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You Signed the Line: Collegiate Student-Athletes' Perceptions of Autonomy

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Aimee C. Kimball

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents for always giving me the power to make my own choices and for encouraging me to follow my own goals.

I also dedicate my dissertation to my brother and sisters, thank you for always pushing me to be my best. The greatest satisfaction I could ever ask for is forcing you to call me “Doctor.”

And to my niece, I hope that you always strive for your own dreams, and I’ll always be here to support you and to encourage you in whatever you aspire to become.

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Abstract

This study had three goals: First, to assess student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy within the structure of collegiate sport. Second, to gain an understanding of student-athletes' perceptions of power and how these perceptions affect student-athletes' autonomy. Third, to understand the ways in which student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy are important to the field of sport psychology was explored.

Working from within the constructivist paradigm (Hatch, 2002), a semi-structured interview approach was used to investigate the perceptions of autonomy of collegiate student-athletes. As described by Kvale (1996), data were gathered through semi-structured conversations with the co-researchers surrounding the theme of their perceptions of autonomy in their lives as collegiate student-athletes. Twelve co-researchers from four different sports at a Division I university were involved in this study (football=3, women's basketball=2, men's golf=4, women's track=3). The student-athletes also represented each academic grade level (first-year=3, sophomore=2, junior=2, senior=5) to assess perceptions of autonomy during each of these years. Although an attempt was made to include a diversity of racial backgrounds in this study, due to lack of race representation in different sports, this study was limited to Caucasian (7) and African-American (5) student-athletes.

After analyzing the data using the interpretative analysis model described by Hatch (2002), three themes were identified. They were: 1) personal autonomy, 2) lack of autonomy, and 3) relational autonomy. Each of these major themes was comprised of several sub-themes that provided a greater understanding of how autonomy was

experienced by the student-athletes in this study. Three minor themes- Effects of Autonomy, Model of Desired Autonomy, and Power- also are presented.

Overall, student-athletes' lives were not completely autonomous, yet they did not fully lack autonomy either. Within the confines of the collegiate sport environment, there were many limitations on student-athletes' abilities to be autonomous individuals. Seemingly, most of their decisions were based on commitment, mostly being committed to teammates and to the "requirements" of being a collegiate student-athlete. Possibly, then, the heart of student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy lies in their relationships with others. Perhaps because they have a strong sense of commitment, they create a self-concept based on this commitment that then becomes a constant factor in their decision-making process. Finally, it appears that student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy are dynamic and fluctuate depending on the context and their ability to reframe and integrate these experiences into their sense of self. Hence, perceptions of autonomy seem to exist on a continuum from completely lacking autonomy to having ultimate choice. In light of these results, recommendations for working with student-athletes and suggestions for future research are also provided.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Title

“You signed the line, that’s your commitment, that’s your responsibility....”

Once they “sign the line” and commit to participating in collegiate sport, student-athletes’ perceptions of autonomy begin to change. Their perceptions change because they must choose to accept a new identity as a collegiate student-athlete. With this new identity comes a new lifestyle, a lifestyle of commitment and compromise. This choice to “sign the line” is one of great significance because it begins a new journey for individuals to develop a sense of who they are while balancing their own desires with the obligations imposed by the structure of collegiate sport. Hence, “signing the line” is the first of the many choices made that will influence student-athletes’ perceptions of autonomy.

Purpose of the Study

This study had three main goals. The first was to assess student-athletes’ perceptions of autonomy within the structure of collegiate sport. The second was to gain an understanding of student-athletes’ perceptions of power and how these perceptions affect student-athletes’ autonomy. Third, to develop an understanding of the ways in which student-athletes’ perceptions of autonomy are important to the field of sport psychology was explored.

Statement of the Problem

To date, sport psychology researchers have not provided an in-depth description of collegiate student-athletes’ perceptions of autonomy. An examination of student-athletes’ perceptions of autonomy seems warranted because a strong sense of personal

autonomy has been shown to have positive benefits to individuals' health, satisfaction, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Kerr & Goss, 1997). Conversely, a lack of autonomy may create pressure and anxiety, which may have negative affects on athletes' performance and possibly lead to their disengagement from sport altogether (Frederick & Ryan, 1995; Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002). In addition, when athletes reside in an environment that hinders rather than enhances their development as autonomous individuals, their ability to successfully withdraw from sport for whatever reason may be challenged (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Harris, 1993; Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989).

Review of Literature

Autonomy

This study examined student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy, with a specific focus on their sense of personal control and choice. "*Autonomy* refers to being the perceived origin or source of one's own behavior" (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 8). Autonomous individuals engage in behaviors and activities that are interesting to them or that they inherently value. "Autonomous action is action that reflects who someone is" as identified by her desires, commitments, and values (Friedman, 2003, p. 10). By engaging in autonomous activities, individuals are able to express themselves and believe that the resulting behaviors and activities represent who they are. Even if external forces influence their behavior, autonomous individuals believe they are engaging in the behavior because they want to and because it is important to them. Autonomy is not the same as independence, as people can still believe they are autonomous when others have requested the behavior of them, provided that the individual is not engaging in the

behavior due to compliance, coercion, or conformity but because they believe it is important (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Friedman, 2003). Moreover, individuals can still be autonomous when engaged in activities with others, and even groups as a whole can share autonomy (Friedman, 2003). Deci and Ryan (2002) contend that the need for autonomy, as well as the needs for competence and relatedness, are the foundation for people's behavior. When an environment provides opportunities for people to fulfill these needs, people will experience feelings of self-determination, which will bring with it happiness, satisfaction, and general well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2002) claim that autonomy is the key to integrating behaviors into one's sense of self and is necessary to experience self-determination. They assert that people have an innate need to be in control of their choices and to have the choices they make determine their behaviors. Such self-determined behavior is an integral part of people's well-being and satisfaction with life. Moreover, the key to self-determined behavior is the individuals' choice of the behavior due to intrinsic motivation, not because of the feeling of internal or external pressure or obligation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Friedman, 2003; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). People are self-determining only when they choose to have control, choose a specific outcome, and choose to make certain decisions, not when they are pressured to do so (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, self-determination is essentially "freedom from control" (Deci & Ryan, 1985, p. 30).

The choices made by self-determined individuals result from their ability to assess the environment, their needs in that context and, in some situations, to choose to give up control to others. A sense of autonomy, while an internal quality, may be influenced by external factors. The environment in which people reside may either support an

individual's capacity for autonomy or diminish this capacity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). "An account of autonomy should incorporate a recognition of the impact of social injustice and oppression on autonomy, and to do this it must take particular notice of social conditions that suppress people's options for living in ways that accord with what deeply matters to them" (Friedman, 2003, p. 18). Therefore, issues of power must also be examined when looking at perceptions of autonomy.

Another type of autonomy that has gained popularity in recent years is "relational autonomy." According to John Christman (2004) relational autonomy refers to "what it means to be a free, self-governing agent who is also socially constituted and who possibly defines her basic value commitments in terms of interpersonal relations and mutual dependencies." (p. 143). This notion of autonomy acknowledges the fact that people's self-concepts have a social component and are often influenced by power dynamics. Therefore, it is important to examine people's *perceptions* of autonomy since these perceptions are influenced not only by societal forces, but also by relationships with others.

Autonomy in Collegiate and Elite Sport

The majority of people engage in sport for intrinsic reasons, enjoyment, challenge, and interest (Frederick & Ryan, 1995). As the level of individuals' participation in sport increases, so does the likelihood that other factors will undermine their intrinsic motivation to participate (Liukkonene, Laakso, & Telama, 1996). Factors such as the pressure to win, expectations for success, rewards based on performance, and increases in ego-orientation all challenge athletes' perceptions of personal control (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Although most people initiate involvement in sport for intrinsic reasons,

even sport as leisure has some characteristics that may be externally motivating, such as physical appearance or professional networking (Alexandris, Tsorbatzoudis, & Grouios, 2002). Long-term participants in sport and physical activity are most likely to integrate extrinsic rewards into their own belief system and come to value these benefits as being important in and of themselves. Collegiate athletes become personally invested in obtaining results such as fitness, skill, and recognition from their sport participation (Alexandris et al., 2002). Therefore, it becomes important to understand the conditions in which athletes' fulfill their need for autonomy and how they integrate external controls into their own value system so that they perceive themselves as having autonomy in the competitive sport environment.

The Structure of Collegiate Sport

The autonomy individuals perceive they have in a given situation is influenced by various social factors (Vallerand, 1997). These factors include the rewards that come with sport success, coach support, the achievement orientation of the athletes, and organizational loyalty (Amorose & Horn, 2000; Duda & Hall, 2000; Frederick & Ryan, 1995; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2003; Vallerand & Losier, 1999). In the case of Division I collegiate athletes, their autonomy and self-determination are under constant assault by external factors (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). Most significant are the structure of Division I collegiate sport and the social relations of the larger society that shape the expectations, demands, and perceptions of others. For example, since Division I collegiate sport has been so commercialized, participation becomes more of an occupation as the pressure to win increases. This pressure adds more stress and higher expectations to the lives of collegiate athletes (Adler

& Adler, 1985). This pressure causes some athletes to believe that they are controlled by their sport and have little autonomy in the choices they make on a daily basis, leading to feelings of entrapment, and even athletic burnout (Raedeke, 1997).

To say that collegiate student-athletes' sport participation is either autonomous or not would be to ignore the fact that perceptions of autonomy are dynamic and may fluctuate over time and circumstances depending on a number of contextual factors. Contextual factors include athletic scholarships, the athletic environment, and organizational loyalty. These factors are discussed briefly in the next section to highlight their connection with perceptions of autonomy.

Athletic Scholarships

Within sport, many opportunities occur for athletes to exert choice and control (Weiss & Chaumeton, 1992). Since sport occurs in an environment of rewards and feedback, individuals may perceive rewards and feedback as either controlling or informational. In turn, these perceptions may either undermine or contribute to athletes' sense of personal control or competence, and ultimately increase or decrease their sense of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Weiss & Chaumeton, 1992). Amorose and Horn (2000) found that, compared to non-scholarship athletes, collegiate athletes who were on full scholarship scored significantly lower on the tension-pressure subscale of the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory and significantly higher on perceived competence. Collegiate athletes who viewed the scholarship as controlling tended to view their motives for participation as more extrinsic and also enjoyed their participation less (Ryan, 1977, 1980). Interestingly, the revenue producing sport of football had the highest percentage of athletes who saw their scholarship as controlling, while female athletes and

non-revenue athletes viewed their scholarships as signifying a standard of competence. Note that these studies were conducted prior to the enactment of Title IX legislation (Ryan, 1977, 1980). The impact of scholarships on student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy may vary depending on the type of scholarship, gender, and perceptions of the scholarship (Amorose & Horn, 2000, 2001). Thus, how athletes perceive their scholarship (i.e., as a signal of their competence or as controlling of their behavior) becomes another important factor that influences individual perceptions of autonomy (Amorose & Horn, 2000, 2001; Ryan, 1980).

The Athletic Environment

An important sociological factor influencing the autonomy of collegiate athletes is the environment in which the sport is performed. When individuals reside in an autonomy-supportive environment, they are less likely to believe that others are manipulating their behaviors and are more likely to take responsibility for their actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Standage et al., 2003). In one study investigating elite athletes' perceptions of and reactions to the behaviors of their judo coaches, d'Arripe-Longueville, Fournier, and Dubois (1998) found that within an environment where coaches allowed their athletes little control over their lives and created a structure that was restrictive, athletes were still able to achieve a sense of self-determination. These athletes did so by finding ways to engage in autonomous behaviors within the confining environment. They accepted the control others had over them, but found "loop holes" in the system where they could be themselves, make choices, and feel in control over some aspects of their competitive lives. For example, one athlete noted, "Anyway, they've got the power, you've got to adapt, to comply with the coach, in the end to be diplomatic. Sometimes,

you're sick of it, it's hard, but you let them talk, and you do your stuff on the side" (p. 325).

Apparently, engaging in autonomous behaviors is easier and more accepted when athletes have proven their competence or are in a place where they are able to bypass conventional rules (d'Arripe-Longueville, et al., 1998). For example, one athlete acknowledged that once someone becomes an Olympic Champion, has proven to be competent, and has succumbed to the coach's control for years, then (s)he may then exert control. When an athlete has just begun or has yet to win a major championship, (s)he is obligated to abide by the structure of the sport and follow the norms set by the group. In other words, the coaches seem to allow more autonomy for athletes who have proven themselves as serious medal contenders. This notion that better athletes may experience greater autonomy was suggested previously by Frederick and Ryan (1995) who contended that athletes who had little competence in their sport may actually receive less support for engaging in autonomous behaviors than those who display high competence, reinforcing the feeling of external control as opposed to personal autonomy.

D'Arripe-Longueville and colleagues (1998) also noted that judo athletes did as they were told while "covertly redefining these tasks" so as to fulfill their own need for autonomy (p. 325). Such diplomatic strategies "permitted athletes to avoid conflict that could negatively affect their well-being and also allowed each a sense of autonomy while maintaining the teacher-student hierarchy within the sport" (p. 325). These same behaviors may also occur with collegiate student-athletes, since the structure of the French judo system and American Division I collegiate sports are similar. In both systems, athletes are often expected to follow the rules of the coach, work within the

system, and not exert their own control, at least until they've proven themselves as an accomplished performer.

Organizational Loyalty

In a study examining intense loyalty in collegiate sport, Adler and Adler (1988) found that many athletes did indeed feel controlled and powerless. Athletes noted how their coaches controlled their schedules and their social lives, and they also felt their coaches knew too much about their life outside of their sport. The players felt the control of the coach should be limited; however, they still accepted the authority of the coach. Adler and Adler (1988) noted that when the coaches tried to take control of areas the athletes did not find appropriate, the athletes' loyalty to the coach decreased. The coaches also used their power to encourage athletes to identify with the goals of the team so that the athletes would internalize, and thus believe, their actions were important to them. This internalization of goals then led to increased athlete loyalty to the team and coach and a greater likelihood of acceptance of the coaches' authority.

Part of the explanation the authors gave for the athletes' submission to the coaches' power was athletes' extreme commitment to the team. As one athlete stated when talking about signing his letter of intent, "When you sign it's almost like you're taking an oath that you're gonna follow this man, do what he tell you for four years, play on his team. It feels like signing your life away" (Adler & Adler, 1988, pp. 409-410).

Summary

The research on autonomy in the collegiate sport environment suggests that the behaviors of coaches, the perception of rewards garnered through sport participation, loyalty to the team, and other social and psychological factors may enhance or undermine

student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy (Adler & Adler, 1988; Amorose & Horn, 2000, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002; D'Arripe-Longueville et al., 1998). How autonomy is experienced by collegiate athletes, particularly what they feel constrains their ability to choose behaviors for themselves and to be autonomous, is less clear. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to achieve a better understanding of how collegiate student-athletes experience autonomy. More specifically, how and in what ways student-athletes view their overall sport participation to be autonomous was examined. A better understanding of how student-athletes are able to make sense of and integrate their non-self-determined activities and experiences into their overall view of and experience with collegiate sport may provide important insight into the life of collegiate athletes.

Power in Sport and Society

It is difficult to discuss autonomy in sport without addressing the relationships of power that exist in society, since the structure of sport and society influences the autonomy of student-athletes. Athletes do not live in a bubble void of social influence, so researchers need to take into consideration the environment in which athletes compete and the social context under which athletes are expected to exist (Dewar & Horn, 1992). Therefore, even though much of the focus in sport psychology research is on performance, we must still look at the big picture to truly understand how the power dynamics of the larger society may impact this performance.

