This study has

four sources of data that can be triangulated to assure confirmability. Lastly, member checking also applies to confirmability. According to Ary et al. (2006), this method is often used in qualitative research to allow interviewees the opportunity to review interpreted notes for accuracy or to confirm the data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since this research will contain written documents of several coaches, their interview transcripts as well as eye witness accounts of practices, meetings, and matches, there will be a large amount of data to protect. Separate locked file cabinets and password-protected computers will be strictly enforced to protect all records. Additionally, pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the programs and coaches. Moreover, confidentiality will need maintained as I will observe game plans among opponents.

Prior to collecting data, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval will be obtained from the Liberty University and the IRBs of the participating institutions. All participants will receive a copy of the consent at least one week prior to their observation, either by mail or email (Appendix B and E). Written consent will be obtained immediately before the interviews and observations. As stated in the consent forms, participation in the study is completely voluntary to the coach, as well as athletes, and they can withdraw at any time during the study.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

As stated in chapter one the purpose of this study was to gain insights into character development through participation in Division II and III college varsity team sports. Character is defined as: The combination of qualities or traits that distinguishes an individual or group; Moral Strength; Integrity (*American Heritage Dictionary, 2003*). The ethnographical phenomenological study was used because the goal is to explore the coaches as a group and ascertain their philosophical commonalities related to character development, as well as to get a deeper richer understanding of the impact these philosophies have on athletes (Creswell, 2007). Thus the goal of this study is to explore culturally specific information concerning character development, as we have defined it, and to further explore the intentionality, or awareness of its development in the social context from these groups.

In a qualitative study the findings are byproducts of the researcher's view of the data as it relates to the topic. Therefore, the researcher's assumptions and ideas are not discounted, but become a part of the interpretation. According to Creswell (2007) those interpreting data will support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation. Data containing character traits was condensed using synonymous terms from Tables 1 and 2 which were stated in chapter two as that which could be used as a model. Additionally, there are synonymous character traits listed in Table 3 that are traits from within the data that could be combined using confirmation through member checking as well as references to Tables 1 and 2.

Table 3. *Combining like terms used by coaches and athletes*

Character Theme	Associated Character Traits	
Teamwork	Cooperation Getting along Acceptance Selflessness Pride Cohesion On the same page	Communication Togetherness Family Supportive Common Goals Chemistry Team buy in
Hard Work	Give 100% Go the extra mile	Diligence
Trust	Faith	Believe
Determination	Grit Drive Heart Motivation Passion Pushing yourself to the limit	Never give up Strive Desire Overcome challenges Persistent
Composure	Patience Handle negative situations	Handle Stress Self-Control
Caring	Love Helpful	Giving Supportive
Sacrifice	Unselfish Selfless	Know and fulfill your role
Confidence	Self- Belief Self-Esteem	Self-Respect Not afraid of failure
Comradery	Friendship Bonding	Relationship building
Sportsmanship	Being a good winner and loser	Golden Rule

### Procedures

Permission was granted by the Liberty University IRB to contact schools. Seventeen schools were contacted for permission to do the research. Some schools required their own IRB to grant permission, some only required the Athletic Director to give written consent. Once appropriate consent was given by a contacted school and final approval was granted by the IRB at Liberty University, I contacted coaches by email and followed up with phone calls. The

consent form was emailed to the coaches that consented, and was collected at the time of our first meeting. Athletes playing for these coaches were then contacted by email and sent the consent. Only athletes with at least one full year playing for each coach were invited and the consents were also collected at the time of the first meeting.

### **Participants**

A purposeful sampling of Division II and Division III college coaches was selected that would purposefully inform an understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Nine schools responded to inquiries to participate and seven were used. One of the schools not used was due to no coach responding, and the second school had scheduling conflicts that prevented finishing the process. Coaches that responded were sent the consent form via email. Fifteen coaches gave consent, but only thirteen finished the process. Coach O did not finish due to not being able to schedule a time to complete the questionnaires with the athletes and Coach L could not get free for the interview. Therefore data from these teams were eliminated. The usable data then contained four women's volleyball teams, one football team, four men's soccer teams, and four women's soccer teams. There were three Division II teams and ten Division III teams. Two of the coaches were females coaching females, six were males coaching females, and five were males coaching males. Three coaches had been with their programs over fifteen years, two more were over ten years, and the other eight were from four to nine years. Three coaches were from one school, there were two coaches from each of four schools, and one coach from the other two schools. Over 100 athletes responded and 92 finished the process with usable data. There were no fewer than five and no more than ten invited athletes per team that responded and completed the questionnaires with useable data for the total of 92 athletes. Useable data means that they completed all of the questions. There were athletes eliminated that

needed to leave for treatment, practice or class before finishing the questions. The final demographic of participants was 13 coaches and 92 athletes which can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. *Demographic of participants.*

Coach	Sport	Division	Coach Gender	Experience	Number of Athletes
Coach A	Women's Volleyball	III	Male	Over 10 years	5
Coach B	Women's Volleyball	II	Male	4 to 9 Years	7
Coach C	Men's Soccer	III	Male	Over 15 years	7
Coach D	Men's Soccer	III	Male	4 to 9 Years	8
Coach E	Women's Soccer	III	Male	4 to 9 Years	8
Coach F	Women's Volleyball	III	Female	4 to 9 Years	7
Coach G	Men's Football	III	Male	4 to 9 Years	10
Coach H	Women's Soccer	III	Male	4 to 9 Years	7
Coach I	Women's Soccer	III	Male	Over 10 years	9
Coach J	Men's Soccer	III	Male	4 to 9 Years	6
Coach K	Women's Volleyball	III	Female	4 to 9 Years	7
Coach M	Women's Soccer	II	Male	Over 15 years	5
Coach N	Men's Soccer	II	Male	Over 15 Years	6

### **Data**

Data was obtained by four methods. First the coaches supplied me with their written documents that they use to routinely communicate to the team. These were in the form of team policy and procedures that were presented and often signed by athletes, as well as team power point presentations of meetings. The second form of data was audio recorded interviews of the coaches, which were transcribed verbatim. Member checking or giving the coaches the opportunity to comment further on portions of the transcripts that were ambiguous or unclear was performed for clarity (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). Additionally, observations of the coaches and athletes were conducted at a practice or match to witness interaction between players and coaches. Lastly, the athletes were given a questionnaire to complete.

### **Written Documentation**

There were 180 pages of written data used by the coaches containing their team rules, policies, philosophies, and mission statements. Three coaches gave written documents with limited detail in a single page, but most of the coaching sample supplied extensive written documents. In the case of the three coaches that used little in the way of written documentations,

they relied more on team meetings and constant verbal communication to get their main points across. While the other 10 coaches had team meetings using direct verbal communication, they also supplied multiple written documents including power point presentations and team handbooks making up 177 of the 180 pages. The compilation of similar answers from this data is available in Table 5.

Table 5. *The coaches' written documents containing team rules and philosophies*

Major Theme	Related Themes
Respect for others (7)	Golden Rule When speaking to coach or teammates look them in the eye (2) Conduct proper use and care of all equipment Arrive early for team activities (7) Keep phones away during team activities (3)
Responsibility (11)	Attend all training (5) You are responsible to know the principles objectives and key skills (3) Maintain a coachable spirit during training (5) Maintain stated team GPA goal (3) Attend all classes and study halls (7) Communicate your physical health with Athletic Training staff Give proper notifications for any issues causing you to miss activities (4)
Teamwork/ Unity (13)	Encourage and push your teammates (4) Help one another on and off the court/field (2) When you see someone is down pick them up No yelling at teammates Leave the drama at the door (3) Keep a positive attitude (2) You are asked to speak candidly and honestly with coaches so they can assist you Keep team matters between the team Travel with the team to events (7)
Represent the University well (5)	Social media is not to bring any negative attention to the program/ No vulgarity (5) 24/48 Hour Rule on drinking (6) No use of illegal banded Substances (3) No swearing No Hazing Wear stated attire for practices, matches and during travel (5) Display good sportsmanship (4)



## **Coach Interviews**

Each coach was interviewed in their office or conference room. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 13 and 20 minutes on average, though one coach did take over 40 minutes. Each coach was asked 14 questions. There were originally 15 questions intended, but question number seven inquiring about their biggest influence was not asked on the first two interviews based on the flow of those interviews and then was left out intentionally in the remaining interviews. The interview answers were transcribed verbatim and totaled 113 pages. The interviews were semi structured allowing for the answers to dictate the flow. Questions one and two were warm up questions designed to get the coach talking before narrowing the focus regarding the research purpose toward character development in sports. These two questions were always asked in order at the beginning of each interview.

**Question 1: What would you say is your primary function as the coach of these young men/women?** This question was piloted in this study and allowed the coach to speak of something familiar and begin to give me answers as to each coach's priorities. Results after coding produced six primary job functions. Interestingly, four of the functions as described by the coaches, were related to the athletes' personal development, while two functions were related to team development. That is to say that according to these coaches the athletes' wellbeing, experience on the team, academic progress, and character were expressed as things that the coach should manage as part of his or her job. One coach put it this way: "I guess as you get them in here obviously, you kind of become a surrogate parent number one. You're responsible for their wellbeing regardless of if they grow physically and become better volley ball players." Another stated: "I guess the requirements would probably be overall their wellbeing. We want them to be successful soccer players. I also pride myself to try to raise people that are good, outstanding

people in the community as well.” The other two responsibilities, as described by the coaches for question 1, were more expected, which included training the team, and developing the program.

**Question 2: How do you measure your success as a coach?** This question was piloted in this study and was meant to allow the coach to express his or her philosophies for the team as well as start to measure the team climate. In line with question one, only one answer seemed to be related to performance on the field. The coaches suggested game performance as a strong measure of success in training the teams, which includes wins and losses. However, the responses also suggest that the number of graduating players, the experience of the players, and the players’ character growth were important measures of their success as well. One coach answered this way: “I measure my success by my retention of players, ah, our wins and losses, and the overall experience of the ladies.” Another made these points: “To be clear, to me as a coach the easiest way to measure whether we are successful or not is wins and losses, but I think that what we are most proud of actually is our kids academic performance.” Common answers from these coaches continued to support the same four methods listed above as a measurement of their success.

**Question 3: How do you think others measure your success as a coach?** This question was piloted in this study and was in place to determine what external cultural pressures that may be present that could affect the coaching philosophies and climate. All the coaches believe that wins and losses was how they were measured by most outsiders but they also believed or hoped that administration may look at academic progress and reputation of the team more than results. None of the coaches were contracted to win, but they did express that winning, at least on some level, was expected. The best example of this was the following

answer from one of the coaches: “I do feel that in many cases success is measured in wins and losses. Um, I think that while maybe sometimes, it’s somewhat pretended that that doesn’t matter, but it definitely does.” The coaches suggested that their athletes may measure the coach’s success based on the relationship the coach maintained with the players, but the coaches also suggested that their players would measure success based on the team’s ability to compete. For example one coach said, “well, the athletes may also measure their success by if they are improving or by the level of enjoyment.” The coaches all suggested that if the team was losing, but continued to show improvement, others may consider for a short time that to be successful.

**Question 4: What is your definition of character?** This question was a derivative of a question asked by Vella et al., (2011) as well as Rudd (2005). I asked this question directly with no leading information in order to assure that the coach’s first thoughts would be captured without influence or leading the coach being interviewed. Three main common answers developed as the data from the coaches was coded. The first definition seemed to suggest that character was deeper in the individual’s identity. Specifically, five coaches stated that “character is what you do when no one is looking.” This may be defined as being without external influences or being of intrinsic processing. Four of the coaches’ primary thoughts about character might be better defined as externally regarded reputation or how one is viewed by others. For example, one coach put it this way, “basically how your reputation is to others. People should be able to immediately see what your character is.” The final two coaches listed character traits and spoke more about how character is developed, denoting they do recognize it when they see it.

**Question 5: What are key character traits that you feel sports can build in athletes?**

This question offers details about how coaches view character development through sports.

Moreover, it allows opportunity to compare findings to previous research asking the same question (Arnold, 1992; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995; Shields & Bredemeier, 2008). After coding this data, four primary possible categories for traits were listed: Social Interaction, Discipline, Morals, and Mental toughness. The supporting answers and grouping used to list the four categorical traits for character can be viewed in Table 6.

Table 6. *Character traits that coach's feel sports build in athletes*

Social Interaction (3)	Discipline (2)	Mental Toughness (3)	Moral (2)
Teamwork (10)	Hard Work (5)	Push passed your limits	Honesty
Accountable (8)	Sacrifice	Moving on from mistakes	Integrity (3)
Trust (2)	Habits	Problem solving	Credibility
Influences	Preparation (2)	Learn about themselves	Playing fair
Leadership (3)	Time management (2)	Winning/Achievement	Ethical
Love (4)	Commitment	Handle adversities (2)	
Encouraging	Making good decisions	Managing injury	
Sportsmanship (3)	Doing the right things	Confidence/ Self-worth (5)	
Positive Attitude (4)	Subjugate your immediate	Respond to not playing	
Sharing	needs for the team	Pride	
		Determination (5)	

### **Question 6: What role do you feel that you play in their character development?**

The question is a derivative of one asked in Peláez (2011). The answers to this question suggest that they felt they had a role as well as their belief as to what extent their role influences their players. Six of the coaches stated that they see themselves as role models for the athletes. Additionally, twelve of the coaches state their role was to teach character to the players. One example of both of these is from a coach who said, “Well the head coaches are the biggest role model and I know myself I try to show that I’m working hard. Ok I try to show that I’m prepared. I also try to teach them right from wrong.” Moreover, four of the coaches’ responses suggest the belief that they could help the athletes’ character by acting as a parent or guardian and all of the coaches believe they affect character by the ways they manage the team. All of the coaches gave more than one answer to this question.

**Question 7, 8, and 9:** As mentioned before question 7 was skipped and questions 8 and 9 were transition questions to get the coaches thinking about competition. Question 8 was derived from Vella et al., (2011). These questions asked for their opinion on the competition and the officiating in their league. The coaches mostly had positive things to say about both the competition and officiating. Moreover, the coaches were diplomatic with their answers when they found faults with either other programs or officiating, but were forthright with answers without naming names. There was no relative usable data from these questions. Perhaps these questions may have been perceived as being too dangerous for them to offer a response.

**Question 10: What does winning mean to you as a coach?** This question also a derivative of one asked from Peláez (2011). The question was designed to get to the crux of the study and gather data related toward the coaches' philosophies about winning as well as to determine the type of climate that is developed as a result. According to Nichols (1989) there are two themes related to a coach's philosophy on winning, the first is performance (ego) orientation and the second is mastery (task) orientation. As stated in chapter two Nichols (1989) claims that Mastery (task) orientation is a philosophy that focuses on mastering skills and game plans to prepare to win and allow the game to measure the progress. These coaches' answers seem to fall under the mastery orientation. Most of the coaches expressed that mastering the process and playing perfectly creates wins. For example one coach stated: "I would definitely say that I am more of a process guy. I don't ever worry about wins or losses, I care more about the process and everything we do that leads up to that Saturday game day."

The coaches expressed in their responses the importance of winning, trying to win, and/or learning to win. Four coaches' responses suggest a possible label that might be described as a desire to build a winning mentality in their athletes. The theme was represented by the

coaches' expression of their desire that their players not have the idea or excuse for losses with the mindset that "we did our best." These coaches expressed the desire to get the players out of the mindset that they did their best and that's enough win or lose. An example of this desire expressed by one coach:

Winning is why you play sports. Winning is what matters. You either win or you lose. There's no "you played as hard as you could, and that's ok, it'll be alright." It's not alright. If you lose, you have to try harder to try to win, not I gave it my best effort. That's not good enough and that's what we're trying to instill in them, you can always do more.

Conversely, there were coaches that did consider the team playing their best as good enough if a loss came to a better team. For example one coach explained it this way:

Winning is - are we giving 100% on the court at the time. If we're giving 100% and we still lose it's a win in my book, because we did everything we could as a team. We played together as a team, we struggled, we still did it as a team and in the end we might have just got beat by a better team.

This idea of equating the team's effort and execution with a win was the majority response from the coaches.

**Question 11: Describe for me what it takes to produce a winning team.** This question was piloted in this study and was designed to get the coaches' opinion on character traits associated with winning. The coaches' statements suggest five areas that produce a winning team: Executing the process, Discipline, Mental toughness, Teamwork, and Talent. Most of the character traits identified by coaches were listed in this answer.

**Question 12: Describe your approach to teaching character development.** This question was a spin-off of one asked by Peláez (2011). This question was to confirm if they had an approach and to determine any purposeful actions toward character development through sports. Each coach revealed methods where they are purposeful toward character development through sports. The most popular answer among coaches was to “set the example” or “be a role model.” Moreover, most of the coaches’ answers were making known what is expected. One may say this is indirect teaching and direct teaching. The coaches as a whole used various methods such as team meetings, verbal reminders, written documents, and individual time with players, to be sure the athletes are directly aware of what is expected and accepted behavior. Additionally, five of the coaches stated that they use teaching to enhance character of their athletes. This could be proactive like leadership training or reactive like learning from mistakes. Lastly, five of the coaches stated they try to use activities like community service or fund raising to help with character development by giving them an opportunity to unselfishly give to others.

**Question 13: Describe a time when something happened where you saw a positive change in an athlete as a result of your coaching? What do you believe you did that resulted in this change?** This question was a derivative of Peláez (2011). Every coach had multiple stories of players that underwent character growth due to their coaching methods. Though the stories are too lengthy to offer details, the coaches all expressed that through their coaching practices they were able to turn certain athletes away from poor character decisions.

Interestingly, while the coaches all had stories where they directly had an impact on a player; some also understood that some of what happens to the players is from being part of a group. That is to say that these coaches felt that they can set and manage behavioral

expectations, but the team or group often then will have influence on each other. Coach B may explain it best by acknowledging his role, but also the pressure from players to conform:

We have had kids who have come in with questionable decision making habits and have succeeded and turned that page somewhat through our guidance and probably a lot through their peers. You know they have to buy into the norms of the team . . . you know again I think this year's group or last fall's group is an interesting example of that with four players kind of washed out through their own decisions and/or by being nudged a little bit because they weren't going to conform with the expectations and the standards of the team.

The consensus of the answers to this question from the coaches boiled down to three primary themes concerning coaches seeing a change in athletes. First all the coaches felt they did have a responsibility in the changes that they described from athletes that have gone through there program. Secondly, there were five coaches that acknowledged that while they had a part in the process, being part of a group and pressure from peers was also a factor. Additionally, three coaches also mentioned that the athlete has to be willing to change.

**Question 14: Have you ever had an experience where you were torn between winning the game and teaching character development? How did you deal with this situation?** This question was a derivative of Peláez (2011). The question almost always required prompting, which in every case was asking for an example of a time the coach had an opportunity to sit a player and didn't because they may lose and another where they did sit the player and what were the results. All of them were able to give a story or two once prompted. All the coaches admitted that this is often a struggle or tension. A few gave examples of a time when they believed they did compromise the rules. In all of these cases, they also quickly made



the distinction that it was earlier in their career and that they learned from that and have not compromised since. Two coaches did say that they punish all infractions, but rarely do they suspend. They usually find something that will not punish the whole team if a better player is guilty, but they need them on the field. However, both of these coaches gave an example of suspending athletes. All the coaches expressed that they deal with players equally with punishment regardless of talent. Most of these coaches had either suspended or dismissed a starting player from the team and dealt with the consequences in competition accordingly. One of the best examples of this was this story from a coach:

Last season we're 8-1-1, 26<sup>th</sup> in the country and three of our guys, two starters, made a poor decision, and we had to dismiss them. And that was tough as a coach, because you know those were your players and they're starters and they're producing and you know if they're not in the lineup that hurts you and it did, but ultimately you have to do what's best for the program. You know as far as the integrity of the program so, you know, we had to let them go and that's a tough thing.

**Question 15: Give me examples of particular issues that you have experienced in coaching that we have not already discussed that you feel are important to my study.**

No coaches responded with anything other than that they felt we covered everything.

### **Observations**

Observations were done on every team for either a practice or game. Coaches I, J, M, and N were all observed in a match or game. Coaches A, C, D, F, G, and K were observed in practice, and coaches B, E, and H were observed in both. In the case of coaches E and H the second observation was as a result of these coaches playing each other and coach H was seen

again as he was the opponent of coach I when the observation of coach I was done. The observations were intended to witness the interaction between the subjects in their setting. Moreover, the observations offer the opportunity to confirm information gathered through the interviews.

Research involving the study of character in sports often looks at prosocial and antisocial behaviors (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009; Bortoli, Messina, Zorba, & Robazza, 2012; Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011; Romand & Pantaléon, 2007). Therefore, following previous researchers the notes taken during the observation were of either pro-social or antisocial actions witnessed during the respective observation. I saw coaches concerned for their players. The best of these examples was when a coach saw a player in the stairwell on the way to her office and spent some time talking about a personal issue. There were various styles of coaching from very energetic and upbeat to demanding and rigid. However, all of the coaches appeared to be organized, passionate, and corrective during both training and matches.