Until recently (Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003), the concept of "power" in the sport psychology literature has essentially been considered a characteristic or trait that an individual possesses and uses to influence others (Coppel, 1995; Murray & Mann, 1998). This literature has mostly discussed power as leadership (Murray & Mann, 1998).

Whereas the root of leadership is influence, the crux of power is control (Vealey, in preparation). Vealey (in preparation) contends that empowerment is the key to leadership. Basically, empowerment occurs when leaders instill in their followers a belief in themselves and a sense of responsibility and control. Perceived control is a necessary factor for individuals to be empowered, especially when examining empowerment at the personal level (Rappaport, 1985). Vealey (in preparation) notes that, compared to disempowered athletes, empowered athletes have a more enjoyable sport experience, develop self-leadership, and have greater motivation to learn new skills and to perform.

The concept of power encompasses much more when we look at it from a broader lens than has been used in traditional sport psychology literature. While power is ultimately the ability to influence others, sport sociologists and cultural studies theorists have taken this concept much further and discussed the structural foundations of and constraints on power. When defining power, one must examine power not only at the individual level, but also at the cultural level. Researchers must take into account societal forces at work that influence, when, where, how, to whom, and more importantly, why power is distributed the way it is. “Power” as it stands is embedded in our society by informing our values and dictating who is the dominant social group (Burstyn, 1999; Sage, 1998). Hence, researchers must take into account the fact that sport exists within a highly politicized and highly structured environment, a structure that most likely influences the experiences of student-athletes (Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003).

Power and Athletes

Sport is an arena where hegemonic power is both fortified and challenged and where the power of society’s dominant groups cannot be denied (Sage, 1998).

Hegemonic power relies on the perpetuation of ideals that society deems important (e.g., meritocracy, masculine traits, heterosexuality), ideals that have been made to be important by the people in power who often represent these “common sense” characteristics (Gruneau, 1999; Sage, 1998). There are many social inequities that influence the lives of athletes (i.e., Sables, 1998, Sage, 1998, Coakley, 2001). Within the collegiate setting alone, contextual factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic class, and sexual orientation may affect how people perceive their environment and may influence the amount of autonomy individuals are able to experience (i.e., Anshel, 1990; Anshel & Sables, 1990; Frederick-Recascino, 2002; Nation & LeUnes, 1983). As Coakley (2001) notes, “the continued lack of power among amateur athletes is especially evident in U.S. intercollegiate sports” (p. 344). Sport is structured hierarchically so that athletes are expected to be subordinate to their coaches (Adler & Adler, 1988). Due to this imbalance of power, student-athletes’ attempts to exert their autonomy are often thwarted by their coaches who want complete control (Adler & Adler, 1988).

When examining how issues of power might impact athletes’ autonomy, researchers must take into account the interaction of societal forces as well as the reality that many of these forces work unbeknownst to athletes. While it may appear that these societal forces are not consciously known, they are often felt and experienced in different forms. Most athletes understand athletic departments are using them for their own economic gain (Adler & Adler, 1985; Raedeke, 1997). Athletes understand that their participation in collegiate sport takes away a great deal of their choice over how they spend their time, but also gives them status on campus and perhaps in other social environments (Coppel, 1995; Kimball, 2001). Athletes may recognize they are deemed to

be important based on how they perform. Minority athletes also recognize when their sole purpose for being in college is to participate in their sport rather than to get an education (Kimball, 2001). Female athletes may recognize discrimination and stereotyping (Bartky, 1992; Fisher, 1997; Kimball, 2001; Krane, 2001; Veri, 1999). On some level, athletes may understand that societal forces influence their own power yet feel powerless to change what it means to be a student-athlete and increase their level of autonomy. Empowering athletes by discussing the very issue of power with them may increase their sense of autonomy and may help to alleviate some of the problems associated with the power relations that exist in collegiate sport.

Implications for Sport Psychology

How student-athletes perceive their own autonomy may have strong implications for sport psychology practitioners. As noted, perceptions of oneself as an autonomous individual have been linked to happiness, satisfaction, and general well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Kerr & Goss, 1997). Lack of autonomy may create pressure and anxiety, which may have negative affects on athletes' performance and possibly lead to their disengagement from sport altogether (Frederick & Ryan, 1995; Sarrazin et al., 2002). Fear of success has also been associated with people who have not developed an autonomous self-identity or who fear engaging in autonomous behaviors or asserting themselves (Cohen, 1975; Krueger, 1991, 1988; Meades, 1993). Some individuals who have problems developing their autonomy may try to gain control over their lives in any way they can, as evidenced by people with anorexia or bulimia who use food as a way to exert autonomy or to gain power and control (Erichsen, 1985; Meades, 1993). Hence, the development of an autonomous self-identity is a key aspect for researchers to examine

due to the negative affects the lack or fear of autonomy may have on individuals.

Psychological Mediators

When looking at the collegiate sport environment, it is easy to see how student-athletes might view themselves as having little autonomy over their lives. It is important to acknowledge that each individual's perception of his/her social world may exert a greater influence on sense of autonomy than does the actual environment itself (Sarrazin et al., 2002; Vallerand, 1997). Sarrazin et al.'s (2002) findings suggest that the self-determination of athletes playing for a controlling, autocratic coach who emphasizes "winning at all costs" may only be impacted if the athletes place value on the coach's behaviors. By valuing the coach's behaviors, athletes cognitively allow those behaviors to impact their perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Hence, the significance athletes place on external controls is important for sport psychology consultants to recognize because at some level athletes are in control of how they respond to events and other people.

Note that people constantly reevaluate their situation and that perceptions may change over time. Thus, perceptions of autonomy are likely to fluctuate throughout athletes' collegiate lives (Deci & Ryan, 2002). According to the self-determination theory, at some level, student-athletes must internalize their actions, even those in which they are obligated or pressured to engage (Sarrazin et al., 2002). Otherwise, athletes would most likely choose to disengage from collegiate sport participation if they believed that much of their life is externally controlled (Sarrazin et al., 2002). Therefore, it becomes important to understand how, why, and to what extent athletes perceive themselves as having autonomy.

Autonomous Identity Development

Perceptions of autonomy are also important for sport psychologists working with athletes because of the impact an autonomous view of self may have on individual's identity development. For example, creating perceptions of oneself as an autonomous individual is a key stage in development for college students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Harris, 1993; Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989). Baxter-Magolda (1998, 1999) conducted a longitudinal study in which she interviewed participants at several occasions beginning at the time they entered college. She found that ten years after they entered college and had gone on to various careers, the main experience of the participants was the search for self-authorship, to define themselves and their lives. Four dimensions of self-authorship emerged: 1) trust in their abilities, 2) confidence to direct their own life, 3) ability to act effectively in their environment, and 4) maintenance of their own identity. The author demonstrated that even beyond their college years, people still strive for autonomy and struggle with being dependent on others to fulfill their own needs.

This continual development of autonomy is important to recognize because it demonstrates that people actively try to form their own identity and take control of their own needs (Baxter-Magolda, 1998). It is when people begin to recognize their own ability to make choices and internalize their actions and values that their identity is most likely to endure (Baxter-Magolda, 1998, 1999). Therefore, it is important to assess individuals' autonomy because this sense of personal control is important for college students negotiating their identity.

Summary

This study focuses on student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy within the collegiate sport environment. In this chapter issues that may influence student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy were discussed. In the following chapter, the methods and procedures used to assess these perceptions are described.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

Rationale for Using Qualitative Methodology

Little research exists examining collegiate student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy. Although much speculation and theoretical knowledge abounds no one has undertaken an in-depth study on the perceptions of autonomy of student-athletes, the influence this autonomy has on their lives, or how their perceptions of autonomy affect them. Although more recent research in sport psychology has used qualitative methods to examine a variety of topics, much of the past research in the field has employed quantitative methods based on positivistic assumptions (Sparkes, 1998).

This study examined the perceptions of autonomy of collegiate student-athletes from within the constructivist paradigm. The constructivist paradigm assumes that multiple realities exist; that is, each individual's perceptions of autonomy may differ (Hatch, 2002). As a sport psychology consultant, it is important to treat each athlete as an individual and understand what life is like from his/her point of view. Hence, recognizing individual differences is not only essential for the consultant, but also for the qualitative researcher. Working from within a constructivist paradigm, I sought to describe and explain through detailed quotes and in-depth analysis the perceptions of autonomy held by collegiate student-athletes (Henderson, 1991).

From the constructivist view, I took into account athletes' subjective perceptions of their environment, the meaning they place on the autonomy in their life, and their personal situations (Heynik & Tymstra, 1993). Constructivist researchers believe that the information gathered is situated within the environment the participants normally reside

and that multiple realities exist because the participants come from varied backgrounds (Krane, Andersen, & Streaan, 1997). The ability to examine the contexts in which participants are situated is a key component of conducting qualitative research, as it allows the researcher and the reader to “understand how events, actions, and meaning are shaped by the unique circumstances in which they occur” (Streaan, 1998, p. 336). From this perspective, I attempted to construct a sense of the phenomenon being studied in the way the people who experience it do. Qualitative research provides a setting where researchers can look at the same area from different viewpoints, expanding what they know about various phenomena, rather than reducing them to parts with no interconnections (Shank, 2002). Gould and Krane (1992) note that “the strength of a qualitative approach is that it allows the subject to describe in his or her own detailed words the naturally occurring events that surround the phenomena of interest” (p.138). They claim that conducting interviews with athletes will provide researchers with a depth of knowledge that is unobtainable with nomothetic methods.

The interview is one of the most widely utilized qualitative research methods. It carries with it numerous benefits, as outlined by Heyink and Tymstra (1993) and Henderson (1991). The participants in constructivist research have the opportunity to raise issues they find important and clarify the questions they are asked. The researcher has more flexibility within the interview and in forming a hypothesis, as a hypothesis is derived from the individuals’ descriptions rather than being limited to existing research or knowledge. Interviews also allow the researcher to examine many themes for relevance, discover interconnections between the participants' experiences, and obtain contextual information.

Another key characteristic of the interview is that it is appropriate and useful for research into beliefs and attitudes (Henderson, 1991), which were integral to this study in assessing participants' perceptions of autonomy. Such methodology is also useful for providing descriptions of perceptions because it addresses the nature of individual differences in experiencing and interpreting autonomy. By conducting interviews, a clearer understanding of student-athletes' unique experiences and perceptions of autonomy was obtained. Such detailed interviews provide the reader the opportunity to vicariously experience the environments in which athletes reside and to understand the autonomy they have in their lives (Denzin, 1989). Rich description allows individuals who may not have participated in collegiate athletics to gain familiarity with what student-athletes go through daily.

As stated by Strean (1998), vivid description helps to increase familiarity, clarify obscure information, and modify misconceptions. Such description was derived from interviewing the athletes and provided "the basis for an in-depth understanding of how people make sense of their world and the context in which they reside" (Strean, 1998, p. 335). That is, a benefit of interviews is that they allow for associations to be made with the daily experiences of athletes. By reading rich descriptions of how autonomy is experienced by student-athletes, the reader can recognize and relate to their experiences and make a connection that could be beneficial to him/her (Strean, 1998).

It should not be assumed that perceptions of autonomy are the same for all athletes. By probing further into the nature of autonomy, it is hoped that this study will provide insight into this aspect of the lives of collegiate athletes. Open-ended questions provided the opportunity for the athletes to express their own perceptions of autonomy

and to acknowledge issues of autonomy in their own lives. It was important to take into account the distinctiveness of each athlete's experiences and ask what his/her life as a student-athlete was like. Individual accounts are important to recognize since different athletes may have experienced the same situation but perceived the event differently. Because of the varying nature of perceptions, it was necessary to understand the context in which student-athletes experience autonomy and how they make sense of it in relation to their lives. Therefore, by allowing athletes to describe their perceptions of autonomy through interviews, a great deal was learned of the lives of student-athletes and their interactions with the collegiate environment (Valle, 1998).

Semi-structured interview methodology allowed the athlete (rather than the researcher) to be the expert and control the interview (Giorgi, 1970). Since literature exists that discusses the affect that diminished autonomy may have on student-athletes, I asked direct but open-ended questions to address issues that had been acknowledged in previous literature. Even though the interviews were guided by these pre-existing questions, I attempted to center the conversation on experiences that the student-athletes brought up in relation to the questions asked.

Methods and Procedures

Following the research conducted by Dale (2000) and Scanlan, Stein, and Ravizza (1989), interview techniques were used to probe for a deep understanding of the nature of each student-athlete's perceptions of autonomy. Kvale (1996) discusses methods of interviewing that are used to gain a description of the world as it is encountered in everyday life. He claims that the purpose of conversational, semi-structured interviews is to "obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the

meaning of the described phenomena” (pp. 5-6). The use of open-ended questions allowed me to obtain such descriptions, as the athlete was encouraged to describe his/her perceptions of autonomy and discuss key experiences that appear to have been overlooked by past sport psychology research. Since a strength of interview methodology is that it can acquire differing viewpoints, this approach was utilized to obtain an understanding of the nature of individual differences in experiences and perceptions (Kvale, 1996).

Kvale (1996) states, “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 1). This study explored the context in which student-athletes viewed the autonomy they had in their lives as collegiate student-athletes, how they made sense of this autonomy, and how their perceptions of autonomy affected them.

Bias Exploration

Seidman (1998) suggests that researchers should engage in an exploration of their own understanding of the phenomenon being studied. He suggests that researchers include a section in their reports where they discuss “how they came to their research, what their research experience was like, and, finally, what it means to them. How do they understand it, make sense of it, and see connections in it?” (p. 111). Therefore, prior to beginning the study, I engaged in the process of self-reflection to identify any biases I might bring to the study and to recognize any preconceptions I held that might influence the interview and data analysis.

I became interested in this topic while teaching an undergraduate sport

psychology class in which many student-athletes were enrolled. During the class, a discussion emerged during which many of the athletes complained about the lack of control they had over their lives. They discussed issues such as study hall, practice time, and having to do what the coach asked at a moment's notice. Hearing this discussion, I realized that this issue was one that often gets overlooked in sport psychology, but that it greatly impacted the student-athletes in this class. I set out to gain a further understanding of student-athletes' perceptions of "control" (which I later learned was "autonomy"). Hence, this project represents a type of praxis; the impetus for a research project actually came from practice, my practice of sport psychology. I've also integrated what I learned through practice into my research, which hopefully can then inform the work of other applied sport psychology consultants (Fisher, Butryn, & Roper, 2003).

Another step in my bias exploration process was to engage in a "bracketing interview" (Patton, 1990; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997) to explore my thoughts and expectations going into the study. Another doctoral student experienced in qualitative methodology and aware of the nature of collegiate athletics interviewed me using the interview guide for the study. She asked me the same questions the student-athletes would be asked, and I answered them from my estimation of the point of view of an athlete. The results of this interview illuminated issues that I was expecting to hear from the student-athletes. Some of the issues that arose included the influence of others' expectations, making decisions based on sport, and blindly following what everyone else does as a first-year student.

Throughout the study I also maintained a research journal in which I periodically wrote down any ideas I had on the study, the co-researchers, and the interconnections

between experiences (see examples in Appendix A). After I completed this step, I began the interviews with the co-researchers.