Though much of what I witnessed was positive, there were some antisocial instances during observations. There were noted instances of gamesmanship by the coaches during a game. For example, one coach continually had his players stand near the ball to slow the restart after a foul. Additionally, I did see a coaches lose their temper and lash out at players or referees. During a match one coach threw a clipboard in anger over his disdain for the officiating. These antisocial acts were far outweighed by the prosocial acts, but it is notable that they were present in the sampling of observations. What did seem to be a common trait was the ability for these coaches to regain composure and focus their attention again once angered. In the end, I did not see any actions that were contrary to what was reported by the coaches and athletes during their respective questioning.

## Questionnaires

Athletes from each team signed and returned a consent form and were given a questionnaire with 15 questions on a flash drive. Each athlete opened the questionnaire from the flash drive on their own laptop, answered the questions and saved the form back to the flash drive for retrieval. The questions were designed to determine the athletes' definition of character, the climate of the team and the related perceptions of their coach.

**Question 1: Describe what you believe is the primary job functions required by your coach.** This question was piloted in this study. The athletes' responses reflected seven functions or duties expected from their coaches. Looking after the player's wellbeing, and training the team were answers given here that were also given by the coaches. The players stated that setting and teaching behavioral expectations was a major job function. Some examples of this are as follows: "To demonstrate good character qualities like good work ethic, leadership, and respect while teaching us to the best of their ability how to play and succeed at the game we play;" "to teach the athletes the physical skills of the game, as well as the behavioral expectations . . . teach us to respect teammates, officials, fans, and opposing teams, as well as maintain a high level of sportsmanship." The remainder of the functions listed by the athletes was that the coach is to be a role model, provide leadership, assess the players for positions on the team, and be a motivator.

**Question 2: Give examples of how your coach sets an expectation for athletes to represent your team.** This question is a spin-off of a question from Bolter and Weise (2012). The question is designed to get the athletes' perceptions about the behavioral expectations set by the coaches. These could be expectations from the written documents that they share with the team, meetings, or every day encounters. Forty eight of the athletes believed their coach desired

for them to represent the team well. For example one athlete stated: “Our coach does not let us use vulgar language, drink underage, or post improper items on social media, so we do not give our team a bad name.” Additionally, the athletes revealed that coaches set expectations by their demanding accountability to each other and the standards of the team. For example all of these coaches had academic minimum GPA’s for their team and the athletes’ answers included this in what they were accountable for to the team. Moreover, the athletes revealed that their coaches set expectations by, maintaining discipline, and being a good role model.

**Question 3: Define character and include character traits that you feel make up one’s character.** The athletes defined character most often intrinsically as “who a person is,” and “what you do when no one is looking.” Moreover, like with the coaches, there were several players that gave extrinsic definitions of character describing reputation. Lastly, the athletes stated influences or spoke of how character it is developed. Part two of the question asked the players to list character traits associated with one’s character. The players identified six categories of traits associated with one’s character: Social Interaction, Discipline, Mental Toughness, Morals, Coachable, and Personality. Table 7 below contains the groupings.

Table 7. *Character traits identified by the athletes*

Social Interaction (3)	Discipline (4)	Mental Toughness (2)	Morals (3)	Coachable (2)	Personality (3)
Caring (16)	Organized (4)	Confidence (4)	Honesty (13)	Ability to listen	Short-tempered
Accountability (12)	Dedicated (4)	Learns from defeat	Integrity (9)	Ability to take criticism	Guilt
Role model (2)	Sacrifice (7)	Determined (15)	Genuine	Openness to learn	Narcissistic
Leadership (10)	Hard Work (16)	Fortitude (8)	Honor (2)	new ideas	Envious
Teamwork (5)	Focused on	Composure (2)	Dignity		Intelligent
Positive Attitude (16)	Goals	Critical thinking	Noble		Mature
Encouraging (5)		Competitive (3)	Values		Strength (3)
Sportsmanship					Ambitious (2)
Trustworthy					Wisdom
Unselfish (3)					Shy/Outgoing
Respect (16)					

**Question 4: What are key character traits that you feel sports can build in athletes and why?** This question is a derivative of those asked in literature (Arnold, 1992; Rudd & Stoll,

2004; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006). The question allowed for the direct comparison to their coaches' answers to the same question. Interestingly, when the athletes were asked to list traits that sports build, they eliminated the personality traits. The list of traits is found in Table 8. One notable difference between the coaches and players was that the athletes added the theme "coachable." Additionally, the players like the coaches identified several more social traits than moral traits as defined by previous research (Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006).

Table 8. *character traits that players feel sports can build in athletes*

Social Interaction (7)	Discipline (4)	Mental toughness (7)	Morals (2)	Coachable (6)
Leadership (25)	Hard work (23)	Determination (19)	Integrity (2)	Listening skills (2)
Teamwork (30)	Desire to get better	Focus (2)	Honesty (2)	Observant
Patient (2)	Commitment (9)	Perfectionism		Application of learning
Understating	Organization (7)	Deal with failure (2)		Openness to learn
Comradely (2)	Time management	Fortitude (9)		
Trust (6)	Dedication (4)	Deal with success		
Respect	Sacrifice (11)	Problem solving		
Accountability (9)		Own mistakes (3)		
Positive attitude (13)		Composure (9)		
Encouragement (4)		Confidence (5)		
Caring (8)		Decisive (7)		
Sportsmanship (5)		Desire to win (5)		
Respect (14)		Competitiveness (6)		
Unselfish (4)				

**Question 5: Describe ways that your coach is an example of a man/woman of good character.** The question is a spin-off of one asked by Bolter and Weise (2012). The question was designed to get the athletes' perceptions of their coaches. The athletes identified five ways their coach was an example of good character: Leading by example, Parental figure, Honest, Committed to the team, and Helps those in need. The players were able to identify and elaborate on several ways that these coaches were examples of good character which supported their answers. The final results were able to be categorized by these five themes. Some examples from the athletes are as follows: "Coach is an example of good character by upholding the rules she puts in place for herself as well. She is a good leader and encourager. She teaches us and

communicates with us;” “They take responsibility for their mistakes and admit failure. They preach that they abide by the same guidelines that they have outlined for their players; my coach is very committed to his team.”

**Question 6: Describe what you believe your coach identifies as good character traits.**

This question was developed from one asked from related research (Arnold, 1992; Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006). The question was designed to get further conformation about the athletes understanding of character and again allow for the comparison to the coaches. The answers produced the same five traits that they listed as “traits sports can build” in question four (see Table 8).

**Question 7: Give examples of a time when your coach punished athletes who display poor character and a time when he/she should have but didn’t.** The question was a spin-off from Bolter and Weise (2012). There were 50 athletes that only listed instances where the coach punished athletes and then did not list events that were unpunished. Out of these 50 players, 12 of them stated that they could not recall a time something was not punished or stated “never” when answering if there was a time their coach did not punish transgressions. There were 35 athletes that both gave examples of things that were punished and things that should have been punished. Out of those transgressions that were punished, ten were related to work ethic, ten were athletes showing a lack of respect, two were for tardiness, eleven were policy infractions (drinking, social media, missing events), and the remaining ones were on the field issues that were not specific. There were three players that only gave accounts of things that were unpunished, but listed no times when the coach punished athletes and four others that stated they could not think of anything specific either way. There were also five athletes of the 38 that gave

accounts of unpunished actions that stated that they were not sure if the coaches knew of the infraction, which was a reason coaches gave for leaving things unpunished.

**Question 8: Describe a time when your coach was an example of poor character and what were the circumstances?** The question was a derivative from one asked by Bolter and Weise (2012). Since, many of the athletes declared the coach as a role model or at least felt being a role model was part of his or her job, it was necessary to obtain the athlete's views on any poor behaviors. There were a significant number of athletes that stated they could not think of a time when their coach displayed poor character. However, every team had athletes that did come up with examples resulting in some concerns by athletes, but some also excused the activity. For example one athlete stated, "we didn't play like we were coached and he was upset about it. He just lost his temper, but I think that every once in a while kids need yelled at and disciplined in that way;" or "There was a time when my coach went over the top and maybe said some things that he shouldn't have said to a certain player, but then talked to him on the side and explained." Others were less forgiving: "Doesn't encourage us a lot of the time and just yells instead; or "Our coach has shown a short temper and has yelled at us before going back on the field." The most common instances reported were related to the coach losing his or her temper and then yelling at players, other coaches, referees, and in one case their spouse. Other areas witnessed by athletes were the coach not taking responsibility when he or she is wrong, being dishonest, being negative, and making poor discipline decisions.

**Question 9: Describe a time if it exists when your coach instructed athletes to show poor character. Examples: cheat, hurt someone or intimidate an opponent.** Bolter and Weise (2012) asked athletes to give examples of their coach modeling behaviors. Questions nine and ten are derivatives from this question. Question nine is designed to discover if the athletes

perceive any antisocial coaching practices. While 76 of the athletes could not recall a time or stated “never,” there were still reported instances that were significant enough to discuss. The three areas where athletes identified a coach as instructing poor character were gamesmanship, rule infractions, and indirect verbal approval. The most common of the instances were for gamesmanship. For example one athlete said “One time, coach told me to keep shouldering a striker during the game because it was frustrating the striker.” An example of the last of these was a coach allowing the team to get back at an opponent displaying poor character. Again the significance of this is that it shows that the athletes are watching the coaches and have opinions accordingly.

**Question 10: Describe a time that your coach instructed athletes how to show good character.** This question is designed to look for pro-social coaching practices and the results netted four repeating answers: Sets the match mentality, Tells us to respect others, Tells us to help others, and Gives instruction at all times. These vocalizations of expected behavior are stated to be as informal reminders to supplement formal team meetings. These responses far outnumbered those of coaches displaying of coaching poor character choices from questions eight and nine. Every athlete was able to give examples of their coach giving this type of instruction. One example is from this athlete who said: “We have lots of team meetings about how to conduct ourselves on and off the court as well as on the internet.”

**Question 11: Give examples of a time your coach praised athletes for showing good character.** Question 11 is a derivative of a question asked by Bolter and Weise (2012). The question also was designed to find pro-social coaching practices. An additional seven topics were uncovered when asked for times the coach praised showings of good character. All but one of these was for character traits. The list is as follows: Hard work, Kindness, Group rewards,



Morals, Leadership, Honesty, and Encouragement. Many of the players wrote a great deal about this subject. It was clear that these particular athletes recognized that the coaches were very forthright with their views about showing good character and that they tried to reward it often. Some even stated that getting praised or seeing someone get praise made them want to do things to get the same praises. One of the more common answers was similar to this one: “He will have a group huddle and acknowledge someone showing good character and it makes everyone feel good and want to be able to get praises like that.”

**Question 12: What does winning mean to your coach or what is his or her philosophy about winning?** This question was designed to compare the athletes’ opinions toward the emphasis that the coaches place on winning. It also could be linked back to Peláez (2011). The answers from the question revealed five repeating themes. Winning is giving 100%, Winning comes from the process, Winning is Important, Winning mentality, and Winning is fun. These athletes revealed a great deal about the importance that their respective coaches’ place on winning, but often also mentioned that winning wasn’t everything. For example this athlete stated:

Winning means a lot to my coach, which it should. With that being said winning is not everything to him either. Coach would love to win every game that we play; however, I feel as though it is more important to him to develop the person as a whole and make them into a good quality member of the college and to society.

All the athletes expressed the emphasis their coaches place on winning, but there was not a “win at all cost” mentality perceived by the athletes.

**Question 13: Describe for me what it takes to produce a winning team.** This question was piloted in this study and was designed to get the athletes’ opinions toward character traits

necessary to win. Moreover, it allowed for a direct comparison to the coaches who were asked the same question. The athletes' statements suggest six areas that produce a winning team. Most of the character traits listed were in this question. Subsequently, the players suggested six essentials for a winning team (see Table 9).

Table 9. *Describe for me what it takes to produce a winning team*

Execution	Discipline	Mental Toughness	Talent	Teamwork	Coachable
Focused on the current task	Commitment	Drive	Understand the game	Cohesiveness	Open to instruction
Little things done correctly	Determination	Learn from mistakes	Skill	Communication	Open to suggestion
Preparation	Work ethic	Patience	Conditioning	Relationships	Competitive
	Encouragement	Persistence		Leadership	Positive attitude
	Motivation	Overcome difficulties		Trust	
	Passion	Not afraid of failure		Diversity	
	Supportive	Never give up		Chemistry	
	Believe in themselves/ coaches	Heart		Know your role	
	Dedication	Confidence		Common goal	
	Give 100%	Winning mentality		Respect	
	Sacrifice	Will power		Responsibility	
		Composure		Honesty	
		Pushing to the limit		Selfless	
				Loyalty	

**Question 14: Have you ever had an experience where you were torn between winning the game and displaying poor character? How did you deal with this situation?**

This question was derived from Peláez (2011), though in her study the question was only asked of coaches. Interestingly, the question produced one of the most revealing answers. There were six topics produced during this answer. The first and most common was that the athletes would rather lose and maintain their character. Some athletes admitted to character flaws such as losing their temper or losing their self-control and lashing out. These athletes' answers maintained that they would choose to lose over displaying poor character; however, they admitted that the heat of competition brings out character flaws, such as frustration, anger, or lack of self-control with their mouth. Additionally, there were athletes that did not admit to displaying poor character to win, but said that this had occurred with teammates, one of which stated that it cost them the "win." The next topic was those athletes that claimed that they do not forgo character to win, but

that the struggle to maintain their conviction is always present. Finally, there were those who believed in winning at all cost and would display poor character if it meant they could win. For these athletes there were two identifiable differences. One set had no regrets for their actions while the others showed some remorse.

**Question 15: Give me examples of particular issues that you have experienced in athletics that we have not already discussed that you feel are important to my study, such as does your coach, peers or both have an effect on character and why?** This question and subsequent prompt were both piloted in this study. Many of the athletes gave good ideas for future study, but nothing related to this study. There were two ideas that developed from the example in the question. Most athletes claimed both the coach and their peers have an effect on character. The best example was this statement from a player:

Both a coach and team affect character. Players have a certain level of respect for coaches, and if a coach sets a bad or good example of character, it may have a domino effect onto the players. On the same note, players do the same to other players. Captains especially set the tone for the team, and when teammates see other teammates displaying bad or good character, it has a tendency to rub off on one another.

There were athletes that felt their character was developed before now and they remain true to that regardless of the current influences.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) the ethnography is intended to find a rich description of the contextual views of a cultural group of Division II and III college varsity coaches. The ethnography will call for analyzing data by describing the culture-sharing group of

coaches, looking for themes that develop about the group and how they work (Creswell, 2007, p. 78). The phenomenology will call for analyzing data for significant statements, meaning units, and descriptions of the essence of the shared lived experience of the group (Creswell, 2007).

Bracketing was used to reduce the potential for personal biases. Bracketing described by Creswell (2007) as the step in analysis where the researcher sets aside preconceived experiences to gain a better understanding of the experiences of the participants. Also, horizontalization was done. This is described by Moustakas (1994) as giving equal value to each statement made by each participant in all areas of data collection. This method is designed to prevent the researcher from magnifying one statement by the participants and also required the researcher to focus on the participant's perspective of the opinion or phenomenon as a whole. This allowed for accurate coding of themes. According to Ary et al. (2006) coding is the "core of qualitative analysis and includes the identification of categories and themes as well as their refinement" (p. 492).

### **Ethnography**

The first part of the study is getting the shared experience of Division II and Division III college coaches of varsity team sports. Creswell's (2007) definition of ethnography is looking to interpret and describe the shared patterns of a culture.

### **Character Defined**

The definition of character was addressed above with questions four and five, and in these questions seven of the coaches claimed character to be a deeper ingrained quality supported by statements like "who a person is," or "what you do when no one is looking." On the other hand there were four coaches that stated a more extrinsic view of character and stated it to be "who a person appears to be" or their reputation. Additionally, the coaches listed character traits

that they felt could be enhanced through sports. These were condensed using the predetermined model discussed in chapter two and the results are social interactions, discipline, mental toughness, and morals (see Table 5).

### **Coaches' Views on Character Development**

The following will address how the coaches view character development through sports. There is information scattered through all the questions that offer some insights. For example in the first question to the coaches, they listed character training as one of their job functions. Moreover, the coaches also listed the character of the players as a measure of their success as a coach. Lastly, the coaches did outline their role in and approach to character development through sports. A compilation of these results produces the following concepts toward the coaches' views on character development through sports: Role model, Make known what is expected, Activities, and Accept responsibility. More details can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10. *A compilation of coaches views on character development*

Role Model	Make Known Expectations	Activities	Accept responsibility
Demonstrate character	Communication	Fund raising	Part of their Job
Be there for them	Teaching	Community service	One Measure of success
Surrogate Parent	Help them	Manage public	
Defend your team	Learn from mistakes	appearances	
	Sit down meetings		

### **Coach Created Climate**

The next part of the ethnography is set to determine the climate of the team as set by the coach. There are two distinct, but related areas to this part of the study. First is the philosophy of the coach as related to being performance (ego) driven or mastery (task) driven (Nichols, 1989; Bortoli et al., 2012). According to Chandler and Goldberg (1990) an emphasis on winning could lead to antisocial behaviors in sports. Therefore, this is a pivotal part of the study. Starting with the coaches' written documents that the coaches give to the team, there is no verbiage, listed goal, or pressure to win games. Instead the items listed are those of character

development and positive reputation. Moreover, their focus when dealing with the athletes was on improving them as people, students, and players. The coaches were consistent with this philosophy when identifying how they measure their success. Moreover, while the coaches were all explicit about hating to lose, the idea of measuring success through wins was only a secondary thing under game performance.

There was a common concept of trying to teach the players to learn from losses and use them to improve. All of the coaches expressed that they are focused on the effort of the team and their ability to execute their respective game plan or process. Though the data was divided on this point as described in question 10, no coach set goals based on the number of wins. Instead all of the coaches described a certain focus on doing things to give their teams the best chance to win. Thus they were describing a mastery (task) orientation.

The second factor that contributes to the climate is the philosophy the coaches have towards punishing transgressions to team rules. All of the coaches communicate behavioral expectations. All of the coaches claim to punish accordingly regardless of talent. In question 14 to the coaches were asked if they were torn between punishing an athlete and winning. The idea of the question was to determine what they may be willing to do for the win. Eight of these coaches claim to have never compromised punishing a player in order to win, though two of these coaches also said that they rarely suspend players, but find other methods of punishment. The other five coaches all admitted that they had compromised the rules and allowed a player to play for the sake of a win. In all five of the cases, they stated that it was done earlier in their career and would not do it now. All five coaches spoke with regret, and stated that in the end their program suffered from the decision. One coach stated "I felt so ashamed." Three of the coaches stated that this struggle does exist and that it occurs about every season.

## **Phenomenology**

According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenology will describe the essence of a lived phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994) the goal of a phenomenology is “the understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation” (p. 14). The objective here was to make sense of Division II and III college varsity team sport athletes’ character development experience.

### **Defining Character**

The phenomenology was designed to gain the athletes perspective of the coaches and team climate. The first part of this was to get the athletes definition and view of character. When asked to define character the athletes produced the same three concepts as the coaches. Like the coaches the athletes’ the first theme was an intrinsic view of character which is labeled “Who a person is.” Moreover, the athletes also expressed an extrinsic view of character which is labeled “who a person appears to be.” Furthermore, when asked to produce character traits related to team sports participation, and also when asked character traits important to their coach, they had five themes. Those themes in both cases were: Social Interaction, Discipline, Mental Toughness, Morals, and Coachable (see Table 8).

### **Athletes’ Perceptions of Character Development**

The athletes’ view of character development through team sports did include the coach. The athletes considered character development to be a function of the coaches’ job by providing leadership, teaching behavioral expectations, and being a role model. Moreover, the athletes viewed the coach as the one who sets the expectations for the team and manages those expectations or disciplines the team accordingly. Since the coaches set clear expectations, discipline from the coach was an area that the athletes watch carefully. The athletes identified

numerous infractions in which the coaches enacted discipline. Only a few of them felt that the punishment was too harsh. In nearly all of the athletes' accounts of these situations, they felt that the coach was true to the rules and justified his or her actions. All the coaches felt that there was never a time they left something unpunished in recent time, and a majority of the athletes confirmed this statement. However, there were athletes that had accounts of punishable actions that were left unpunished or under punished, and had strong opinions about the lack of action.

***Positive character perceptions of the coach.*** The athletes can clearly define expectations from their coach, and they also have perceptions of the coach's actions. In fact, the athletes listed the coach as a role model in three of their answers including as a way the coach was an example of good character. The athletes also see their coaches as a parental figure, honest, committed to the team, and willing to help others. Moreover, nearly all of the athletes could give accounts of their coach showing good character, instructing athletes to show good character, or praising good character.

***Poor character perceptions of the coach.*** Many of the athletes stated that they could not think of any time that they saw their coach display poor character. However, while not a majority there were still a significant number of athletes that did reveal actions by their coaches that were less than exemplary. Among these athletes, the largest expressed action was the coach losing their temper and yelling. Additionally, though not highly reported, they indicated times of coaches showing a lack of responsibility, dishonesty, negative attitude, and making poor discipline decisions. Though, 76 of the 92 athletes claimed that their coach never instructed an athlete to perform an action considered to be poor character, 16 athletes were able to recall coaches instructing athletes to perform rule infractions or gamesmanship as well as offering praise for antisocial actions.