Pilot Interview

I conducted a pilot interview with a former Division I student-athlete at the same university attended by the co-researchers. The pilot interview was conducted to try out the questions proposed in the interview guide and to identify further areas that may need to be explored. One question (“Describe your coach as a person and a motivator”) was moved to earlier on the interview guide and one probe was added (“Has this changed over the years?”).

Main Study

In this section the methods and procedures used to gain an understanding of student-athletes’ perceptions of autonomy are described. Included is a description of the co-researchers, the interview process, and the data analysis procedures.

Co-Researchers

For this study, I engaged in conversations with student-athletes who essentially became co-researchers in the search for a clearer understanding of their perceptions of autonomy (Hatch, 2002). The notion of co-researcher stems from a phenomenological approach, which takes the position that the participant and the researcher are co-researchers because the two individuals are working together to learn more about the topic of study as it relates to their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). Co-researchers are not just the subjects of study, but rather their experiences are the focus of the study as they play an active part in exploring the topic of interest (Polkinghorne, 1989). From this vantage point, I attempted to create a more equal power dynamic by allowing the co-

researcher to direct the conversation and discuss what (s)he felt was important rather than holding a position as an authority figure. From this perspective, I viewed the individuals involved in this study as “co-researchers” since we explored their perceptions together. We researched their experiences through a conversation directed as much by them as by me.

There were twelve co-researchers involved in this study, seven male and five female collegiate student-athletes from four different sports at a Division I university (see Appendix B for a description of the co-researchers.). Three of the co-researchers were members of the football team, two were from women’s basketball, four were members of the men’s golf team, and three of the co-researchers were from women’s track. It was important to represent both revenue and non-revenue sports since the varying importance placed on different sports may impact the amount of autonomy student-athletes perceive they have. Also, revenue and gender have been shown to influence student-athletes’ perceptions of their scholarships (Amorose & Horn, 2000, 2001; Ryan, 1977, 1980). The student-athletes also represented each academic grade level [first-year (3), sophomore (2), junior (2), senior (5)] to assess perceptions of autonomy during each of these years. While an attempt was made to include a diversity of racial backgrounds in this study, due to lack of representation of some races in different sports, the study was limited to Caucasian (7) and African-American (5) student-athletes. All but one student-athlete was from the United States.

Co-researchers were recruited from the approximately 180 eligible athletes (127 football, 12 men’s golf, 11 women’s basketball, 30 women’s track) currently engaged in their sport at a Division I university. The co-researchers were chosen because they could

report on their perceptions of autonomy and were able to articulate their thoughts and feelings related to the autonomy they perceive to have over their lives (Polkinghorne, 1989). Specific co-researchers were chosen from those who responded to recruitment emails and phone calls to represent different demographic characteristics, specifically by race and year in school. Co-researchers were recruited for the study in several ways. First, I emailed every student-athlete on each of the four identified teams an invitation to participate and a follow-up email if a response was not received. I was able to solicit eight student-athletes to participate through these emails. I then obtained a roster of each team from the team website. From this roster I identified several student-athletes who fit the demographics (race and/or year in school) of student-athlete not yet interviewed and attempted to reach them by telephone. The student-athletes I was able to contact in this way who agreed to participate in the study were then interviewed. To obtain the contact information for a potential first-year football player, I enlisted the help of an academic advisor who provided the contact information for seven first-year football players. I contacted several of these players by email and telephone until I was able to arrange an interview with one of them. To protect his confidentiality, I did not tell the academic advisor which players I had contacted or who I interviewed. To protect the identity of the co-researchers each was asked to provide a pseudonym that was used during the data analysis and in the final report.

I also took great care to protect the identity of the university involved. I did not reference the location of the university or facts that may lead the reader to assume they can identify the university.

Interview Procedures

The interviews occurred during the fall and spring semester at locations that the student-athletes believed provided confidentiality and convenience. Interviews lasted 40 minutes to 1 hour and 36 minutes and were audio tape-recorded. After each interview was completed, I recorded some initial reactions in a research journal that allowed for easier recall of the conversation and the surrounding context for use when analyzing the data (see Appendix A for examples).

Before beginning each interview, the co-researchers were informed of the purpose and process of the study, asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C), told that participation was completely voluntary, and told that they could decline to answer any question. The co-researchers were assured that the information they provided would remain confidential and that their names and any identifying information would not be revealed. I then attempted to develop rapport with the student-athletes through social conversation. Rapport was built to allow the student-athletes to begin to trust and feel at ease with me (Dale, 2000; Seidman, 1998).

I began the interview by asking the co-researchers for demographic information (see Appendix D). I then asked them to describe their lives as student-athletes, which helped me understand their lives from their point of view. Following these initial questions, I asked the co-researchers questions to gauge their perceptions of autonomy.

Following the suggestions of Seidman (1998) and Kvale (1996), questions were open-ended and allowed me to explore the topic of interest while providing space for the co-researchers to direct the conversation. Probes were used for clarification, elaboration of the athletes' answers, and to facilitate the interview but still allowed for the co-

researchers to focus the conversation on issues pertinent to them. To allow for co-researchers to guide me to what they felt was important and enable us to explore their perceptions of autonomy together, probes such as “What was that like for you?” and “How does that make you feel?” were included (Pollio et al., 1997; Seidman, 1998). Throughout the interview, I sought to clarify what the co-researchers were saying as well as to understand the meaning behind their descriptions (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 1998).

A guide of possible topics to discuss was used to address student-athletes’ perceptions of autonomy, including their perceptions of choice, control, and power (see Appendix D). The guide was used to help reach a level of understanding necessary to derive meaning from their accounts and to address issues identified by previous research (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1987; Seidman, 1998). Broad questions helped to obtain substantive descriptions of the individuals’ perceptions while still allowing them to identify issues that were important to their experiences. The items on the guide were identified by previous research as influencing the autonomy of student-athletes. In using the guide, I was cautious to not force testimony from the student-athletes, but rather to gain a more complete description of their perceptions of autonomy.

Data Analysis

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state, “There is no single interpretive truth” (pg. 23). Each set of data is essentially a story that the co-researchers have created, ordered, and told about their experiences as they remembered and constructed them in their mind (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Thus, perceptions and not the actuality of the events that have occurred become important. Hence, great care must be taken on the part of researchers to ensure that they are interpreting and relaying the person’s experiences and

perceptions of these experiences as accurately and fairly as they can.

I was systematic in my data analysis and continually ensured that I was keeping emerging themes within the context of the student-athletes' experiences by continually rereading the transcript. Data were analyzed in a manner consistent with the interpretative analysis model described by Hatch (2002). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and continually re-read to become familiar with the student-athletes' experiences. Next, I identified categories, summarized the co-researchers' experiences in the form of memos, created a profile for each individual athlete, and searched for patterns in their experiences. After themes emerged for each individual athlete, I then compared these themes with those of all other co-researchers. I explored the similarities and differences in their experiences until all possible experiences were considered and finally incorporated. By continually re-reading the transcripts and re-evaluating why and how various phenomena related to autonomy, rich description of the student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy resulted.

Interpretive content analysis allowed for themes to be created from the statements of the student-athletes rather than from predetermined categories (Hatch, 2002). Because interpretation centers on explaining reported experiences and making sense of each phenomenon, this method of analysis was useful in helping to develop insight into the perceptions of autonomy of the student-athletes in this study. Throughout the analysis process, I constantly referred back to the data as a whole and was careful not to create themes and interpretations that are inconsistent with what was actually described and experienced by the co-researchers (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In condensing meaning from the conversations using this methodology, I

followed Kvale's (1996) and Hatch's (2002) steps for analyzing qualitative data. First, I read the entire interview to develop a sense of the whole. I continued to re-read each individual transcript to become highly familiar with the experiences of each student-athlete and to develop a profile of his/her experiences and perceptions. This step was repeated throughout the data analysis process to connect all parts of the interview, to ensure accuracy, to search for incongruous themes, and to examine the perceptions and experiences of the student-athletes (Tesch, 1990). To look for continuity in the experiences of the athletes and to understand the interactions of their experiences, I related text from the beginning of the conversation to that at the end (Pollio et al., 1997).

The next step I took in analyzing the data was to identify significant statements, or meaning units, which represented the experiences of the student-athlete (Kvale, 1996). Each significant statement was highlighted and color-coded to identify a new topic being discussed. Appendix E provides an example of the steps in the data analysis process. From these significant statements, categories were created based on the co-researchers' descriptions of their experiences and perceptions of autonomy. These categories were identified throughout the transcript in the form of brief notes that list abbreviated versions of the co-researchers' descriptions (Hatch, 2002). Then, I used the interpretations that I formulated throughout the interview and data analysis process to create memos that summarized their experiences as I saw them (Hatch, 2002; Seidman, 1998). Charmax (2000) claims "memo writing aids us in linking analytic interpretation with empirical reality" (p. 517). This memo writing process helped me to notice and analyze relevant information and think about data in a new way (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

The next step in the process was to organize the large amount of data that I had

obtained. I created a document that listed all of the categories identified by the data analysis to this point (see Appendix E). Each student-athlete's transcript was then re-read and a summary of his/her experiences that fell into each of the categories was included. For example, anytime "Amani" discussed issues of control, a summary of her experience was listed under this category. After the transcripts had been thoroughly reviewed in this way, a profile of each student-athlete's experience was created. This profile was set up in outline form, listing each category with an even more condensed summary of the co-researcher's experiences. Within each category were explanatory or descriptive quotes from that athlete which represented their experiences.

A profile of his/her perceptions and experiences was created for each co-researcher. All profiles were then compared to the others to identify individual differences and to recognize similarities in their experiences and perceptions. In comparing each individual profile, emerging themes were related back to the purpose of the study by asking, "What does this statement say about the perceptions of autonomy of collegiate student-athletes?" I compared profiles by gender, race, sport, and year in school. In this way, a profile of all the student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy was created. Finally, fundamental themes were tied together into descriptive statements, thereby condensing expressed meaning into larger concepts (Kvale, 1996).

In the second phase of data analysis, I scheduled a follow-up meeting with nine of the twelve student-athletes involved in the study to ask for feedback and to clarify what had been said. The other three individuals were unable to meet due to time constraints. By returning to the student-athletes and asking if the findings accurately represented their experiences, the trustworthiness of the results were increased (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Before these meetings, I provided the student-athletes with a copy of their transcript as well as my outlined summary of their experiences. After they had time to read and react to it, we met and reviewed what had been said and what interpretations I had made. I gave the student-athletes an opportunity to expand on what had been said, to convey ideas and thoughts they had about their experiences, and to respond to my interpretations or to the initial conversation. The main purpose of this step was to confirm that I had made an accurate assessment of their experiences and to ensure that the information they provided was accurate.

Only two student-athletes modified their interview material. One student-athlete chose to further clarify his relationship with his coach. He felt that the summary painted a negative picture of his coach, because while the examples he provided were accurate, he wanted to note that things were starting to improve. Another student-athlete asked me to clarify an assessment I had made about his experiences. I discussed my assessment with him and we came to a consensus as to the nature of the experience in question. All other athletes believed their profiles were accurate, with some providing further elaboration or clarification of their experiences. These second meetings allowed me to become more confident in the accuracy of my interpretations and to confirm that my assessment of student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy were in accordance with their experiences. Several of the student-athletes expressed an interest in the experiences of other student-athletes and after sharing with them my overall findings they felt that they had similar experiences to many of the others and concurred with my results.

After completing these steps, I reviewed my findings with my dissertation advisor and with another doctoral student, both of whom were familiar with qualitative

methodology and with the lives of collegiate student-athletes. I also reviewed my themes with them as well as my rationale for the themes. They agreed with my findings and logic and felt that I had thoroughly and accurately analyzed the data. Reviewing findings with others allowed for a broader perspective than a single analysis could create and helped to ensure that all possibilities were examined (Dale, 1996).

After all transcripts were thoroughly explored and condensed, follow-up interviews completed, and thematic concepts created, detailed descriptions of the perceptions of autonomy of collegiate student-athletes were produced.

Summary

In this chapter the methods used to assess student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy were discussed. The analysis of the conversations resulted in rich accounts of the athletes' personal autonomy, relational autonomy, lack of autonomy, as well as the influence of power on student-athletes' abilities to experience autonomy. In the next chapter a detailed examination of the findings derived from analyzing the student-athletes' conversations is provided.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter describes the themes that arose from the data analysis. The findings are presented so that readers can “see” the interconnections, patterns, and themes that emerged from analysis of the conversations with the student-athletes in the study. The rationale for each theme is presented and supported by quotes from the student-athletes. By providing examples from student-athletes’ own perspectives, athletes, coaches, sport psychology consultants, and athletic administrators reading the findings should be able to connect the information to their own situations (Strean, 1998). Quotes should enable the reader to relate to the experiences of others and take information from the study that can help them to gain an understanding of their own lives and experiences (Strean, 1998). In this chapter, a discussion of the findings as they relate to existing research is also included. While I did not adapt the data to fit existing theories, many of my findings are consistent with previous research, which was used to connect the data and to provide possible explanations of the student-athletes’ experiences. Because the data were rich and the conversations provided an in-depth understanding of student-athletes’ perceptions of autonomy, I have attempted to go beyond just presenting the key characteristics of the student-athletes’ experiences, and have offered a deeper conceptualization of their experiences so issues of autonomy could be understood more fully and further explored (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Themes

Three major themes related to autonomy emerged from the analysis of the interviews. They were: 1) personal autonomy, 2) lack of autonomy, and 3) relational

autonomy. Table 1 provides a visual representation of these major themes. Each of these major themes was comprised of several sub-themes that provided a greater understanding of how autonomy was experienced by the student-athletes in this study. Three minor themes- Effects of Autonomy, Model of Desired Autonomy, and Power- also are presented. Appendix G outlines the major themes, minor themes, and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the conversations with the student-athletes.

Theme 1: Personal Autonomy

When it comes down to it you're going to do what you want to do...(BOB)

“*Autonomy* refers to being the perceived origin or source of one’s own behavior” (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 8). With the use of this definition of autonomy to analyze the experiences of the student-athletes, it appeared that many athletes perceived themselves as having autonomy and having, at least to some extent, a degree of choice and control in their lives. The theme of “personal autonomy” was comprised of two sub-themes: ultimate choice and sources.

Sub-Theme 1: Ultimate Choice

The first sub-theme, “ultimate choice” arose because several of the student-athletes believed that they had the ultimate choice over their decisions, reactions to situations, and even in non-autonomous situations.

Component 1: Decision Making

As evidenced by the student-athletes’ examples, personal autonomy was demonstrated by their belief that they ultimately decide what they do. Even if someone (often a coach) tells them what to do, they perceived themselves as being able to decide whether or not to comply with those wishes:

Table 1

Major Themes And Sub-Themes Representing Student-Athletes' Perceptions of Autonomy

Themes	Sub-theme 1	Sub-theme 2	Sub-theme 3
Personal Autonomy	Ultimate choice	Sources	
	Decision making	Identity development	
	Control of reaction	Experience	
	In non-autonomous activities	Confidence	
		Expectations and goals	
		Autonomy support	
		Earned personal autonomy	
Lack of Autonomy	Pressure, Obligation, and Compliance	Acceptance	Reframing
	Coach Control	Lifestyle	
	Academics	Powerless to Change It	
	Sponsorship		
	Power Dynamics		
	Not Individual Recognizing Differences		
Relational Autonomy	Sources	Influences	
	Teammates	Caring and trust	
	Family	Team environment	
	God	Mutual respect and commitment	
	Coach	Others' expectations	

SAM: *I don't let myself fall into the category of not having control because I mean, like I said earlier whenever coach tells me something, I know what I have to do, I'm in control of what I have to do or of what I'm gonna do and that's what I do. I mean if he tells me to do more, I don't really...*

BOB: *I'm going to make the choices in the end, like I'm going to decide what clubs I'm going to hit. I'll take [coach's] suggestions, and I'll take them for what they're worth, but it's my choice really in the end. So really his power doesn't mean anything to me in that situation.*

The choice to even be a college athlete is one that is ultimately up to the student-athletes. As this first-year golfer noted, he could quit at anytime if he no longer wanted to participate:

CHARLES: *... you're not controlled, you don't have to be there if you don't want to be there, you know you could check it in and say goodbye if you didn't want to be there. So, I don't think you're controlled, I think you're controlling what you want to be controlling.*

Viking, a senior basketball player, noted that she had ultimate control over her academic success:

VIKING: *Yeah, you gotta go to study hall, and yeah, people are keeping tabs on your grades, but they're not forcing you to be the best student you can be. You know, so...that's all under your control.*

Differences in sport may also be a factor in determining how much autonomy an athlete has, as this senior golfer noted:

BOB: *I think it's quite different in every sport, but golf's an individual sport anyway so you're going to really have a lot of-it's up to you what to do. If you want to be successful or not you have that choice. I mean, no one can take that away from you in the end.*

Two individuals also experienced personal autonomy during the recruiting process. They associated this sense of ultimate control and choice with feelings of power:

COUGAR: *I had control with colleges that I didn't want to go to, I could just tell them that I wasn't interested. I felt like I had control at that point and they couldn't get mad because it was my decision, they're the ones wanting me so I felt like I had control.*

He went on to describe why this situation made him feel powerful:

COUGAR: *...being able to get recognition for my ability and being able to decide which college that I wanted to go to, and especially being Division I because most guys don't get a choice, some of them have one or two offers to Division 2 colleges, so, it felt good.*

One female basketball player felt similarly about the recruiting process, also noting how having that choice be totally in her control also created some pressure:

VIKING: *[Being recruited] felt good but also there's a lot of pressure 'cause you want to make the right decision for yourself. Then you have all these other people, "Oh go here. Don't go to [that school] because you're from [this state], that's bad." You know, you have all those other outside factors trying to play into everything. But it's your decision. You're the one that's going to be doing it for 4 years. So you gotta think about that...*

As demonstrated, when the student-athletes felt that they had the ability to make the ultimate decision, they were able to experience personal autonomy.

Component 2: Control of Reaction

Athletes may believe that they do not have autonomy in certain situations, such as when injured or when being reprimanded. However, a few athletes in this study discussed that their reaction to events was ultimately their choice, and was a way to exert personal autonomy:

REBECCA: *So ultimately I just do my best to choose how to react to certain situations, like that's pretty much all I can do when things happen. Like they might not make you happy but you can choose how you react to it.*

VIKING: *I've grown up and just realized that you can't always listen to the tone. I mean if you do something wrong [the coach is] going to tell you. Now how she chooses to tell you, and if you choose to listen to her tone, and that's when you're going to be all bent out of shape about it, and I think my freshman year I did a lot of that and it seemed like she was always yelling at me. I didn't see it as she was trying to help you, you know, it took me a while.*

Interestingly, the idea that they had a choice of how they reacted to various situations may be an ideology that was passed on by their coach, and not necessarily

something that they figured out on their own:

VIKING: *[The coach is] all about, “There’s one thing in your life that you can control and that’s your attitude.”*

Component 3: Non-Autonomous Situations

Recognizing the limitations of their personal autonomy, student-athletes were able to find opportunities to ultimately make decisions for themselves even when engaged in a non-autonomous activity:

SETH: *Yeah I mean maybe I don’t have any control over what I’m doing, maybe I have to be there, but then I can choose what I want to do when I’m there.*

Student-athletes have many constraints on their time. With practice, competition, and class, they are often forced into choosing between two desired activities. As this first-year track athlete noted, having to make a choice can still be autonomous:

ANIYAH: *Obviously being a student-athlete you have a lot of decisions as far as making sure you have time management, so, whether you want to go out, hang out with your friends or get some school work done because I just got out of practice...*

Some athletes perceived that even if something was required of them, ultimately, they still had to make the choice to go along with that requirement. Hence, while athletes essentially have to go to practice, they still perceived this choice to be autonomous because there is always the option not to go:

JAY: *You have the choice to go to practice, but you have to decide if you’re going to do it or not. So, you’ve got a lot of control over things like that, you know, whether or not you’re going to do this, that, or the other. But uh, most situations you don’t have a lot of control over, being a student-athlete, I wouldn’t say. A lot of things are just out of your hands.*

REBECCA: *I definitely choose what I want to do and don’t want to do. I mean I choose to accept the schedule that either they provide for me or that I contribute to. And so I want to be here and I want to be doing what I do. Yes, they tell me what to do but at the same time I choose to accept that.*

This idea of finding autonomy wherever one can has been documented in other studies as well. In one study investigating elite athletes' perceptions of and reactions to the behaviors of their judo coaches, d'Arripe-Longueville et al., (1998) found that within an environment where coaches allowed their athletes little control over their lives and created a structure that was restrictive, athletes were still able to achieve a sense of self-determination. These athletes did so by finding ways to engage in autonomous behaviors within the confining environment. They accepted the control others had over them, but found "loopholes" in the system where they could be themselves, make choices, and be in control over some aspects of their competitive lives. For example, one athlete noted, "Anyway, they've got the power, you've got to adapt, to comply with the coach, in the end to be diplomatic. Sometimes, you're sick of it, it's hard, but you let them talk, and you do your stuff on the side" (d'Arripe-Longueville et al., 1998, p. 325).

Sub-Theme 2: Sources

The second sub-theme, "sources", refers to the foundations of the student-athletes' personal autonomy. From their discussions of choice, control, and power, several reasons emerged as to why student-athletes may experience personal autonomy: 1) identity development, 2) experience, 3) confidence, 4) expectations and goals, 5) autonomy support, and 6) having earned it. These six sources of personal autonomy affected the degree to which student-athletes perceived themselves to be the origin of their behavior.

Component 1: Identity Development

Identity development appeared to be central to these student-athletes' ability to experience personal autonomy. Four sub-themes emerged that linked identity

development with personal autonomy: 1) stability, 2) life beyond sport, 3) relational identity, and 4) independence. Note that many of these sub-themes were intertwined and the student-athletes did not always separate these factors in their discussion. Several did recognize the influence that developing an identity, gaining experience, and learning what is important to them had on their ability and desire to make decisions for themselves.

Stability. The first sub-component that emerged in relation to identity development was that of stability. This sub-component centered on student-athletes' knowledge of what they need to and want to do both now and in the future. Often, this knowledge was related to increased feelings of power and confidence:

SAM: *I'm a lot more set and stable in what I'm gonna do and what I want to do and I mean I definitely have a lot more control now.*

He continued by discussing how this stability made him feel:

SAM: *I do feel really powerful now and I think I did last year too. I think because, actually probably second semester last year I started feeling you know powerful, because I feel like I've gotten my life straight, I mean I know it sounds bad but I've developed who I am as a person I think. And I know what I want to be and the things I want to do and I'm pretty much doing the things that I do want to do, So I think that, I mean I feel like I'm, I feel like I have a lot of power now 'cause I feel like I have a lot of control, and I think I'm doing what I want to do.*

When asked what he based decisions on, Jay noted that he took into consideration other people's thoughts, but ultimately, he made decisions based on knowing himself and knowing what was best for him.

JAY: *I think you have to really think about where you're going to or what you're going to rely on, you know. I mean, are you going to trust in yourself and in what you feel is best for you more than someone else? Depends on what you think as a person and how much these people actually mean to you in your life, so. Me, I would try to incorporate my own thoughts and everything along with these other people and try to come up with the best solution, but if I feel like they're just way off track then I will just disregard that.*

Aniyah also recognized that people base their decisions on their views of themselves. She realized that since this is her first year in college she is still figuring things out and developing a better sense of who she is:

ANIYAH: *If you view yourself a certain way then you're going to follow through with that way. And you always think about, "That's not me. You know, like I'm not going to do that."*

She continued:

ANIYAH: *Like I think I'm still learning myself, like I just got here, that's usually when you start finding out who you really are. I think I'm still like figuring out like exactly who I am and being more independent.*

Viking also noted that college is a time where students develop their views about themselves. For her, this meant becoming more open-minded and accepting that people are not all the same. Recognizing this, she felt able to make decisions based on her own identity and happiness and felt other people should do the same:

VIKING: *I had my opinions on like homosexuality, but once you get in college it's like everywhere. So then, you either still hold all that prejudice and spend more time being prejudiced against it and spend more time thinking about, "Oh my God, I don't want to be around it" than just accepting that's not who I am but, you're happy, that's fine.*

Views also change in relation to academics. Because of the academic requirements of universities and the pressure students often have to graduate in four or five years, many choose a major very early in their academic careers, before they have actually figured out who they are and what they want to do. NCAA regulations also require that collegiate student-athletes declare a major by the end of their sophomore year and complete certain degree requirements if they wish to remain eligible to compete in their sport. The type of identity foreclosure (that anyone can experience when pressured to commit to an identity before having explored all their options) is just as likely, if not

more so, with athletic populations as with non-athletic populations (Pinkerton, Hinz, & Barrow, 1989). For these reasons, by the time they are seniors, some student-athletes are getting a degree in a discipline that no longer interests them. As Daria explained, by the time she established an identity and a sense of what she wanted in her future, it was too late to pursue another degree. Had she developed her identity earlier, she may have felt her choice of major was more autonomous and intrinsically interesting than she currently perceived it:

DARIA: I kind of regret getting my bachelor's in what I did, and so, it's like I didn't really know that's what I wanted to do, but that was the most feasible degree that I could, I mean major that I, 'cause I wanted to counsel at the time. But I've climbed to another level in my life where I've changed, where I don't even want to do anything close to counseling. I want to teach and teach health, and that's like kind of totally different. I mean I wanted to be in a helping profession, but I cannot see myself doing that anymore, and that was like 2 or 3 years ago and now I'm like I don't even want to do this...

Fortunately, some athletes are able to change their majors to a related field with similar requirements. Jay discussed how he was having difficulty in the business classes but knew he wanted to pursue this type of degree. After looking at possible options and assessing his interests and what was plausible given that he had already taken a year of classes, he decided to change his major:

JAY: I decided to change my major to sport management where I can get a business minor but the requirements are a little different. So, that was something that wasn't really made for me, you know. I had kind of progressed along at my own pace and kind of assessed it myself and that was a decision I made.

Having a sense of stability was key in athletes developing personal autonomy. Part of this sense of stability may have been due to student-athletes' ability to develop an identity of themselves beyond that of an athlete.

Life beyond sport. Finding its roots in high school, and now with even younger

athletes, individuals are often rewarded for their performance in sport, leading them to become preoccupied with this facet of their lives (Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). By the time they arrive at college their identity and self-esteem may revolve solely around their actions on the field or the court. The increasing importance of sport to their lives is further perpetuated by the emphasis on athletics over academics, as individuals identify even more with their role as athletes rather than as students (Baillie & Danish, 1992). Hence, as the athletes in this study noted, recognizing that there was more to life than sport was key in student-athletes' identity development. In this study, developing an identity beyond that of an athlete affected student-athletes' ability and desire to make decisions for themselves:

SAM: Whenever I first got here there was no way I was thinking, I mean I never thought about quitting, because I thought that, you know, at that point golf was my life and it had been up to that point. Golf was my life and there was not a chance that I would ever want to quit. But I realized if I quit today I'm gonna enjoy golf for the rest of my life, I mean I enjoy golf just playing with friends and whatever so I mean I'll still get enjoyment out of golf, golf doesn't ever have to leave me. Maybe at some point if this ever got too unbearable, being a student-athlete here, I might leave, but golf will never leave. And whenever I first got here I was more focused on thinking that golf was something that I wanted to do for the rest of my life and this was a huge stepping stone and I mean the chances of me making that [decision to quit] and not playing golf here would have been slim to none.

He later noted that:

SAM: For one I view myself now as more than just an athlete because in high school that's basically what I was. I view myself a lot more than that and I take a lot more pride in stuff that's not sports so you know that's definitely changed in that sense.

Rebecca had similar feelings, noting that she decided how to spend her time because she realized that there was more to life than sport:

REBECCA: Um...just what did you come to college to do? Especially if you're a student-athlete, do you, like I've talked to so many teammates like they're sooo focused just on performance in track and they don't really have a personal life. Which I know you have

to sacrifice part of your social life to do what we do but I think you also need to have a balance. [.....] just choosing how you're going to spend your time is huge.

When asked about his preparation for life beyond college, Jay noted that even though he might have opportunities to play football at the professional level, sport would eventually end. He said that he makes decisions now to prepare for life beyond sport so he can go down whatever path he chooses:

JAY: I think I'm prepared [for life after college by] the fact that I understand and I realize that there's a lot of life after sport that you have to live and you have to work through. And to me sport is just a way to have fun and release tension and maybe one day make some money, you know. But I don't look at it like as that's the end of the road because your window for playing sports is so small, you know, but your life, your window for life is so much greater than that. So to be prepared after sports is like, you have to realize that there is life after sports and you have to think about the types of things that you're going to be doing then, that you want to be doing, and how to set yourself up for that now.

The process of developing an identity beyond that of an athlete was key for these individuals in experiencing personal autonomy. Note that peoples' identities are often created by and encompass relationships with others (Christman, 2004; Friedman, 2003).

Relational Identity. Several people in this study noted that their friends formed a large part of their identity. Often, the student-athletes sought out certain "types" of friends who would allow them to live a life consistent with their view of themselves. Interestingly, the majority of the student-athletes to whom this sub-component was relevant were also those athletes who had a self-identity in which God was a key figure. Hence, for these people God also emerged as a source of relational identity:

REBECCA: Yeah, I chose my freshmen year to go to Athletes in Action because I wanted to be surrounded by good people and people that were nice and things like that, that I felt comfortable with, and they ended up being my close group of friends. I mean, that's a big choice, deciding on what kind of friends you want to hang out with, kinda influences who you're gonna be, what kind of person you want to be.