### **Athletes' perceived team climate**

*Winning philosophy.* Most of the athletes did express that winning is important to their respective coach. However, nearly all of the athletes perceived that their coach's focus is on hard work and execution. Additionally, the athletes perceived the same split in the data between those who felt effort is as winning and those with a certain winning mentality. The athletes believed that it took a combination of execution, discipline, mental toughness, talent, teamwork, and being coachable to win (see Table 9). Additionally, though there were exceptions, the athletes showed a stronger willingness to maintain character even when it may mean losing a match.

*Athletes' perception on discipline.* The players were also asked for their perceptions on the coaches' discipline practices. The athletes gave several examples of their coach punishing infractions. The athletes gave an account of several infractions that the coaches punished, which included things like poor attitude, missing practice, late for practice, disrespect, drinking, work ethic, and breaking social media policies. Some gave great detail or additional comments such as that the punishment was too harsh, not harsh enough, or correctly warranted. These perceptions from the athletes confirm that the coaches are willing to punish. Additionally, these sets of answers offer insights into the types of behaviors athletes recognize as unacceptable and show that they are looking at how coaches respond. The athletes' concern was with the coach being consistent and fair.

*Perceived Influences on Character Development.* The final area of this study was investigating the environmental and personal factors that Division II and III athletes perceive to influence their character development. The athletes perceived that their coach and peers collectively contributed to their own character. They stated that the coach set the atmosphere by

what he or she would discipline or allow. Teammates and especially team leaders would set expectations in what they would get away with or allow. The best example of this attitude were these statements made from these two players: “I believe that both my coach and teammates affect a player’s character because if a coach allows for bad character then the team will continue to act with bad behavior.” “I believe your coach and your teammates affect your character because they set a precedent and a standard on people within the locker room and on how the team will conduct themselves.” In both cases there were two types of athletes. The first is the majority, which would succumb to the character decisions of the coach and/or peers, and then the minority that would hold to their own values regardless of the coach’s or team’s actions.

One Final thought concerning the athletes. While most of the athletes answered questions in a manner that suggested that they liked their coach, there were some athletes from nearly every team, where the tone of their answers suggested that this was not the case. However, this is speculative and whether the tone of the answers were that of the athlete liking or not liking the coach, there were rare outlier answers present due to that fact.

## **Themes**

Coding units allows the researcher to group the lists of significant statements into larger clusters of information. This clustering of the significant statements results in the development of themes used for analysis. Based on the summary of the ethnography and phenomenology there are seven major themes developed through the bracketing and coding of the data collected.

**Theme 1: Character is deeply ingrained within a person.** The primary answers given in question four to the coaches that support this idea was “who a person is” and five of the coaches supported this theme by stating specifically that “character is who you are when no one is watching.” These coaches denoted an intrinsic view of character. There was a group that

spoke of character being something achieved by the way you are raised or brought up by your parents. This was noted because a few coaches brought it up, but those that answered this also had phrases or statements that would fall under the theme of character being intrinsic.

The athletes supported this theme as well. Several athletes suggested a deep seated intrinsic definition. They made statements like “character is what you do when no one is looking,” “character is who you are,” and “character is how a person acts at all times.” Like with the coaches the athletes with this view were in the majority. Sixty seven athletes gave statements that fit this theme. Moreover, there were athletes that spoke of character being something you were brought up with that also indicated that this was a deeply embedded set of values, thus supporting this theme. Interestingly, these athletes supported an intrinsic view of character, but also expressed the external actions as a measurement, denoting that there is an outward expression of the inward man.

**Theme 2: Character is as extrinsic reputation.** This extrinsic view of character was the other primary theme that came from the coaches defining character. There were four coaches that produced this theme directly and one more that spoke more about how character was developed or influenced that also made statements supporting this theme. These coaches spoke proudly about how their teams are perceived on campus and throughout the conference. They were adamant that their teams knew to represent themselves, the team, and the university well.

Sixteen of the athletes also expressed this outward view of character as reputation. Additionally, they gave answers throughout the study that they were to represent their team and university well. This group of athletes seemed to have a good understanding of the outward expression of oneself, but may or may not have had an understanding of deeply engrained

character. Many of them used phrases like, “represent the team well,” or responded at great length about how others see your actions.

**Theme 3: Character as social over moral.** Research (Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006, Rudd & Stoll, 2004) produced two themes concerning character development in sports. The first is what they called “social values,” which are concepts like teamwork, hard work, loyalty, and self-sacrifice, and the second is referred to as “moral values,” which are concepts like honesty, fairness, and integrity. The coaches and athletes in this study overwhelmingly listed “social values,” over “moral values.” This confirms that the findings from research (Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006, Rudd & Stoll, 2004) are applicable to this level of athletics. That is to say that while research (Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006, Rudd & Stoll, 2004) looked at coaches, parents, media, and Division IA athletes, this research has confirmed similar results from coaches and athletes of Division II and III varsity team sports.

It could be argued that all character is social in that honesty and fairness are virtues that come out when dealing with others, but it is understandable that research (Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006, Rudd & Stoll, 2004) would separate them into two categories. It is reasonable to call traits like honesty and integrity moral because of their internal nature, and call traits like hard work and teamwork social because of their external nature. That is to say that while both may have an extrinsic quality, the moral traits are those that are often deeply engrained in an individual, while the social traits can possibly be produced on the surface as necessary for the sake of reputation.

**Theme 4: Belief that character develops through sports.** The coaches listed character development as one of their job duties. They also stated that character development is a way they measure success. More importantly, the coaches felt that they had a role in character

development. The coaches listed four methods in which they had a role in character development: Being a role model, Teaching the athletes, Acting as a surrogate parent, and The way they manage the team. Moreover, the coaches delineated their approach to develop character in their athlete by adding to the above list, making known the expectations and providing opportunities for community service and other like activities.

The athletes offered their perspective on their coaches' role in character development. The athletes also saw character development as a function of the coach's job. Additionally, the athletes did see their coach as a facilitator and role model of behavioral expectations. In this way athletes learn behavioral norms by their experiences with their coach as it pertains to what he or she will establish and manage. Additionally, they will learn behaviors vicariously through the coach's praise, discipline, and interaction of teammates. Finally the players will watch the coach's for acceptable or unacceptable behaviors.

**Theme 5: Winning Mentality.** Though all the coaches held to a Mastery (task) orientation, there was a split in the findings concerning the philosophy of winning. This theme of "Winning Mentality" is one derivative of that split. Coaches with this winning mentality did not believe in moral victories. That is to say, that they felt that if their team played their best and lost, playing well was commendable, but they still lost. Moreover, these coaches felt that athletes would use playing their best against superior opponents as a psychological safety net and therefore not use losses to improve to that higher level. One coach put it this way:

You got to be willing to lay it on the line and be in that fragile spot of you know I played my best and still didn't win. Where a lot of our kids are less willing to find themselves in that circumstance and are more comfortable with the self

defense mechanism of I did my best instead of wow we might have been able to beat them if we played better.

According to these coaches, they were trying to teach that losing is always a measure to improve and not something to be comfortable with regardless of how well the team plays. In this way the coaches, felt the team needed to improve through training and recruiting. This group of coaches felt that teaching winning was an important part of teaching character.

There were a group of athletes that supported this theme as well. These athletes' responses revealed that they understood that any loss is not excused by effort or execution. Therefore, the only course of action was to improve through training. However, these athletes had a small split in their view. Though all the coaches had a mastery (task) orientation or "winning as experience" philosophy of coaching, a very small number of these athletes had a performance (ego) orientation or "winning as consequence" philosophy.

**Theme 6: Winning is giving your best.** The other theme related to winning is that of playing your best or giving one hundred percent. These coaches measured the success of their team completely by the combination of the effort the team put forth and the execution of their process. The coaches stated that if these elements existed during a game or match and the team did not win, they were still happy with the team. However, they also felt that it is then important to train harder or recruit to win the next time.

The idea of giving your best effort is as a win was the philosophy of a majority of the athletes. Some of these athletes expressed satisfaction from games where they knew that they had done their best and lost. These athletes focus was on achieving personal goals and striving to improve. In this way they measured their success by improvement as individuals and as a team. Moreover, they expressed the importance of training to improve and trying to win.

**Theme 7: Environmental Factors Affecting Character.** The coaches took responsibility for developing character in their athletes. Theme four outlines the details. However, the coaches also indicated that being part of a group was also a factor. The quote above from Coach B indicated that athletes need to give into group norms and that some players washed out of the program by their decisions and a little nudge. The discussion on this answer indicated that the nudge was from the teammates who were compliant expecting the same from their fellow team members. Several coaches and athletes spoke of the team holding each other accountable. In the case of the coaches they spoke of the mutual accountability between them and their athletes.

The athletes stated that their coach was responsible for their character. They felt that the coach sets the behavioral standards and enforces the adherence to those standards, therefore, upholding the character of his or her team. Moreover, he or she was expected to be a role model and provide the type of leadership to the team that would require of the team to uphold high standards. However, even with this attitude from the athletes, they also indicated that their peers and coach were equally responsible for their character development. This is because while they saw the coach as the administrator, they felt that the comradery of the team and the accountability to their teammates was also a factor. In this way, there was a certain acknowledgement by the athletes that they understood the impact that group norms and peer pressure can have on their own behaviors. For a list of codes that supported all seven themes see Table 11 below.

Table 11. *Open Codes Supporting the Themes*

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes	
Who you are when no one is watching	10	Character is deeply ingrained within a person	
Who a person is	16		
How you act all the time	56		
What people perceive you to be	6	Character is an extrinsic reputation	
Your reputation	15		
How one portrays themselves to others	7		
Represent the team well	44		
Social Values Listed	359	Character is social over moral	
Moral Values Listed	15		
Role Model	69	Belief that character develops through sports	
Teach character	44		
Make known expectations	93		
Character is a measure of success			
Function of the job	22		
Leadership	41		
Provide Discipline	68		
Coach is responsible	77		
Play like it means something	3		Winning Mentality
Did your best and still lost	11		
Winning is everything not at all cost	11		
Winning is why we play	2		
Winning is what matters	8		
Winning is giving 100%	13	Winning is giving your best	
Winning is executing the process	30		
Winning is doing our best	31		
Coach	95	Environmental Factors Affecting Character	
Peers	69		



## **Research Questions**

There were certain research questions set to guide the study. The purpose of these questions was to focus the research in a direction that could add to the current body of knowledge on the subject. The data as given by the participants was able to answer these questions and is as follows:

### **Research Question 1: How do Division II and III college coaches and athletes define, view, or experience character development through sports?**

The coaches and athletes in this study were split between those that would define character as intrinsic and those that defined it as extrinsic. Moreover, they listed more social traits than moral traits as defined by previous research (Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006). To address the remaining part of this question how do the coaches view character development through sports? The coaches feel they affect character by being a role model, teaching character, making known expectations, providing discipline and by providing opportunities through activities. Thus research question one can be summarized by saying that both the coaches and athletes had the same themes related to intrinsic and extrinsic views when defining character. The coaches and athletes agreed on many of the character traits enhanced through sports with the athletes adding answers making up one additional theme of "Coachable." Moreover, the coaches felt they could influence character, that he or she is a role model, and that the coach should set and manage the behavioral expectations.