TYLER: *I've kind of surrounded myself with people that I know will help me be successful and also that maybe they can rub off on me, 'cause I'm going to need a lot of help. [...] I think that if you surround yourself with good people and, you know, a man's really kind of defined by his friends. If you have a lot of good people around you you're going to have a good place, you know greener pastures.*

Having a relationship with God exerted great influence on the decisions of those student-athletes for whom this relationship was important:

REBECCA: *Just realizing what having a relationship with God is about. It's not about, I mean, it's about this life in the here and now and even though I went to church all the time I didn't really get the point. So I came to Athletes in Action and I started talking to the priest at my church and stuff like that and just having relationships with people became more important than performing for other people. 'Cause losing, that brought me down, and I was like it's not all about performing 'cause I'm still here even though I didn't do well, I'm still here. So like it's just kind of a personal insight because when track's gone and I'm done and old and all that stuff, I can't [do this] when I'm 80, you know, it's not really that big of a deal, it's just something fun to do right now and I really enjoy it.*

AMANI: *Especially trying to live a Christian life. It's a lot, especially in the college atmosphere. You know, the constant peer pressure, the constant pressure to go to a party always, people trying to get you to go here, go here, go drink, oh go out and party, all this stuff. And um, like in the setup of my reputation, I don't want to be a part of that really. I don't have any desire to. I know that the reputation that I have and the reputation that I put up for myself, I don't really want to, and so that definitely has altered different decisions that I made.*

Independence. While some people experienced personal autonomy in their relationships with others, some student-athletes felt they had more control over their decisions when they were able to exert their independence. This sense of independence was mainly related to being away from their parents. Independence allowed the student-athletes to gain confidence, change their views of themselves, and to feel prepared for life beyond college:

VIKING: *...you've got to make your own decisions, you do what you want to do, you're not under your parents, your parents aren't telling you who you can date and who they approve of. They don't know.*

CHARLES: *I just feel like I have control all the time, especially being away from my family now it's all down to what I do. You know I haven't got other people around me, not telling me what to do just hinting on what to do. Um, you know whether or not, I don't have to do my homework if I don't want to.*

AMANI: *I think that I'm prepared [for life after college], because this is what it takes to get through college, first of all. Again, being out here away from family and away from everything that's normal to you, that is familiar to you, and then putting yourself in a situation, a surrounding where you really don't know anybody. You're coming in, making your own identity here...*

Amani continued by saying:

AMANI: *Even last year I think my views have changed completely. Besides just being away at college and on my own, being totally away from my family. Just because growing up in a smaller community all my life and being real close to my family, having a huge extended family and always seeing them a couple of times, if not more, a year, everything was given to me basically. And my life has just changed because I have control over everything now as far as like, if I need food I can go and buy some groceries and if I don't have time to do this or that then I can't do it. You know, if I have some studying to do I have to do my studying and it's not like I can just go and do whatever I want. Spiritually, trying to find my own church, trying to further my relationship with God on my own and not having other people as far as family to make sure that I'm going to church. [...] It's all because of my own doings.*

Viking felt that she would not be totally independent, and thus in control of her decisions, until she graduated, or at the very least, finished her obligation to her sport:

VIKING: *So that's kinda where I'm at right now, just thinking about what I really want to do, what I really want to be because like after now the decision is mine. Like everybody's already had me, everybody's already pushed me to do things I might not [have] wanted to do, but now it's like to the point where like it's going to be all my own and I just want to make the right decisions.*

{INTERVIEWER: *How do you feel about that?*}

VIKING: *That does feel good. That actually, there's something in my hands. I actually define my career, what I want to do, what I don't want to do anymore, and how I go about it. And nobody can really say no. If I want to move to Phoenix, mom and dad can't say no.*

Viking continued this discussion by saying:

VIKING: *[I think it will all be my decision when basketball's over] 'cause I'm on my own. I have no ties anymore, no obligation to be anywhere. You know, that's just me, taking what I was taught and put it to work.*

Many of the student-athletes in this study felt that they were more autonomous the more they had developed a sense of who they are. Similar findings arose in d'Arripe-Longueville and colleagues' (1998) study of French judo athletes. For example, one athlete said, "I'm at a period in my life as an athlete where I don't want things imposed on me, I want to do things that please me, and be able to choose. I know what I want to do, and the coach is not as important to me" (p. 327). According to Friedman (2003), identity development is necessary for choices to be autonomous, since at some level an individual must identify with those choices after a process of self-reflection. That is, the choices- and actions resulting from those choices-must be intrinsically important to the individual because they are a part of who (s)he is (Friedman, 2003). For example, an athlete who chooses not to go party with teammates because it goes against her view of herself as a Christian would be engaging in an autonomous decision. However, an athlete who chooses not to party because the coach told her that she would lose playing time if she did would not have made the decision autonomously. Note, the autonomy people experience is a matter of degree and why people engage in certain behaviors might be a result of several interacting factors.

Friedman (2003) states that, "to realize autonomy a person must first somehow reflect on her wants, desires, and so on and take up an evaluative stance with respect to them" (p.4). From this view, an athlete can commit to a behavior and have this behavior be autonomous in various degrees. The more people's desires are part of their identity and the more they reflect on these desires as being a genuine part of themselves, the more autonomous the chosen behaviors will be (Friedman, 2003). Hence, for a behavior to be autonomous, it must have been reflected on as being important to one's sense of self at

some point in time. Therefore, behaviors that are chosen out of habit or ambivalence for which an individual has no intrinsic feelings are not viewed as being autonomous. For example, going to a party because everyone else is going or working out because it is something an athlete just does would not be considered autonomous behaviors.

“Autonomous actions and choices also stem from what an agent cares deeply about” (Friedman, 2003, p. 6). When deciding between two desired actions, people usually choose the more autonomous behavior and often use it as rationale for other choices. For example, a student who usually chooses to spend time with friends rather than studying may consider relationships to be a deeper desire than an education. Or, as was the case with several athletes in this study, Christian values may be so deeply rooted in their sense of self that these values guide most choices they make. The more a behavior is consistently chosen because of its importance to the individual, the more it becomes part of the individual’s identity. A person choosing behaviors based on this sense of self is then considered to be self-determining because she is acting on “what matters to her, what she deeply cares about, and in that sense, who she ‘is’” (Friedman, 2003, p.6). Of course, people’s deepest desires, commitments, and perspectives fluctuate as they are exposed to new experiences that test those desires, as was the case with the student-athletes who chose an academic major early on but later realized they no longer wanted to pursue that profession.

Component 2: Experience

The component of “experience” was closely linked to that of identity. Through experience, the student-athletes learned what they wanted and needed to do, felt more prepared and in control, and learned to speak up when decisions were being made that

affected them:

I think a lot of people my age are just to the point where they don't even listen. I mean, I know that sounds terrible, I'm not saying that I don't listen to what [coach] says, I mean I just don't, whenever he tells me something I just say, "yes sir" and I'll do it or whatever. We know what we have to do, I mean we're old enough and we've been doing this long enough that we know exactly what we have to do and that's what we do and what he says more or less we really don't pay attention, we just do what we know we have to do.

For another athlete, the more experience he had with various aspects of his life the more control he felt he had:

At first when I was kind of walking-on trying to get my feet wet into the whole football thing I had no control. You know I was kind of just going out on a limb and you know, my dad was kind of, "just try it." He was kind of pushing me into it and I didn't feel like I was prepared or ready for any of the football thing. But now that I've gotten a routine down, you know I have these set classes that I'm going to and I already have my major picked out and am getting towards the end of that, I feel like I have a lot more control, not only on like the personal basis but also spiritual and you know other aspects of my life that I really wasn't in tune with my freshman year.

It took Rebecca getting injured to learn that she needed to speak up when she knew that what was being asked of her was not what she should do. She learned from this experience that she knew what was best for herself and needed to have input into decisions that affected her:

REBECCA: *No I didn't [speak up] my freshmen year and I ended up hurt. So I definitely learned that lesson and I just trusted that, a lot of excitement, like "Oh, I've never done this before, this is going to make me go so much faster." And I really believed that. And I'm sure that's what they thought they were doing for me but they didn't know the way my body was going to be able to handle, and I didn't either. So I guess I had to go through that to understand, you know, more about what my body can handle versus what like the formula was to create like better speed or whatever.*

Exposure to different cultures, sub-cultures, and developing relationships with new people was integral in shaping the student-athletes' identities and also in altering their perceptions of the world. This "culture shock" appeared to be an important

experience since the more athletes were able to reflect on their situations and on the socialization that influenced their behaviors, the more autonomous they could become (Christman, 2004; Friedman, 2003). As one athlete noted, the subject of sexuality was an eye opener for her:

You get to college and, wow. You're on a big old campus, a lot of things going on, lot of people from different countries are here, you know, you got interracial dating, people who are bi, who are gay, people who are, you know, they don't care what you think about them. And, people that come here to like be prepared for to go into the real world and I think that college is where you just learn all that stuff. You see different things and you're not living in this little box and you're not sheltered, and you've got to make your own decisions, [...] And I think that's where you see everything, where you learn everything, where you learn that, "Hey, I have an opinion about this now." That's where you learn more about it, once you're kind of out there.

Another student-athlete agreed that exposure to new cultures can change people's perspectives:

Being around different people, different cultures, and getting used to being around just a lot of people all the time, like roommates and teammates. 'Cause at high school I mean, we saw them for like 2 hours and then you didn't have meetings, you didn't have team bonding or team dinners, you know. It was nothing like that in high school really. I was really an only child. [...] It was kind of a culture shock to me here too 'cause I went to like an all black school and then when I got here, it was kind of like I was the only black person, but it helped me I think just because, just I'm a more well-rounded person, I'll say that. And I look at things way differently than I did before. I have a different perspective about different people and different cultures. Just because I didn't experience a lot of different cultures at my school so it was like, that's all I was used to, and so like, everybody has different like habits and different things that they do, you know, their cultures. Cultures do have different things that they do, and I think I've learned that through here, I mean definitely.

For another athlete, exposure to new people, different from those she had grown up with, helped to build her self-esteem:

I have grown up a lot since I've been, since my freshmen year. [...] I think I have more self-esteem now than I did before, just because I really kind of did have a low, lower self-esteem. I mean like in high school you're tall and skinny and people make fun of you all the time, and now I'm like around a lot of people who look like me, so, tall skinny people is not like anything new anymore and nobody really just talks about you bad about it

anymore because it's like I have friends that are as tall as me or taller, so it's not a big deal, so. It makes me feel better about myself because a lot of people kind of put me down, "oh you're so skinny, you're so tall" you know. And like now it's just like it's not a big deal anymore. It used to be like a, you know I want to cry and just get depressed about it, but now it's like okay, whatever, it's like thank you, you know. Now they kind of compliment me, "your legs are so long and beautiful" or something like that, and before I probably wouldn't believe it, I'd be like whatever...

Component 3: Confidence

The student-athletes in this study who had developed a sense of confidence in themselves and in their ability to make decisions reported greater feelings of control.

Often, this confidence came from experience but it also arose when the student-athletes felt that others respected them and their opinions:

REBECCA: *I don't think I've ever had bad peer pressure or if I've had it's never been too much. Like, I just feel confident enough in what I want and what I want to do that's good for me.*

JAY: *I feel like I have a lot more control, a lot more choices to make now as opposed to last year, just because I'm a year older, I'm playing, my role on the team has grown so much so now I feel like I actually have a voice on the team whereas last year, you know, I kind of just, I was in the back. I was afraid to voice my opinions on a lot of things and come to the forefront because, whereas my teammates and coaches respected me as a person and as a player, I hadn't really done anything to prove myself, you know, here, on this level, not just in my sport but just to them on any kind of level, you know. So a lot of that has changed and I feel like I have a lot more control over my destiny, a lot more control over, over myself and the present and the future, like I do have a voice now and I'm not afraid to step to the forefront to voice that.*

Jay went on to note that feeling respected was a key to developing the confidence he needed to speak up and to make decisions for himself:

JAY: *If people don't give you that respect, then it's going to be hard for you to feel comfortable enough to have more control over your life.*

In talking about what can help him to actually make the right decisions, this first-year football player also noted:

COUGAR: *Probably get more confidence in myself or whatever. I think that kinda gives*

me the confidence, like academics or whatever, and the same with football, it's always, I end up having the right answer but I always second guess it. So probably I need to build my confidence a little more.

Confidence was also integral in Amani's ability to stand up against people who tried to pull her away from what she believed in. She felt that individuals who did not have a strong sense of identity and thus lacked confidence in themselves could easily be persuaded by others:

AMANI: *I think [confidence is] a very good thing, because people can see that too. They know that, I think that people who are less kind, the hunters, that want to try to get you down, that want to get you to go to this place and that place, and that's not going to probably be too good for you. They can tell those who are confident and they can tell those who um, if they think it's wrong, if they think that you don't want to do something, that you're going to be strong enough to say no. And um, I think that if they see someone who is kind of timid, who's kind of in search of their own identity that they're going to tackle them, they're going to try to pull them that way.*

As demonstrated, confidence was integral in enhancing student-athletes' abilities to experience personal autonomy. The influence of confidence was evidenced in the fact that once they believed in themselves and in their abilities, student-athletes were more likely to voice their opinions.

Component 4: Expectations and Goals

It was apparent that the expectations and goals student-athletes had for themselves often influenced their decisions. When looking at decisions they made, many noted that they took into consideration what they were working toward and what types of behavior they, and sometimes others, expected:

VIKING: *I think that every decision I make will take me closer to my goal. When I'm facing a problem or a decision I think "how is this going to make me closer to the goals I want to meet? Or is this?" You know. That's how, that's how I make my decisions.*

CHARLES: *I'm not the type to go out and drink and socialize all the time, you know, I do it sometimes but it's, I mean, it can take you away from what you want to be. If you're a sportsman you don't want to be drinking all the time.*

REBECCA: *If I didn't care about doing well in track I wouldn't get up at 6 in the morning to go lift weights. You know, those are things, I probably wouldn't be here if I didn't expect myself to do well, want to do well I guess. I don't know, I'd be a completely different person if I didn't feel some sort of pressure or expectation to do something, you know.*

AMANI: *I'm making sure that I have my priorities straight in order to be All-American, in order to have a 3.5 or over, you know. You have to make those decisions of, you know, there's more than just practice and working out outside of practice. There's doing the extra school work, extra reading, extra studying.*

ANIYAH: *Like [my expectations] will be in the back of my head, like, "Should I do this? Um, yeah. Is this going to help me whatever?" I'll just think about in general, like, what I expect of myself.*

As these athletes noted, the expectations they have for themselves influence what they do on a daily basis. Seemingly, their goals provide a foundation that guides their decisions and provides them with motivation to make consistent decisions.

Component 5: Autonomy Support

Student-athletes who felt supported in their ability to make important decisions for themselves also noted the confidence, satisfaction, and caring they felt because of this support. Often, it was family members who supported the student-athletes in developing autonomy and in making decisions for themselves:

SAM: *My parents aren't really controlling at all, I've been lucky because my parents kind of I think they wanted to establish morals whenever I was young. And whenever I was about 16 or 17 I proved to them that I wasn't gonna do anything, I mean I had pretty good judgment, they pretty much let me just do my own thing as long as I pretty much did the right thing. I mean everybody makes mistakes but as long as I pretty much done the right thing they haven't, you know, it's just been they haven't really tried to help me do anything, I mean if I ask, if I need help they're totally there for me but they don't really have too much influence, they just let me do my thing and they just trust that it's gonna work out...*

CHARLES: *My parents [influenced my decision to stay in school]. They just said, "If you want to come home, come home." [.....] My family just being there saying "you can come home when you want, it's all up to you" just giving me the decision was a big help. [.....]*

{INTERVIEWER: How did that make you feel when you're parents gave you the ability to make that decision?}

CHARLES: [...]It was nice to know that I could always go home when I wanted to and my parents aren't pushy, they've never been the ones who go "you're definitely", I mean it was my decision to come [here], my parents have never been "this is what you're going to do, you're going to go over there-" And so they've never been like that so it's always my decision and just to know that they support me in whatever I do is a big positive.

ANIYAH: It's never about what [my dad] wants me to do, it's about what I want to do
{INTERVIEWER: How does it make you feel when he does support your decisions?}

ANIYAH: It makes me feel good because I know that he's never going to be ashamed of me no matter what I do, no matter, I can do anything, he's always going to be there to back me up. He'll always be there.

REBECCA: I have the choice now to do what I want to do because I talked with each one of my siblings and I have a better understanding of what they expect of me now. [...] I feel like I want to impress [my brother] and make him proud but he sent me an email the other day congratulating me on doing well at the last meet and how he was happy, and just giving me all these encouraging tips. But then at the end he was like, "I don't want you to feel like this is pressure to do well, if you quit track tomorrow I would still love you and be proud of you and all that stuff." That means a lot to me because I feel like he definitely expects stuff but I know if I were to quit track tomorrow or even if I were to drop out of school you know, I'm sure they wouldn't be happy about it but they would accept it. So that was a huge turning point in my mind, and I was just like, "wow." I mean sometimes it's just so hard to accept but, it, it makes me feel better to know that they're still there for me even if I lose or if I fail a class...

VIKING: I didn't let anybody influence my decision [during recruiting]. I mean my parents didn't care where I went, they said, "as long as you're happy." [...] they never once said, "Don't go here, don't go here." Never once. That's why I knew that this is a decision that I get to make. And it feels good.

AMANI: I think family's huge. I have a great family life. A great, you know, all of us are very very close, and always knowing that the others are supporting them, always knowing that you can always call them and talk to them whenever, and they're always there to love you and to listen to you, to congratulate you, or to bring you back up. Um, knowing that you always have that support, you know.

The impact living in an autonomy-supportive environment has on people's sense of autonomy has been noted in other research as well (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Standage et al., 2003). It has been demonstrated that individuals who feel supported in making their

own decisions are less likely to believe that others are manipulating their behaviors and are more likely to take responsibility for their actions (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Standage et al., 2003). Environments that support individual's engagement in autonomous behaviors have also been shown to enhance their development of self-determined motivation for activities within that environment (Standage et al., 2003).

As the student-athletes in this study discussed, family plays an important role when it comes to developing decision-making ability. Parents who allow their children to do tasks they are capable of doing assist their children in feeling independent, autonomous, and competent (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989). Such children develop a sense of autonomy over their lives and are more likely to believe they have control over their behaviors than children who believe their actions are due to coercion (Myers, 2001). As Myers (2001) notes, children who are "given *control* over their lives become motivated and self-confident; those with little control tend to see themselves as helpless and incompetent" (p. 141).

When parents do everything for their children (to the extent that the children remain dependent on their parents even through adulthood), these children may actually begin to fear autonomy and believe that they should allow others to take care of them and make important decision for them as well (Kruger, 1991). This fear of autonomy can create obvious problems when it comes to functioning in the real world since individuals who are not supported in creating an autonomous view of themselves then begin to rely on other people to initiate activities, to assess their level of success, and to prove their self worth (Krueger, 1991, 1988). Hence, athletes who look to significant others (i.e. parents, coaches) to gauge their own self-worth or who adopt significant others' beliefs and

values without exploring their own identity are at risk for developing a dependent personality. It has been noted that relationships “characterized by either an excessive need for closeness that threatens independence or an excessive need for autonomy that prevents emotional connectedness” puts individuals “at risk for problems both within and beyond the relationship” (Hodges, Finnegan, & Perry, 1999, p.737). This could include coaches who take advantage of athletes’ dependency on them. Many people who have not been supported in their autonomous identity development would not reach the level of success that the student-athletes in the current study have; therefore, it makes sense that these athletes felt supported by their families to make their own decisions.

Component 6: Earned Personal Autonomy

Many philosophers believe that all human beings, regardless of social status, have a right to personal autonomy (Friedman, 2003). However, some of the student-athletes in this study felt that personal autonomy was something they had to earn. They felt that they could have greater choice and control in their lives if they gained the trust of others, proved their responsibility, performed successfully, and were prepared.

Trust and responsibility. When asked what it would take to increase the level of choice he experienced, one senior golfer noted:

SETH: *It would take coach giving us more freedom, I mean he should expect us to want to get better on our own not just try to make us. He should maybe give us more freedom and hope that we want to be better ourselves and not just depend on him to make us practice.*

One athlete discussed his dislike of having to get up early every morning and check in with the strength and conditioning coaches. He felt freshmen had to check-in to prove they were responsible enough to get up to go to class. He believed that if the

coaches thought he was responsible, then he (as well as all of the other freshmen) would not have to check in. He noted that the only way to get out of having to check in was to obey the coaches for his first year, thus proving this responsibility and gaining greater control:

If I continue to do that this year, the thing I hate most-checking in-I won't have to do it next year. So, I think it will [change]. And you got to show you're responsible for them to let you move off campus, so, I think I've shown that too.

Proving responsibility was also at the heart of mandatory study hall. As this athlete noted, once you prove yourself, the decision as to when and where to study should be yours:

REBECCA: *If you prove yourself I don't think you should have to do [study hall] the whole year. But, your first semester is crucial, that's pretty much where you define how you're gonna study and, you know, you're gonna learn from it either way. So I don't think I should've had to put in all my hours the second semester.*

Performance. Several of the student-athletes in this study noted the influence their performance had on the degree of autonomy they experienced. Many believed that the amount of respect they garnered increased when they performed well. In turn, because of this increased respect, they would be more likely to be listened to and also perceived themselves as having greater control:

It means more because I'm successful, more successful. Like I've had some type of success and that means more to [my coach]. I've felt this, I think I've probably felt this way all along, but the more you get to know somebody and the more, I don't know, the more better-the more passes [the university's quarterback] completes, the more he'll have a say on what passes to throw, the more the coach will listen to him and be like, "yeah, that might be a good idea." Like our coach doesn't regard our opinion as being that good, he never really asks us for our opinion and what we want to do...

If you're not playing, yes, you still have a voice because you're a year older and in the program longer and you've gotten a little better and your relationships have grown, but um, you're not going to receive that immediate respect [if you're not playing]. Whereas people might hear what you say, they might not listen, so there's kind of a difference.

A student-athlete's status as a walk-on athlete as opposed to a scholarship player may also impact the respect he is given:

You get a lot less respect being a walk-on. I remember my freshman year, I don't think it's so much like this anymore but I remember when I first walked on and other guys wouldn't talk to you the same. They wouldn't you know, it's like, "ah walk-on, y'all don't have to do anything" and they kind of disrespect you just to, the point is they're more athletic and they've got more opportunities coming out of high school than you.

As this athlete stated, athletes have to demonstrate their capabilities to gain some control:

As far as like control, I think it's kind of limited, I guess, um...right now I am a freshman so that, and, I guess you kind of like have to build your history and build your credibility as [an athlete].

Preparation. Being prepared was another way that student-athletes felt they could earn autonomy. That is, the more they did what they needed to do, the more control they perceived to have over the outcome:

TYLER: *I think control kind of comes from preparation, 'cause you're obviously going to be in control in situations you've already prepared for, you've already done everything you can that kind of leads up to that point...*

COUGAR: *The reason I didn't play as much as I did was because I procrastinated and didn't learn my stuff, so that's all my fault. They told me I could play my freshman year if I learned my stuff, so they stayed to their word on that.*

Several athletes noted that if they wanted to have more autonomy in their lives they would have to earn the right to do so. Seemingly, it was coaches who held the athletes' rights to make decisions until they proved they were responsible enough to handle the decision-making on their own. Sometimes the athletes' abilities to experience greater control were constrained by their own perceptions of what it took to have their opinion matter to both coaches and teammates.

Summary of Personal Autonomy

In this section, student-athletes' perceptions of personal autonomy were discussed. For these athletes, personal autonomy was represented by the fact that they felt they had the ultimate choice when it came to making decisions, controlling reactions, and even within the constraints of non-autonomous situations. There were also many factors that influenced student-athletes' perceptions of personal autonomy. The first, and most salient, was that of identity development. Student-athletes recognized that once they knew who they were and what they truly wanted, they were able to make decisions for themselves based on this. The literature on autonomy strongly indicates that this is a central-if not defining-characteristic of autonomy (Christman, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 2002; Friedman, 2003; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). That is, for a behavior to be autonomous, it has to have been reflected on as being a part of one's identity and something that is truly and desired (Christman, 2004; Friedman, 2003; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000).

The majority of the other the sub-components were also linked to identity; but since very few of the athletes were able to consciously link these components together, their perceptions of autonomy are represented as independent sub-components. In light of understanding the developmental nature of autonomy and the results of previous research, I considered confidence, experience, expectations, and autonomy support as being intertwined with identity development. (Baxter-Magolda, 1999; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Standage et al., 2003) For example, without having had certain experiences, the athletes would not know what they were capable of or what they truly needed or wanted in each specific situation. It is through these experiences that individuals can develop their identity. Similarly, confidence increased when the athletes realized the extent of their

capabilities and when they increased their knowledge of or experience in a situation. Additionally, it is unlikely that the student-athletes would have developed expectations and goals for themselves had they not identified what was important to them. These goals and expectations thus helped them form ideas about who they were and what they wanted. Finally, having others who supported their decision-making capabilities assisted these student-athletes in developing identities as autonomous individuals, able to make choices for themselves.

The last sub-component, having to earn personal autonomy, is one that warrants further discussion as well. Several student-athletes felt that they had to earn the ability to make decisions for themselves and to take control over their lives. Interestingly, the philosophy literature suggest that human beings should never have to earn autonomy; it should be a right accorded to them out of respect (Friedman, 2003). Friedman (2003) notes that, historically, groups have failed to respect others' capacity for making decisions and have taken away their right to make autonomous decisions (e.g., women's right to vote or to have abortions). She writes that "Respecting someone's autonomy means not interfering unduly with her choices or behavior (assuming she is not harming others). It means giving her the freedom to choose and act unimpeded by such hindrances as deception, manipulation, and coercion" (Friedman, 2003, p.73).

I would argue that because of the nature of collegiate sport, many situations do arise where student-athletes' rights to autonomy are not respected, and they are expected to prove their ability to handle decision-making responsibilities. The most apparent example of others' not respecting athletes' right to autonomy is requiring they go to study hall. The general student population has no one telling them when or where to study- they

make the choice to do so on their own, taking into consideration a plethora of external influences. Collegiate student-athletes often have a set number of hours that they must study and usually a set location where they have to do their studying.

Both non-athletes and student-athletes must achieve a minimum grade point average to remain at the university or to avoid probation. Additionally, student-athletes who do not meet the minimum GPA requirements set by the NCAA will not be eligible to compete. Therefore, rather than running the risk of having ineligible athletes, many athletic departments choose to control the study habits of their athletes. While it is true that many departments require study hall as a way to teach time management skills and to ensure continued academic success, student-athletes do not have the autonomy to make the decision when and where to study.

Friedman (2003) argues that when a person has not yet developed the ability to make competent decisions, then “respecting her autonomy calls for treating her in ways that promote the development of autonomy competency, for example, encouraging her to explore what she wants and supporting her initiatives” (p. 73). There are many layers to this argument; my point here is not to debate the value or rationale behind mandatory study hall, but rather to illuminate the limits placed on student-athletes’ ability to be truly autonomous given the constraints of collegiate sport. Just the fact that student-athletes are aware that they have to earn autonomy through academic and athletic performance fuels the recent debate as to whether rules restricting the behaviors of collegiate athletes are in the best interests of the athletes or of those in power (Brown, 2004).

Theme 2: Lack of Autonomy

I feel like I'm part of the system I suppose. I don't feel like I'm controlled. I don't feel that way, I feel like it's a system that you work through to get to where you want to go. I don't think it's like control "control" like an army or anything... (CHARLES)

Sub-Theme 1: Pressure, Obligation, and Compliance

While student-athletes were able to talk about decisions they made and control they had over their lives, they were also able to discuss times when they felt they had little choice and control. The times when student-athletes' felt pressured or obligated to comply with requests or engage in activities were related to: 1) coach control, 2) academics, 3) sponsorship, 4) power dynamics, and 5) not recognizing individual differences.

Component 1: Coach Control

It was often the case that when student-athletes felt they had little autonomy, it was their coach that had the control to make (or strongly influence) their decisions. Coach control resulted from sport not being a democracy, the coach not trusting his/her players, and the coach having a sole focus on players' performance:

Sport is not a democracy. A few student-athletes in the study noted that sport was not a democracy, that it was the coach who made the decision for the group.

It's not a democracy on how you, if you're gonna change, you know it's kinda just what you have to do if you're gonna play. So yeah, I mean I think that virtually every decision with [my sport] has been made for me pretty much.

I mean [the coach] asked us but it was kind of one of those questions where the answer was "yes" no matter what you say...

Lack of coach's trust. As previously mentioned, several student-athletes felt that they had to earn their autonomy and prove their ability to make appropriate decisions.

Having to earn autonomy was echoed by the fact that some student-athletes felt their coaches were controlling because they did not trust the student-athletes' decision-making abilities or because the coach treated them like children incapable of making decisions:

[Our coach is] insecure. He's afraid of losing his job. He's afraid we'll mess up. 'Cause we're "immature" kids... 'cause we're college students. 'Cause he doesn't trust us.....He likes to... He likes to show his power I guess is his thing, feel powerful.

[Our coach] tries to control everything about our lives really, which I understand most of it I mean, like I understand, like he'll try to control our advising which I understand he wants us to get advising and everything but we're all 18 to 22 and every student on campus has to get advised. I mean if everybody else can do it I think we're responsible enough to do it too without somebody on our throats all the time. I mean he's really controlling about everything like that, he really treats us like we're kids I think because, that's a great example, I mean there's nobody living in [a residence hall] who, there's nobody over them telling them to get advised but they do it and they register for classes that's just the way it is.

They [make me check in because they] don't think I'm responsible or something like that. That's probably, yeah, because of previous players' reactions or what they have done they kind of punish the next group for what they do.

Focus on Performance. Three student-athletes in this study also felt their coach was controlling because he was solely concerned with his athletes' performance. Note that all of the other student-athletes in the study discussed how their coaches were also concerned about their success outside of sport. As these athletes noted, their coach's sole focus on their performance created feelings of being controlled:

During our off season if I really enjoy [playing another sport] and I go out and [do that], I mean that's okay because I've been doing it my whole life or whatever but he's telling me I can't. He's not really thinking about me at all, he's not thinking about the fact that I enjoy [playing that sport] he's just thinking about, "oh if he gets hurt then he can't play for me next year." I don't know I mean it's just...after everything just seeing about how, the negative side of everything for so long I just don't listen, that's terrible to say but I just don't.

Another athlete said:

It's about playing good [in my sport]. That's what it comes back to. He's scared,

paranoid, thinking about him keeping his job. The only time he does things for people is for them to play better and if they're better at [their sport] then he gets his job.

He continued:

He has to control about every situation. He has to know where you are, what's going on. [...] Everything's on his tight schedule, 4:30 to 5:30, 5:30 to 6:00, you know, everything is on an itinerary [.....] He needs to have that, the feeling, the feeling of power, of having control.