**Research Question 2: What contributes to the climate that Division II and III college coaches produce in their coaching philosophy concerning reconciling winning and character development?** There are two distinct, but related areas to this part of the study. First is the orientation of the coach, which in this case is that these coaches are mastery (task) oriented

(Bortoli et al., 2012; Nichols, 1989). Thus, these coaches were focused on the players developing their talent and executing the process. While the coaches were all explicit about hating to lose, the idea of measuring success through wins was only a secondary thing under game performance. Moreover, their focus when dealing with the athletes was on improving them as people, students, and players. The coaches were consistent with these ideals when identifying how they measure their success, as these same three elements were present. All the coaches emphasized that their job is to make sure the athletes graduate. Lastly, there are little external and/or internal factors that affect the coach's priority or orientation toward winning.

Part of what contributes to the climate is the way the coaches consider or define winning. There were two themes that arose from the data. The first was that "winning is winning" and if you do not win there are no excuses; the team must assess the loss and work toward the necessary improvements. In this philosophy, the coaches were trying to instill a certain winning mentality in the athletes that could be a part of their character. One coach used this analogy:

I tell my kids if you go for a job interview and there are three people they're going to take the best person, it's that simple . . . if I'm interviewing for a job and I have three candidates then I'm going to pick the best one and the other two lose.

During this discussion the coach alluded to the fact that all the candidates may be good and have done their best, but as he stated only one is going to win the job. These coaches stated that they were trying to get their teams to get out of the mentality that if I played my best this is acceptable even if I lose, which interestingly is the other perspective from the coaches.

The idea that playing one's best is as winning was a philosophy that nine of these coaches believed. All of the coaches believed there is a process to follow to win. It included recruiting,

developing talent, teamwork, hard work, discipline, and mental toughness. These nine coaches indicated that they were satisfied with the result if all was done in these areas.

The coaches and athletes both expressed that it is the coach's responsibility to set and uphold behavioral expectations. For that reason the athlete's perceptions of this process is warranted. Eight of the coaches reported that they have never left a transgression unpunished, while five admitted that in the past they may have not punished an athlete when a win was on the line, but currently all infractions are punished. As reported above, 85 of the athletes gave examples of the coach punishing athletes and 35 of these along with 3 others also reported events that should have been punished. One thing worth noting when looking at the infractions is that only eight of the reported 38 would possibly have resulted in a player missing playing time. Therefore, only these eight indiscretions would affect the climate with an orientation toward "winning as consequence," and be associated with a coach forgiving a player to try to win. The other violations (talking back, poor work ethic, etc.) were generally more associated with physical punishment.

To summarize the answer to this question, the coaches' emphasis on mastering the process and then expecting a win identifies them as coaches with a mastery (task) orientation. While winning is important to these coaches, there was a split between the coaches that created the two themes "winning is winning," and "winning is playing at one's best," which are described at length above. All the coaches set behavioral standards and claim to punish accordingly without compromises. This also supports that the coaches are mastery (task) oriented.

**Research Question 3: How do Division II and III college athletes perceive the team climate concerning reconciling winning and character development?** There were two

distinct facts about the athletes' perceptions of their coaches' philosophy. First, the athletes did support a mastery (task) orientation. Similarly there were a majority of athletes that claimed that they would not sacrifice character for a win, though many did admit that this is a struggle to maintain at times during competition. A few athletes did admit that they had performed antisocial acts to win and some expressed remorse, while others admitted they would do it again.

The athletes perceived their coaches to be mastery (task) oriented, though there were a small number of athletes from two teams that perceived their coach to be performance (ego) oriented. The athletes were split on their view on winning between those that felt that playing their best was the same as winning verses those that felt winning was winning regardless of effort. Both sets of athletes believed learning from a loss was the next step. In many ways the athletes' perceptions of their teams was consistent with that of the coach. For example, though there were indications of coaches not punishing athletes, the athletes' answers seem to indicate support for the coach as the facilitators of team behaviors. Moreover, the athletes' answers support that the coaches do not place winning above behavioral expectations.

**Research Question 4: What environmental and personal factors do Division II and III athletes perceive to influence their character development?** There were two views on environmental factors influencing character. The athletes believed that both their coach and teammates were equally responsible for their character. The athletes perceived that their coach set behavioral expectations and then set the atmosphere by what he or she would discipline or allow. Teammates and especially team leaders would set expectations by their level of adherence. In both cases as mentioned there were two types of athletes. The first is the majority, which would succumb to the character decisions of the coach and/or peers, and then the minority that would hold to their own values regardless of the coaches' or team's influences or actions.

## Summary

The coaches and athletes produced the same two themes defining character. The first is an intrinsic view of character denoted by a deeply ingrained moral code, and the second is an extrinsic view of character denoted by reputation. Additionally, the athletes and coaches identified many of the same character traits associated with character development through sports. The coaches listed four major themes when listing character traits: Social Interaction, Discipline, Morals, and Mental toughness. The athletes added coachable to this same list. The coaches and athletes both described the coach as role models. The coaches felt they could teach character to the athletes. Moreover, both the coaches and athletes saw opportunity for character growth through the ways coaches manage the team. Each coach revealed methods where they are purposeful toward character development through sports. Subsequently, all the coaches make known what is accepted behavior. Lastly, the coaches try to use activities like community service or fund raising to help with character development.

When looking at the climate produced by coaches through their philosophy concerning winning and character development both the coaches and athletes acknowledged that winning is the goal of sports and purpose for playing the games. All of the coaches claim that winning is a result of executing the process, discipline, mental toughness, talent, and teamwork. The athletes identified these same elements, but added coachable to the list. Some felt winning and success was measured by the effort put out by the athletes. Others were trying to teach winning as part of developing character. No coach claimed to have, exhibited behavior that would suggest, or was described by the athletes as having a “win at all cost” mentality.

There are certain environmental and personal factors that the athletes perceive to influence their character development. First the athletes do recognize their respective coaches to

be a role model or mentor. Additionally, the athletes felt the coach could manage behaviors as the leader of the team. The coaches and athletes describe various traits that they felt playing sports can enhance. The athletes and some coaches felt that both their peers and coach could influence their character equally.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Overview

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into character development of the athlete participating in College Division II and III varsity team sports. This Chapter will provide the interpretations of the collected data. This will first be done by discussing the methodological findings based on relevant literature from chapter two. Secondly, theoretical and practical implications that were revealed will be addressed. Third, because all research is prone to certain limitations, the chapter will address any limitations of the study. Finally, future recommendations for research will be expressed before providing a total summary of the chapter and study.

### Discussion

#### Methodological findings

**Defining Character.** When defining character, the findings suggested the development of two main themes: The first reflected an intrinsic view of character, and the second theme reflected an extrinsic view of character. The intrinsic theme that the coaches and athletes expressed suggests character as an inward set of values that come out through ones actions. The second theme expressed by the other group of coaches and athletes refers to character more in terms of one's reputation and appeared to be more externally driven. Intrinsic and extrinsic values are two different things. For example, Character is defined in the dictionary as: The combination of qualities or traits that distinguishes an individual or group; A moral strength; Integrity (*American Heritage Dictionary, 2003*), which denotes a more internal value system. On the other hand, reputation is defined as: The general opinion or judgment of the public about

a person or thing (*American Heritage Dictionary, 2003*), which denotes a more external concern with public opinion.

According to Doty (2006) and Peláez (2011) before character development occurs in sports there has to be an intentional goal to build character from the coach. This leads me in this research to question the ramifications of defining character intrinsically verses extrinsically. Is it possible that those coaches that define character more intrinsically are also more concerned with the inner character development, and therefore according to research (Doty, 2006; Peláez, 2011) can have an effect on athlete's character? What is not evident is if the same effect occurs when the coaches' intent is to build the external reputation of the athletes and/or team. Therefore, if the coaches that identified character as reputation consider only outward perceptions and not character or inward growth, then it may affect whether their athletes character is being enhanced through their sport experience.

As stated in chapter two, studies defining character makes an effort to identify character traits related specifically to sports (Arnold, 1992; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Rudd (2005) studied character in sports, by seeking the character traits as defined by stakeholders such as developmental literature, secular media, coaches, and parents. Additionally, research (Rudd & Stoll, 2004; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006) defines character traits based on these social cultural sources. The findings from the research (Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006) indicate that these sources identify social values as teamwork, hard work, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. Other research (Arnold, 1992; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995), adds to the list with traits like respect, honesty, fairness, and responsibility as moral values.



In this study the coaches and athletes listed several character traits enhanced through sports. Many of these traits were repeated several times. Moreover, a majority of the traits listed would be classified as social values listed in prior research (Arnold, 1992; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Interestingly, the coaches and athletes listed far fewer traits than what research (Arnold, 1992; Rudd, 2005; Rudd & Mondello, 2006; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995) labels as moral values. Moreover, the traits labeled as moral values were repeated by less of the coaches and athletes than the connecting or listing of the socially labeled traits. This higher identification of the social character traits over the moral traits by both the coaches and athletes may explain why Rudd and Stoll (2004) concluded that sports may build social character, and is less likely to build moral character. This might explain why Bredemeier and Shields (2001) found that athletes possessed higher levels of social character than non-athletes, but also possessed much lower moral character scores than non-athletes.

**Coaches' and Athletes' View of Character Development.** All of these coaches had set up codes of conduct and consequences for breaking the rules or codes. This is one way the coaches seem to believe they affected the character of their athletes. This is important, because according to Dalton (2009) one way coaches can transmit morality is by setting the tone at the beginning of the season and making known what is expected (p. 203). These coaches set standards and punish transgressions to those standards. Furthermore, the findings suggest that athletes know that coaches punish transgressions and they are aware of how their teammates are punished.

This awareness of the standards for punishment is important, because according to Horn et al. (2012) coaches can achieve mastery (task) orientation with proper punishment practices. This has significant ramifications because research (Boardley, & Kavussanu, 2009; Gould &

Carson, 2008; Kavussanu, 2008; Miller et al., 2005) predicted prosocial behaviors when a mastery (task) orientation exists. Moreover, according to Boardley, Kavussanu, and Ring (2008) athletes perceiving the coach as effectively instilling an attitude of good moral character may lead to increase frequency in desirable behaviors (p. 283-284).