Component 2: Academics

The student-athletes were split as to how much autonomy they had in their academic lives. Several athletes noted that they could always choose how much to study and how much effort to put into their schoolwork. Others discussed experiences in which they felt like they had little control, such as in choosing classes or when assignments were due. Note that these experiences can occur for non-athletes as well. Some athletes felt that just going to college, either to be eligible to compete at this level or to succeed in the real world, was something they had to do rather than something they wanted to do:

REBECCA: *I just feel like I have to take certain classes, academically. Like I wish I could be more free to take the ones I want to take.*

CHARLES: *Academically you've got less control because when it comes to academics you can't tell your teacher, "I want to hand this homework in a month late."*

When asked if there were any other times when he felt pressured or obligated, this athlete responded:

TYLER: *I think school is the hardest thing for me just like because it's like one of those things where you have to, you have to do school in order to do what you want to do, whether it be, you know, you have to do school to get that job that you want or to do school so you can you know be eligible to play. I've always thought, ever since I got here, when I was a walk-on, I was obligated, I was obligated to go to school because my parents were paying for it, not necessarily because I wanted to, but 'cause I respect them and they were paying for my school. And now that school pays for it I am respecting them, so I am obligated to go to class to fulfill all my scholarship, or all my school along with football...*

Another football player felt similarly in that he believed that even though he did not necessarily want to be there, college was necessary to achieve things he wanted:

COUGAR: *Yeah, so I can have my own life and not have to depend on nobody, I'll get my own education, I'll get my own job, and just do my own thing.*

Component 3: Sponsorship

The idea of being sponsored by a specific athletic apparel company was brought up by three individuals in this study. While they had different reactions to having to wear a certain brand, they had all gotten used to it and understood that it comes down to money. They noted that because [company A] was sponsoring their university and they were given shoes, uniforms, and other apparel, they were expected to only wear this brand. While they felt like they should only be expected to wear [company A's] gear in competition, and to some extent in practice, they felt that their choice of apparel should not be restricted outside of the competitive environment:

With so many rules it's just like, I mean we just sit there like zombies, "okay I got to study, now." "Okay, I won't wear [company B] in [the dining hall]." [.....] I can see like, ok at [competition] you can't wear [company B] and stuff like that, but I mean come on now, like in the weight room and stuff like that? Everybody can't wear [company A] every day. We're not provided clothes every day for practice. [.....] It's just stupid. I'm sorry it's stupid. Like everything is about money and tradition here and it's just like, I mean it's just stupid. And they're, "well we don't want to get our money taken away" or something like that. I'm like, "But we're at lunch. Why can't we wear [company B] or something like that?" I mean that's just, so they're saying if you have money to buy [company B] then you can buy [company A]. I'm like, "what if you don't want to?" Everybody should be, see this is just...

{INTERVIEWER: It sounds like you're really frustrated by this.}

No, I'm not frustrated. It's just like it will never change and I just think it's stupid. [.....] it's just dumb how we have to change everything about ourselves just to be a [student-athlete at this University]. You know, you can't wear certain clothes, you can't, you can't do this, you can't do that. I don't know if a lot of, it doesn't seem to me that other, like I know some other people, that they're not as strict about all this and that, but it might just be because we're a bigger university, and that's the only thing I can figure out why it's so like that.

Another athlete had similar feelings, noting also the difference in treatment between the male and female athletes:

When we come [to the academic center], we're not supposed to wear anything competing with [company A]. When we go into [the dining hall] or any athletic facility, we can't wear anything but [company A]. I feel like if it's on your own time, if you're not at [the competition] or representing yourself at like a place like that [...] it shouldn't really be a problem. [...] They let the boys do whatever they want, like they can wear any [brand], and um I didn't really like that too much. I was just like, that's kind of weird...

When asked if there had ever been decisions that have been made for her, another athlete noted having to wear [company A]:

Like wearing [company A] and so I felt like, like my brother used to work for [company B] so all I had was [company B] and all I can wear is [company A]. I mean I don't mind, I like [company A] and I like wearing that stuff but I had to buy stuff because like- I don't want to complain 'cause we get so much more athletic apparel than most schools but at the same time I didn't have enough to wear every single day of the week. Um, like this year like they just started doing our laundry so that helps a lot. Before that I was like, I can't go spend my own money just to practice, you know.

{INTERVIEWER: Well how does that make you feel that you have to wear a certain line of clothing?}

I like [company A], it's good. I think the reasons they have us wearing only [company A] are right, like they have a right to expect us to wear just that because I know that if they didn't give us all the stuff they give us we'd have to pay for that. And we wouldn't be able to have everything else that, that we're able to do. So, I mean that doesn't bother me [...]

She continued:

I could see if, and we do have like a, um, thing where if you can't where it's due to physical reasons like they'll let you wear other shoes or whatever, which is good. That would be the only problem I would have if it somehow harms your performance or whatever just because you have [company A] on, that wouldn't be right.

Component 4: Power Dynamics

The power dynamics that exist in collegiate sport, as well those that exist in larger society, can impact the choices of student-athletes. While issues of power are discussed later in greater detail, it is important to acknowledge how such dynamics can impact student-athletes' decisions and behaviors. That is, issues of power in sport and society

affected student-athletes' own sense of autonomy, and are often issues that individuals believe are out of their control. Some examples of power dynamics that emerged in the present interviews included: coach/athlete relationships, being in a "revenue-producing" sport, the consequences of their behavior, and scholarships.

Coach/athlete relationships. The relationship between athletes and their coaches is a good example of what is meant by power dynamics in sport. As noted by several athletes, coaches are authority figures, they are in charge, and when you're part of a team you listen to and agree with the coach. Hence, the coach has the power and the athlete must be subservient to that power:

I wish I stood up to coach a little bit more. But that's hard to do with coach, because he's your superior. I mean it's not easy to do.

I have to do what coach says, I have to do what coach tells me to do pretty much. It's not always what I want to do, it's what he wants us to do.

Having to do what [the coach] says. When you're part of a team you have to do, you have to listen to the guy in charge, even if you don't agree with what he says, you just have to do it, it's part of the game, it's part of being a team, it's about being part of the team.

As mentioned by several athletes, commitment to one's coach is demonstrated by doing what the coach says and not arguing with him/her:

If coach tells them something they don't talk back or argue or whatever. Or if they're committed they're going to do right then and there what he's telling you to do, the way that he telling you to do it. Some people that's not committed or that think they know everything, they still try to do it their way instead of the coach's way or something like that. Um...some players tend to talk down on their coach and you can tell they're not committed there when they talk down on their coach.

Revenue sports. Several of the student-athletes in this study recognized the power that "revenue" sports have. Sometimes this power was viewed negatively because of the stricter rules that athletes in revenue-producing sports perceived to be governing them.

Being in a revenue sport was also seen as impacting their behavior because of the increased expectations placed on student-athletes who are in a high caliber program. Also, being a revenue producing sport meant that the student-athletes were often in the spotlight and thus had to carefully watch their behaviors because of this popularity.

As noted by Jay, the rules of professional sport leagues are different. Because of these different rules, the options available to football players seeking to play in the NFL are limited. Draft rules are really only a concern of those in revenue-producing sports because very few of the non-revenue sports have professional leagues or rules that create this concern:

JAY: So many of the rules are so different in different sports, you know. That seems unfair in a lot of ways. You know for, for a basketball player who chooses to enter the NBA draft, as long as they don't sign with an agent, if they don't like their draft position they can come back to college and still play. In football once you declare the NFL, you're done, for good. You know, you make more money in basketball, you know

{INTERVIEWER: Why do you think there's that difference?}

JAY: [...] I think because of the spotlight put on football a lot of the rules are more strict. But yeah, I mean, to me that seems completely unfair.

When asked how his experiences differ from other athletes, Jay replied:

JAY: I think my experiences differ because this is one of the most major sports on campus. It's one of the most major sports in the country. [...] So I think my experiences differ because football is put under a spotlight, you know, on most campuses, and uh, so the rules and regulations differ for us than they do for students of other sports and anything we do gets pumped up, you know, and blown out of proportion a lot of times because of what sport we play and our role on campus and in raising money for the school.

One athlete in a non-revenue sport perceived the experience of revenue-producing athletes differently. Aniyah believed that athletes in revenue sports get away with more than those who are not bringing in money for the university. She explained her perception of why football and basketball participants can bend the rules and have special privileges:

ANIYAH: *The main ones, you know how like football and like basketball, how those men's athletic teams bring in so much more money than the women's athletic teams and uh, I guess, it has something to do with your sport, what sport you play, not necessarily, not, it's not always like women's or men's, just sometimes it's your sport. And track doesn't bring in a lot of money. Football on the other hand [does]. I guess you just have to accept it.*

Amani's experiences were consistent with Aniyah's perceptions. She noted that because they bring in money they are able to have greater perks than sports that maybe don't produce as many funds:

AMANI: *You almost take it for granted sometimes how much, how spoiled you are and how much you have given to you: the facilities, the people, the apparel that you get just because you play basketball and the publicity that you get, notoriety, everything that comes along with it, it's so much more than any other athlete.*

As mentioned, the student-athletes in revenue sports felt that they were held to higher expectations than other athletes and, in some cases, than non-athletes:

VIKING: *I guess just being in the caliber of program that I'm in, they expect you to attend class, they expect you to be out in the community and doing stuff, they expect you to sign autographs at the drop of a hat if someone asks you, no matter what you're doing. Um, you're expected to have like a lot of loyalty to everyone you're involved with, your teammates, your coaches, and even people here, just have the utmost respect for everyone. You know, people just view us in a different way and so we have to live up to that. It's hard sometimes, but it makes you a better person I think.*

{INTERVIEWER: How is it hard?}

VIKING: *'Cause there are just some things you just don't want to do all the time, you know. I mean, some meetings you don't want to go to, and some days you don't want to go to class, and that's what makes it hard.*

Because of these expectations and the attention derived from participating in a popular sport, many athletes in revenue sports behaved in ways they normally wouldn't choose to or, at the very least, felt they had to filter their behaviors because of these expectations:

VIKING: *Most people around here especially know who you are. You gotta watch everything you do, everything you say, how you act in public, and I think that's another key difference.*

COUGAR: *One lady talked to us from judicial affairs, they always talk to the freshmen, and she was like newspapers call their office everyday to see what an athlete has done to get into trouble. Are they in any trouble? They call especially for that. So I don't think that's right.*

Cougar continued:

COUGAR: *And the way that every time an athlete does something bad it makes headlines. Athlete get caught walking down the strip drinking it makes headlines, but if a regular student or anybody else get caught, it's small compared to what athletes go through [...] and I hate that.*

Thus, while many see athletes in “revenue” sports as having greater power, there are drawbacks to participating in high profile-sports, one of which is a decrease in autonomy.

Consequences. The student-athletes also understood that there would be consequences for their decisions, thus restricting their abilities to make truly autonomous choices. Hence, consequences may have been more powerful than the student-athletes' intrinsic desires:

SETH: *... like you have the choice not to be there but you don't really, the control definitely is more powerful. You always have a choice, but the consequences influence what you choose.*

{INTERVIEWER: The consequences?}

SETH: *Yeah. Like if you didn't ever come [to practice], I wouldn't do that in the first place, but it would show that you didn't really care about it to start with and you'd get kicked off the team or if say you skipped one day just 'cause you had other stuff to do, say you just skipped 'cause you didn't have a good reason or something like you're going to have to get up and run tomorrow, do stuff like that.*

ANIYAH: *Yeah I mean you will always have your choices, you're just going to have to deal with the consequences. But in my case, I feel like my choice is limited because I'm not going to probably do something crazy where I'm going to have to deal with all the crazy consequences. So in that aspect, yeah, my choice is limited.*

VIKING: *You have to practice everyday, you have to try to get better if you want to play, and obviously you're here to play so if you don't practice well and you don't want to be there all the time then you're not going to perform at your best at practice and then you're not going to play.*

REBECCA: *I mean pretty much everything I do I know there's a consequence. Like I know if I don't study I'm not going to do well and if I get a bad grade like, it's not the teacher's fault really, like I understand the consequences for my actions. So I mean I have control over what I do but at the same time if I don't do well-*

Scholarship. For some, the idea of having a scholarship that was renewed every year was very powerful. If the athletes felt that having their school paid for or that continuing in sport was important, then they would have to engage in certain behaviors to keep the scholarship:

VIKING: *You have to earn your scholarship. That's a big thing. I mean I think it's good because it keeps you focused. That you, that scholarship isn't guaranteed, it's renewed every year, it's not a guarantee. You know, you have to earn it.*

ANIYAH: *Scholarship, if I stop [participating in my sport] I lose it, so that's a big thing. [......] If you would ever consider quitting or just, I think scholarship will definitely help in making you run more, influence your decisions more. That's like a huge role, 'cause if you're not getting a scholarship, you're not doing well, you want to quit then it's a lot easier, but if you're on scholarship then, you know, it's easier to just go along with it.*

TYLER: *It's just how you carry yourself from then on out because you know you have a scholarship, you kind of belong in a sense to the [university] and that's kind of them making decisions for you. They can tell you to go to study hall, they can tell you to go to class, they can tell you a lot more things,*

He continued:

TYLER: *I am obligated to go to class to fulfill all my scholarship, or all my school along with football.*

One athlete in particular had strong feelings about his scholarship, noting how he felt that it was used as a means of controlling behaviors. He also said he felt it wasn't worth all of the service that was expected for the price of the scholarship:

The worst thing about a scholarship, about my scholarship I would say would be that, it seems almost like that people try to hold that over your head to uh, to have unfair treatment

{INTERVIEWER: *What do you mean by that?*}

Like, NCAA or like the coaches, you know, will say, "well they can do this, this and this" and you have to give them so much because they're giving you a scholarship. And that's

nice, you know I mean that's, I don't have to worry about buying books and I can go to school and eventually get a degree, but I really don't see scholarships being worth all that much. I mean a lot of people can afford to go to college this day and age with financial aid, grants, loans. I mean your scholarship's not worth all that much really.

He continued by saying:

A lot of the things that we're required to do in [our sport], out of season, in season. I mean the 20 hours a week, plus, you know travel and all that stuff, I think some of that is above and beyond the call of duty. You know some of the training requirements out of season are above and beyond the call of duty. Things like that, you know, uh, it's, it's almost like people can hold that over your head because they've given you this, so now you have to give them whatever they want.

{INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that you have to because you are on scholarship?} You do, unless you are willing to lose that. And some might take that chance, you know, because I mean, scholarships are renewed year to year, you know, so they don't have to renew your scholarship to the next year or whatever, so I mean, basically you're bound to that service unless you are willing to take that chance

When asked how he felt about having his scholarship renewed yearly, another replied:

Um, it gives you a lot to think about. Makes you really want to, if you like doing it, it makes you want to continue to work hard and keep it.

When asked how she felt about her level of scholarship Rebecca responded:

REBECCA: ...I definitely feel pressure, like I need to get a job this summer so I can pay for my rent and I want to do as much as I can so when I'm competing and I don't do as well as I want to I feel like, "well there goes my chance to earn a better scholarship." And I guess the same thing goes with academics, if I don't get a 4.0 this semester then I'm not going to get as good of a scholarship. So I'm definitely motivated to, you know, get the best scholarship that I can, um, just 'cause I don't want my parents to have to pay so much. And I mean, ahh, I feel so lucky to be here and I just feel like I have to do my best so that I can pay for it.

Existing literature has examined the impact scholarships have on student-athletes' sense of autonomy. Researchers suggest that student-athletes' perceptions of their scholarship as controlling can either undermine athletes' sense of personal control, and ultimately decrease their sense of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Weiss &

Chaumeton, 1992). From the athletes' discussion of their scholarships, most were content with the fact that some, if not all of their school was being paid for. Although they noted that each year they had to earn their scholarship-essentially performing or behaving to a set standard-most accepted the power of the scholarship in dictating certain behaviors. Few saw their scholarship as extremely controlling, seemingly because the benefits of being a collegiate athlete outweighed the negatives. One athlete did vocalize the fact that scholarships were controlling and not really worth the service that is expected in return. His discussion of the controlling nature of scholarships provides some support for previous research showing that some athletes saw their scholarship as controlling (Ryan, 1977, 1980).