**Responsible.** The data from the coaches in this study were consistent with previous research (Dalton, 2009; Kay & Ward, 2010; Peláez, 2011; Romand & Pantaléon, 2007; Vella et al., 2011) where the coaches view themselves as responsible for character development of their athletes. For example the coaches listed character training as one of their job functions and also listed the character of the players as a measure of their success. Moreover, most of the athletes also listed character development as a function of the coach's job. Therefore, the findings of this study are that these coaches and athletes believe that sports do build character and the coach is a part of the process.

**Role Model.** According to research (Dalton, 2009; Nichols, et al., 2012; Omar-Fauzee, et al., 2012; Thompson, 1995, 2003), being a role model is a key function of coaching. Similarly, the athletes and coaches from this study found that being a role model was a function of the coach's job. Moreover, according to Omar-Frauzyee, et al., (2012) modeling conduct is a strategy for building character through sports. Subsequently, this study addressed the athletes' opinions on the modeled behaviors of the coaches.

The athletes had several opportunities to identify positive and negative actions by their coach. For example, these athletes identified numerous times when the coaches enacted proper discipline and also gave several accounts when the coaches praised good character.

Additionally, the athletes gave numerous responses of their coach displaying good character. There were less instances where the athletes identified times that coaches displayed poor

character or left poor behavior by the athletes unpunished. This is important, because according to Kenworthy (2010) even when coaches displayed more positive than negative behaviors, athletes' perception of their coach's negative behaviors predicted athlete negative orientation (p. 63). Kenworthy (2010) surmised that the negative orientation may be due to the negative actions having a greater impact on the athletes memory (p. 63). This research seems to dispute findings from Kenworthy (2010). These athletes' responses though not unanimous, overwhelmingly indicated that they had a positive orientation and also indicate that they had a more positive orientation toward their respective coaches.

**Team Climate.** The next part of the study is to reveal the climate of the team as set by the coach in their coaching philosophy. This is significant because according to Nichols (1989) there are two distinct, but related climates: The first is performance (ego) orientation and the second is mastery (task) orientation. Nichols (1989) claims that performance (ego) orientation are people preoccupied with demonstrating superiority over others, while mastery (task) are those concerned with performing one's best. The ramifications of this climate is important because according to Smith et al. (2009) coach initiated climate can play a role in the psychosocial development of young athletes (p. 179). Based on the parameters of Nichols (1989) the coaches in this study were mastery (task) oriented. This conclusion is based on two facts. First is that the coaches uphold behavioral standards. Secondly, the coaches were more concerned with perfecting their process and expecting to win as a result instead of coaching to "win at all cost." Once again this has important ramifications, because research (Boardley, & Kavussanu, 2009; Gould & Carson, 2008; Kavussanu, 2008; Miller et al., 2005) predicted prosocial behaviors when a mastery (task) orientation exists. These findings suggest a confirmation of this type of research.

***Winning Philosophy.*** Though these coaches were not contracted to win, they all did feel that they were being judged by wins, and felt there was some expectation for them to win. However, they felt equal pressure to retain athletes until graduation, meet behavioral standards, and assure that the athletes were having a positive experience. According to Chandler and Goldberg (1990) there are two distinct philosophies about winning in sports, “winning as consequence” (performance) and “winning as experience” (mastery). In this study the coaches’ philosophy on winning expressed a high level of importance to win, but their answers were associated with “winning as experience.” That is to say, that all of these coaches were more consistent with experts (DiCicco & Hacker, 2002; Dungy & Whitaker, 2007; Thompson, 2003; Wooden, 2003) whom all revealed that by mastering the process or game plan winning is expected. Moreover, this philosophy should then be associated with prosocial conduct (Boardley, & Kavussanu, 2009; Gould & Carson, 2008; Kavussanu, 2008; Miller et al., 2005). The athletes confirmed this attitude in their coaches and also confirmed the orientation toward prosocial conduct (Boardley, & Kavussanu, 2009; Gould & Carson, 2008; Kavussanu, 2008; Miller et al., 2005).

There are two themes that have developed from the findings. The first theme suggests our coaches support what we will call “a winning mentality”. This concurs with Dalton (2009) which found that coaches saw teaching athletes to have a winning mentality as an important life skill (p. 93-94). These coaches participating in our research stated that while teams playing their best are to be commended, it is not an acceptable excuse for losses. Moreover, the coaches producing this theme feel that losing and then saying “at least we played our best,” does not allow the athlete to come to terms with the fact that they were not good enough to win, process that information, and then truly strive to improve. There were some athletes that adopted this

view. Conversely, a larger group of the coaches and athletes felt that the team playing their best is an acceptable way of losing. One thing significant about this finding is the lack of related empirical study concerning this philosophy that can be used for comparison, thus the ramifications will be discussed further below in the implications.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this study was to view the concept of character development in college sports. The social cognitive (Bandura, 1986, 1991) and structural development theories (Gilligan, 1977; Haan, 1991; Kohlberg, 1977) provided the theoretical basis of the study. Thus we will want to weigh character development in sports when different theoretical models are considered together. Additionally, the findings of this study seek validity through empirical research. This section will discuss the study findings in relationship to the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

#### **Theoretical Implications**

**Structural Development.** Structural development theorist sees character development through a sequence of stages. This may be why the coaches concurred on the point of “character is influenced.” Moreover, these coaches believe that they can have such an influence. For example the athletes have given examples of being praised for good character choices and punished for detrimental ones. The coaches set behavioral parameters and use both their adherence to praise and indiscretions to punish the respective reasoned moral dilemmas.

The coaches set rules and expectations and punish accordingly. By creating a fear of punishment the coaches operate in stage one of structural development theory (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). These coaches expressed intent to give the athlete a good experience. They had the athletes’ happiness and wellbeing within their coaching philosophy. In this way the coaches

operated in stage two of the structural development theory by playing to the athletes' self-interest. One of the biggest concerns of these coaches was creating a team or family atmosphere. They believed in unity and holding each other accountable. Moreover, the coaches wanted the team to represent themselves well, conform to team standards, and give to and have a positive effect on society. These elements put the team in accordance with structural development theorists. For example, according to Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) stage three places an emphasis on conformity and consideration of how choices influence relationships, stage four focuses on maintaining law and order or following rules, and stage five claims moral development is that which is agreed upon by society. Each of the coaches were able to give multiple examples of athletes that grew into better individuals as a result of their coaching, thus revealing the existence of the final stage.

The athletes have a good understanding of the behavioral expectations and have strong opinions about their adherence to the rules as well as opinions about any times that they felt that coaches fell short on maintaining a rule. The athletes by their answers do operate in stage one of Kohlberg's model, but seemed to be more consistently in stages three, four and five. That is to say that while these athletes had a fear of punishment, they were far more interested in pleasing their coach or adhering to the social order of the team or society.

**Social Cognitive Theory.** According to Bandura (1989) the behavioral learning associated with the social cognitive theory is strengthened when the subject identifies with the model. This is relevant to this research since the coaches believe they can teach and model character development to their athletes because of their relationship with the players. Based on the findings in the data this may be true. These athletes and coaches both indicated that being a role model was a function of the coaches' job. Moreover, the athletes were able to give

extensive accounts of their respective coaches modeling behavior. Furthermore, the athletes were also able to learn both through their experiences as well as vicariously when moral dilemmas would arise. Since these are key elements of development using the social cognitive theory, there are adequate examples to claim that Bandura's social cognitive theory is a valid construct for moral reasoning in these participants. Moreover, based on the constructs of the social cognitive theory and findings in this study, it is reasonable to believe that these coaches can affect the character of their athletes. That is to say that since these coaches, teach, model, and punish or reward behavior, the setting exists for players to learn behaviors socially both through their experiences and vicariously. Additionally, since the athletes claim that both their coaches and peers affect their character, there is clear evidence of the Bandura (1989) constructs.

### **Practical Implications**

In chapter two we addressed various coaching practices concerning character development in sports such as defining character, coaches considering themselves as responsible for the character of their athletes, the coaches seeing themselves as role models, and determining the effects of the coach created climate on the team. Each of these subjects listed were addressed in this research.

**Character Defined.** These coaches and athletes denoted two themes concerning the definition of character, an intrinsic view of character verses an extrinsic view of character. There are three implications to this finding. First is that since the coaches and athletes produced the same themes it is possible to conclude that the coaches are affecting the athletes views on character development. Though this will need a correlation or grounded theory study to confirm, it is a reasonable assumption from these results. If this is true, then coaches and administrators

surrounding sports should be aware of this effect on the players and give an appropriate level of attention to character development in coaching practices.

Secondly, it could be that those that have an extrinsic view of character are concerned with perceptions and not character change. Research (Doty, 2006; Peláez, 2010) indicates character development has to be intentional for it to occur, but there is no evidence that those concerned with reputation or extrinsic perceptions has the same affect. Though this will need studied further to be proven, it could have great implications because if this is true it could cause further character issues in sports rather than character development. That is to say, that it could produce the response that it is more important to cover up indiscretions in order to appear good and avoid punishment, instead of applying consequences and managing behavior.

The third consideration is that there may not be different effects on the character of athletes between those that focus on character intrinsically verses those whose focus is extrinsically. In this case it could be that the two different views may not have different character development ramifications, but may only be that coaches are operating in different stages of the structural development model. These three things could be hypothesized in further study and statistically assessed. In any case, this study has clearly shown that coaches and athletes view character either as intrinsic deeply ingrained, or externally perceived actions.

**Views on Winning.** The second major finding in this study is the two views about winning within the mastery (task) philosophy. As discussed in chapter four all the coaches held to a Mastery (task) orientation, yet there was a split in the findings concerning the philosophy of winning. Some coaches and athletes described a certain winning mentality theme that considered only a win as a win, while there was a second group of coaches and athletes who considered the combination of effort and execution as a win. There are implications to consider



with these findings. First, there is no related empirical research to draw a comparison. In this way these findings offer a possible new relationship that should be explored through other research designs. That is to say, most findings at this point viewed winning in two ways, “winning as consequence” or “winning as experience” (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990). This research has revealed that there may be smaller subsets within those views. Secondly, because both the coaches and athletes produced this theme, it is reasonable to suggest that the coaches are influencing the athletes’ philosophy on winning. This conclusion can be supported by the fact that the coaches and athletes both have a mastery (task) orientation, and also because there are similarities in findings between the coaches and their players view on winning within this orientation.

**Environmental Factors.** The coaches took responsibility for developing character in their athletes. Theme four from chapter four outlines the details. However, the coaches also indicated that being part of a group was also a factor. The quote used above from Coach B indicated that athletes need to give into group norms, and that some players washed out of the program by their decisions and a little nudge. The discussion on this fact indicated that the nudge was from the teammates who were compliant to rules and were expecting the same from these teammates. Several coaches and athletes spoke of the team holding each other accountable. In the case of the coaches they spoke of the mutual accountability between them and their athletes.

The athletes stated that their coach was responsible for their character. They felt that the coach sets the behavioral standards and enforces the adherence to those standards, therefore, upholding the character of his or her team. However, even with this attitude from the athletes, they also indicated that their peers and coach were equally responsible for their character

development. This is because while they saw the coach as the administrator, they felt that the accountability to their teammates and the comradely with them was also a factor. The implications of these findings are that when considering character development through sports it may be important to account for both the coaches and peers of the athletes to get accurate results. Secondly, since there are coaches and athletes that only identified the coaches for influencing character, and others identified both the coaches and peers, it may be that one group sees the process only as authoritative, while the other as mutually social.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

When considering the findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study, there are certain recommendations and directions for future research. This study has reported some interesting findings, but there are some limitations to consider. The first limitation is that we examined qualitatively the nature of the relationships and thus we cannot make firm conclusions regarding causality. Researchers should use longitudinal or experimental designs in future studies to test causalities.

A second limitation involves the gathering of data. Though every measure was taken to get reliable data, still both the coaches and athletes were self-reporting. Observations and checks were in place to confirm results, but still much of the interpretations are based on what the participants stated. Moreover, much of the data was from pilot questions and therefore, should be validated through further study. Next, I used only 13 teams from one region. Therefore, I strongly recommend that future research replicates the present findings with a larger sample size and/or in different areas. Furthermore, I sampled participants from various teams and have to confess the possible clustering of responses. I can only speculate that similar answers and ratios to those answers have causalities. A case study of one coach and his or her athletes could give a

more narrow view, or perhaps a longitudinal study grouping coaches with the same definitions of character and philosophy on winning.

This study examined methods that coaches used to develop character in their players. The sample covered coaches from various sports and the findings may be generalized, with caution, to situations in coaching. It is important to note that the purposefully selected sample of 13 Division II and III college coaches limits the possibility of making broad generalizations for all sports and levels of competition. It may then be necessary to incorporate a broader range of sampling to determine if the findings can be generalized or are specific to this level of competition. Moreover, this study used athletes and coaches of both genders, therefore, similar research needs to be done that are gender specific, to determine if the same strategies are perceived across gender. In this way identifying potential differences in gender and context is an important future step.

These implications lead to additional ideas that should be studied further. First is determining if coaches are interested in character development or reputation. Secondly, what affect if any does coaches with each of these focuses have on character development through sports? Additionally, are both of these scenarios capable of developing character through sports, but only are operating in different stages of the structural development theorist model? Moreover, is it necessary to study the effects on character in light of an authoritative view of the coach verses a social view of the coaches and peers together?

### **Summary**

The data produce notable findings related to the ethnography of the coaches and the subsequent phenomenology. One of the findings in the study is that both the athletes and coaches were split between coaches and athletes who defined character as “who a person is at

their core” verses “who a person appears to be” or their reputation. To my knowledge there is no related empirical research. Therefore, these findings have three implications that can add to the body of knowledge. The first is that this common view may indicate that there is a possibility that the coaches are influencing the athletes’ views on character. That is to say that it is conceivable that the coaches identifying character as intrinsic created the same view in their athletes, and likewise those coaches identifying character as reputation influenced the athletes to that end. Secondly, the split between the opinions of character being intrinsic verses extrinsic could create a difference in character development through sports. For example, the coaches and athletes understood that opinions and judgments are formed by those witnessing their actions, thus the group that identified character as reputation may only have been extrinsically motivated to behave in an acceptable manner. Conversely, the other group identified character intrinsically, and therefore it is reasonable to suggest that they are more concerned with being good and not just appearing good.

Additionally, findings indicate that these coaches and athletes believe that athletes’ character could be changed from their adherence to rules and accountability to the team. This offers plausibility that those who define character as reputation could be operating in stages two, three and four, so they are only looking for extrinsic acknowledgement and acceptance, while those who define character as from within, may have progressed to stages five and six, and are looking to be a better person.

Literature deems it necessary for coaches to have as intent to build character in athletes for sports to have such an effect (Doty, 2006; Peláez, 2011). The findings of this study indicate that the coaches do have an approach to building character. This claim is made cautiously, but the coaches were asked directly for their approach to building character. Moreover, the coaches

admitted that character training was a function of their job duties and also listed the character of their players as a measurement of their success. As noted in the discussions, the athletes had similar views about the coaches' role in character development. These similarities could suggest two things. First is that the coaches speak to their athletes about having good character and making good decisions often enough that the athletes are aware of the degree of importance it holds with their coaches. Secondly, that the similarities of the athletes views to that of their coaches suggests that coaches may be influencing the athletes' character.

The next most pertinent finding is the coaches' orientation on winning. These coaches' answers were consistent with having a mastery/task orientation or what Chandler and Goldberg (1990) referred to as "winning as experience." This was important since the coaches' orientation on winning effects coaching practices. The athletes by their answers confirmed this orientation in their coaches. Additionally, the athletes, though not unanimous, overwhelmingly had a master/task orientation as well. Once again this allows for us too cautiously suggest that the coaches are influencing the athletes' orientation.

The coaches found winning to be important, and there were two views that developed from this premise. The first was that winning is the key measure of things, and a part of the development of the athletes. This is consistent with research from Dalton (2009). These findings therefore, will support the findings of Dalton (2009) that coaches believe teaching winning is a part of teaching character. The second view these coaches produced about winning is that athletes performing at their best, and giving their best effort is considered acceptable in losing to a better team. This may be the same as considering this type of effort to be a moral victory in a loss. While both views consider it important to learn from a loss, there are the implications of these philosophical views. This difference seems to have affected the athletes.

Though this opinion is made with caution because there were no direct comparisons of athletes to their coach, there are still athletes that represent both philosophies about winning, and therefore, it can be hypothesized that this similarity is due to the athletes having similar perceptions as their coach.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

I will use this interview for my dissertation research that focuses on how coaches keep winning important while teaching Character. I look forward to hearing about your experiences as a coach. My study is not designed to evaluate your specific techniques or experiences. Instead, I am trying to learn more about coaching practices that may help understand and improve overall coaching education. I want to thank you for taking the time to talk with me about your coaching philosophy and practices.

Please sign the attached consent form (human subjects review requirement). Your name, your schools name will not be used to ensure confidentiality. However, I do request permission to record conversations to ensure accuracy.

1. What would you say is your primary function as the coach of these young men/women?
2. How do you measure your success as a coach?
3. How do you think others measure your success as a coach?
4. What is your definition of character?
5. What are key character traits that you feel sports can build in athletes?
6. What role do you feel that you play in their character development?
7. Who was your biggest influence in the sport and why?
8. What is your opinion of the competition in your league?
9. What is your opinion of the officiating in your league?
10. What does winning mean to you as a coach?
11. Describe for me what it takes to produce a winning team.
12. Describe your approach to teaching character development.

13. Describe a time when something happened where you saw a positive change in an athlete as a result of your coaching? What do you believe you did that resulted in this change?
14. Have you ever had an experience where you were torn between winning the game and teaching character development? How did you deal with this situation?
15. Give me examples of particular issues that you have experienced in coaching that we have not already discussed that you feel are important to my study.

### Appendix B: Athlete Consent

We are asking if you are willing to participate in this study because we are trying to learn about college athlete's experiences in sport with their coaches. We are interested in your thoughts and opinions about how your coaches might teach you about character development. We hope to gain a better understanding of how coaches might build character to help us know how to create positive sport experiences for college athletes.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to fill out a questionnaire. You will answer questions about your coach's behavior. The survey should take about 30 minutes to complete. It is completely anonymous. If you change your mind during the study and do not want to continue, you can stop at any time. Being in this study is totally up to you. You can ask any questions that you may have about this study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can ask me next time.

Signing here means that you have read this paper and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in this study, don't sign.

Signature of Participant / Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C: Questionnaires

**Instructions:** As you probably know, coaches differ in how they value character development and in how they teach their athletes to show good character. The following items have to do with what your coach says or does to teach you about character development. **Good character** includes things like justice, fortitude, positive attitude, Hard Work, love, integrity, gratitude, humility, respect for team mates, loyalty, sportsmanship, respect for officials, self-control, discipline, coping with success, honesty, coping with failure, maturity, respect for the opposition, responsibility and commitment. **Poor character development** includes disrespecting the rules, officials, and opponents; criticizing others; and losing self-control.

1. Describe what you believe is the primary job functions required by your coach.
2. Give examples of how your coach sets an expectation for athletes to represent your team.
3. Define character and include character traits that you feel make up one's character.
4. What are key character traits that you feel sports can build in athletes and why?
5. Describe ways that your coach is an example of a man/woman of good character.
6. Describe what you believe your coach identifies as good character traits.
7. Give examples of a time when your coach punished athletes who display poor character and a time when he/she should have but didn't.
8. Describe a time when your coach was an example of poor character and what were the circumstances?
9. Describe a time if it exists when your coach instructed athletes to show poor character.  
Examples: cheat, hurt someone or intimidate an opponent.
10. Describe a time that your coach instructed athletes how to show good character.
11. Give examples of a time your coach praised athletes for showing good character.

12. What does winning mean to your coach or what is his or her philosophy about winning?
13. Describe for me what it takes to produce a winning team.
14. Have you ever had an experience where you were torn between winning the game and displaying poor character? How did you deal with this situation?
15. Give me examples of particular issues that you have experienced in athletics that we have not already discussed that you feel are important to my study.

Verbal question

Do you think your coach, teammates or both have an effect on your character and why or why not.

## Appendix D: Field Note Template

<p>Type of observation:</p> <p>Date of observation:</p> <p>Unedited Notes:</p>	<p>Contextual Comments:</p>
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### Appendix E: Coach's Consent

We are asking if you are willing to participate in this study because we are trying to learn about college athlete's experiences in sport with their coaches. We are interested in your thoughts and opinions about you as coaches might teach character development. We hope to gain a better understanding of how coaches might build character to help us know how to create positive sport experiences for college athletes.

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to agree to an interview with the researcher, allow at least on practice and match to be observed, and allow access to your athletes before or after practice for them to voluntarily fill out a related questionnaire. The interview should take about 30 minutes to complete. It is completely anonymous. If you change your mind during the study and do not want to continue, you can stop at any time. Being in this study is totally up to you. You can ask any questions that you may have about this study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can ask me next time.

Signing here means that you have read this paper and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in this study, don't sign.

Signature of Participant / Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: IRB Approval

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 28, 2014

Ronald Lupori

IRB Approval 1885.072814: Winning with Morals: A Qualitative Study of the Impact That College Coaches Have on the Moral Development of Their Athletes

Dear Ronald,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
*Professor, IRB Chair*  
**Counseling**

(434) 592-4054

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