Component 5: Not Recognizing Individual Differences

Some student-athletes felt less autonomous when they perceived that others did not recognize the fact that people are different. For some, it was bothersome when choices were being made for them without recognizing individual differences. Others disagreed with the stereotypes that came with being a student-athlete and the assumption that all student-athletes are the same.

In sport. Sport was one area where some athletes felt their coaches did not recognize individual differences:

[The coach] told us [what we needed to do and if we didn't listen] we were gonna have to run. Just, I mean I think if somebody thinks [they know] the play for them then I think they need to [do] it. I mean I don't think he should tell us, I don't think there should be punishments because doing what you think you should do and so that's definitely making a decision for, I mean he decided for us pretty quickly there.

Another athlete noted:

I think coach sees it as one way to do stuff. I think people practice differently than others.

One athlete noted how she reacts differently in pressure situations than do her teammates and thus needs a different style of coaching:

[My event coach] doesn't get excited, he doesn't get angry, which I feel that if I feared him a little bit more then I'd feel pressure to actually do it. [.....] Which is weird because the rest of the [people in my event] do better in practice and less well in meets. So I don't know, I need to figure out somehow to get excited to practice. I love practice and everything but I just don't have that extra energy...

In society. While several athletes felt a direct impact of others not recognizing individual differences in sport, few discussed this notion in the larger society. Viking did discuss this and noted that society has an idea of what is “normal” but many people fail to recognize that not all people fit the “norm”. When her opinions differed from what everyone else thought, she was less likely to stand up and voice her views on the subject. Also, when people judged others or when they didn't recognize individual differences, she felt powerless and excluded:

VIKING: *People telling me I'm wrong or “that's not right”, or “I don't know why you feel that way.” Just because I don't think the same way other people think it's not right, 'cause it might not be the “norm” or, and I'm not saying that happens in every situation but it happens and it's made me a little bit more reserved, it kinda keeps me to myself.*

She continued:

VIKING: *Because there's a lot of people here who's living in the same world you're living in and doing different things and they have things they want to do and society has things that are normal and what's not. And, just like you feel powerless [.....] And so I think life, life in general can make you feel powerless.*

In school. School was another area where the athletes felt that recognizing individual differences was important. Several athletes noted that many coaches and athletic department personnel failed to recognize individual differences when they imposed various academic requirements:

DARIA: *I need to get 8 hours [of study hall] in a week, you know, so um, I think that was*

kind of a waste of time, still now I do, just because everybody's not the same, everybody can't study. Most people come [to the academic center] just so they can get some time in. It's not about studying. Everybody can't study the same, just like they tell you what you can have, what you can't. You can't listen to headphones when you study. Everybody needs, maybe you need that to relax you while you're studying, or you can understand stuff better if you have the sound drowned out, you know, other noise. It's just weird how everything's so organized, and they tell you how to do things, when really that's not how, that's just what people think people should be, and it's not always.

She continued by saying:

DARIA: *I have a very individual process. Like I just don't, I'm always out of the norm. 'Cause it's like we're athletes, why even say you can't drink water somewhere? Like seriously. Like, if you see an athlete, you always see them most of the time with a water bottle or something like this, especially track athletes. We have to have water. We secrete water when we work out so bad. Okay I've fallen out so many times because I've been dehydrated and if we, we have to be [at the academic center] 8 hours a week, and during those 8 hours we can't drink water, don't you think we're lessening our work? But they're saying we're drinking like, we go to the water fountains and something like that. But then we'll have to check out of the computer lab to drink the water.*

One athlete believed that if coaches recognized individual differences then not all freshmen would have to check-in before they went to class:

Not all people are not responsible, some people are responsible and will get up and go to class. And that's kind of the reason we have to check in, trying to make people responsible for getting up and stuff. And so that's why I don't like that because I don't see no point.

Rebecca said that she had to continue to attend study hall because the coaches didn't take into consideration individual situations:

REBECCA: *I hated going to study hall, that was one thing. I didn't feel like I needed to, I got a 4.0 my first semester and I still had to go to study hall my second semester. I was mad about that...*

Recognition of individual differences. As previously stated, when the student-athletes perceived that others did not recognize individual differences, they had a negative experience and they felt their choices were limited. However, some athletes did note that their coaches recognized that not everyone is the same. When this was the case,

the athletes trusted their coaches more because they felt like their coaches cared and understood their individual situation. These athletes also felt that their performance benefited because their coaches took into consideration individual differences:

Well the reason I say [I trust my coach and believe he has my best interest in mind] is because, when I got here I thought that he was just going to put, like each section like as far as like, you have your 400 meter runners, y'all do the same stuff together. 800 meter runners, you all do the same exact stuff as far as workouts, as far as meets, you all run the same events and y'all are going to do the same thing. Well, what comforted me the most about him was, he's like individual, like he is going to do what's going to be the best for you, not for anybody else, and everybody's body is different, everything varies from one person to the next. You can all be doing the same event, but not have the same workout. Everything is separate, from, that's what I mean like he cares about you, you know.

Last year, when these new coaches came in, like I already knew what wasn't going to work for me, what kind of workouts, um, like too much of a certain kind of workout, eventually it's just going to lead to more stress fractures, 'cause I'd been through that path. So like anytime I felt like we were given too much [.....] I had to tell them that I had to cut back. And they talked to the trainers so they knew about my history and stuff like that so they cut back for me, which is good because if I had just gone along with what they thought would have been good for me as an athlete, it wasn't for my individual situation.

She also noted:

This year we all met as a group, including with the weight coaches, [.....]so it's more individualized this year, which I think is awesome, and it helps, it's been helping a whole lot too.

Sub-Theme 2: Acceptance

Many of the student-athletes in this study accepted their lack of autonomy for several reasons. Some student-athletes accepted that lacking choice and control was part of the lifestyle and they had gotten used to it. They accepted a regimented schedule, sport as a priority, and having to commit to and compromise for others. Others accepted their lack of autonomy because they had made the original choice to be a student-athlete -- they had “signed the line” and thus were committed to being a student-athlete. While

acceptance could then be considered autonomous to a certain degree, many of the actions that they were then required to engage in were not fully integrated into their sense of self, therefore, decreasing the degree of autonomy which they were able to experience.

Finally, several student-athletes in the study accepted their lack of autonomy because they felt powerless to change it and thus felt it unimportant to focus on and worry about. This included lack of control over the coach, the system, and injury.

Component 1: Lifestyle

Student-athletes have a very regimented lifestyle compared to the majority of the collegiate population. They have a strict schedule of classes and practice, and then they must find time for studying and a social life, all of which takes a toll on them mentally and physically. Because they have little free time, they often find themselves having to choose between several available options. As these athletes noted, part of being a “student-athlete” is that you must make sport a priority. Often, athletes accepted having to prioritize sport over other aspects of their lives because they are committed to their coach and to their teammates and thus have to make compromises and sacrifices for them.

Schedule. The student-athletes in this study accepted their daily schedules, which often included mandatory activities:

JAY: Obviously [non-athletes] don't have the same amount of, or the same type of stresses in their lives, you know, dealing with success and failures in sports and pressures and expectations in sports. I won't say that that's better or worse but uh it's just different in the fact that they just have to worry about going to school and getting good grades and putting their efforts in that, whereas we have to split time.

SAM: I think life as a college athlete is a lot harder than people think that it is, I think that the common perception that, oh we have all this great stuff, we get all the free clothes, we get everything, we get the [academic center] to go study in, and I mean that's

true but I think that we definitely put in a lot more than most people 'cause, normally we have eight o'clocks every morning. We got 8-12 is class, then practice golf from probably 1:30 to five or six even sometimes seven, so it's a pretty full day then we go home and study then it's time to get up and do it again. I mean, I think there's a lot of requirements that you have to meet, a lot of things you have to do.

Sam continued by stating:

SAM: *It's okay with me 'cause I enjoy it. I'm not bothered by it, I mean it just becomes a way of life.*

Sport as a priority. Because of the demanding schedule that athletes choose to accept, they are forced into prioritizing what is important to them. In many cases, athletes must put more time and effort into sport than into school or their social lives. For some athletes, this may be an autonomous choice because they deeply value their sport performance as being integral to who they are. However, student-athletes who value education or a social life may feel pressured to prioritize sport, and even though sport may be important to them to some extent, if they are coerced into prioritizing sport this decision lacks autonomy:

CHARLES: *There's some golfers that believe that we do too many hours, but if they think that then they shouldn't be in this school. That's what I think. I think if you're here to play your sport you should just grin and bear what you've got to do.*

SETH: *I don't like it. I mean 'cause, like they want your sport to be your first priority, which it is but, like, sometimes it's too much of a priority.*

JAY: *I think it's an awkward balance, you know. You try to put as much as you can into [sport and school] but it's sort of awkward you know. You can't say it's 50/50 because at some times your sport is going to be more important to you than your schoolwork and at other times it's going to be vice versa.*

SAM: *I mean if I have a big test on Tuesday and we don't get done playing golf on Monday until 7:00, if I was a normal student there's not a chance I'd start studying at 8:00 or 8:30 I mean I'd be studying all afternoon and so you definitely put golf over school.*

{INTERVIEWER: *And how do you feel about that?*}

SAM: *It's just what we have to do I mean there's really no way around that and I think*

that's part of being a student-athlete. I mean that's why we're not just students and a lot of people don't take that, like I was talking about those stereotypes a lot of people don't take that into consideration when they make those judgments about us.

TYLER: *You have to make a lot of sacrifices like on the, social level 'cause you can't do as much as you want. Academics kind of sit hard because you don't have as much time as a normal student would have. Just as soon as they're done with classes they'll have a whole afternoon to study and stuff like that and then they can go out. Whereas you know we have football and we have to eat, and then we can, you know, at night we have to do our studying and we're so tired by the time we have to go to bed, and then we have to do it all over again. So a lot of social and academic things are kind of like hindered because you do so much, it's like a full-time job being an athlete.*

Commitment and compromise. For many, being a student-athlete was about commitment and compromise. Many of the student-athletes in this study felt that they did have some autonomy in their lives; yet the degree to which they had choices and had control over their behaviors was restricted by what they had committed to do. They had accepted the fact that they “signed the line” and in essence turned over the decision making to those in power. For some this emerged as relational autonomy because it appeared to be something they wanted to do. The experiences of the student-athletes presented here represent more of a forced choice, one they had to accept if they wanted to be a collegiate student-athlete:

Being an athlete, I mean there's some things you gotta do. You might wake up and don't feel like practicing, but you gotta go to practice, you got no control over that. You either practice or get kicked off.

{INTERVIEWER: And how do you feel about that?}

I mean you signed the line, that's your commitment, that's your responsibility. You can't be mad, be like, “Oh my God, this sucks” you can't do that. You signed it, you did it, it's your responsibility now.

She continued by remarking:

Just because, you're a student-athlete, there's a whole different ballgame, like you have to do some stuff. You're not always in control. They own you, once you get here you work for them. (laughs) Basically.

One athlete noted how this sense of obligation and commitment was so powerful that it affected most of the decisions she made throughout college:

When I made the decision to stay here my last two [years] I felt, I felt obligated because I knew my teammates understand and my coaches did and there was so many other factors that just made me feel like I had to be here.

{INTERVIEWER: How did that affect you?}

It sucks but I mean, I really, I haven't really made a decision totally for me in a long time so I guess I'm used to it.

{INTERVIEWER: Well how do you feel about that?}

I mean I know sometimes my time's running out when I have to answer to people, I'm going to be on my own and like [I think that's why I do some of the things that I do] but right now I think this process is just a stage in your life where it's like a whole, maybe your last year in high school on through all 4 years in college is like a learning experience and preparation for the real world when you have to go out and get a job and not everybody respects who you are and nobody knows who you are for once. So I mean, it's a good learning experience, how I feel about, it sucks right now, but I think in the end it'll all work out the way I want it to.

She continued:

Like right now, I'm just kinda like out of the loop, I don't really have a part, I just want to get out of school. Right now I'm just kind of living day by day, whatever happens, happens. I mean I don't know if that's good or bad, that's just kinda the attitude I have towards things. I mean I still have goals and things that I want to accomplish but I mean I'm not in such a hurry to do everything now.

Similar to this athlete, other athletes made sacrifices because had they made the choice to be a college athlete and be committed to whatever that entailed.

It feels different but I feel like over time I'll get used to it because it's the life that you chose. You chose to be a college athlete so you have to really deal with it, because being a college athlete they're pretty much doing everything, everything's paid for, you get a bowl check and stuff. So I think it's just something you have to deal with.

It's double-sided. I mean, you're allowed some perks that everyone else doesn't have, you know, especially with the men. But then again, you're missing out on some of the things that [non-athletes] get to experience. So I think it's, it's just a tradeoff. It's a sacrifice that you have to choose to make before you enter college and it becomes natural.

Committing to being a collegiate student-athlete also meant having to compromise for the team, again limiting one's choice of behaviors:

I feel like sometimes I want to do what I want to do, but I think I've been doing pretty good on compromising. I still think in a team sport you have to do certain things just because that's the way it is. You're part of the team no matter.

Sometimes you can do what you want and sometimes you're binded by what you have to do. Like you have to go do your [community service] or sometimes you can just do whatever you want to do...you never have full control when you're on a team.

The strength of athletes' commitment to their team and coaches emerged in other studies as well. In a study examining intense loyalty in collegiate sport, Adler and Adler (1988) found that many athletes did indeed feel controlled and powerless. In their study, athletes felt the coaches used their power to encourage the athletes to identify with the goals of the team so that the athletes would internalize them, and thus believe their actions are important to them. This internalization of goals then led to increased athlete loyalty to the team and to the coach and a greater likelihood of acceptance of the coaches' authority. Part of the explanation the authors gave for the athletes' submission to the coaches' power was athletes' extreme commitment to the team. As one athlete stated when talking about signing his letter of intent, "When you sign it's almost like you're taking an oath that you're gonna follow this man, do what he tell you for four years, play on his team. It feels like signing your life away" (Adler & Adler, 1988, pp. 409-410). This statement is similar to Viking's belief that once she "signed the line" she was making a commitment to all that being a student-athlete entailed. This commitment then affected the student-athletes' decisions, in essence, constraining their ability to be fully autonomous.

Component 2: Powerless to Change It

Several athletes recognized that there are many situations that they had no control over, and even if they wanted to change things, they couldn't. Therefore, they just

accepted things the way they were and didn't focus too much on what they couldn't

control:

The first couple years it was hard but then you just kinda get used to it and then you try to work for that extra playing time but you're still not seeing some and it's like, by the 4th year it's like you know, whatever. You just keep playing the way you want to play and keep practicing the way you know how to practice and maybe it will work out.

I'm still caught in this rut that nobody cares how I feel that I really don't waste the breath to say it because [the coach is] not, she's gonna listen and be like, "that's ok", she's going to act like that for about a week and then it's going to wear off. So that's what I think about before I say anything, if it's only going to happen for a week then what's the point of going through all that.

There's a lot of stereotypes that go with being a student-athlete and so some people they don't want to talk to us and you can sit down and if I have something, you know something that says [this university] on, and somebody sits beside me you know they might not want to talk to me and if I say something they may just totally act like I don't exist. And some people look at it a little, I mean the opposite of that, so I don't think I have that much control over that because if somebody is gonna judge me because I am an athlete here then I can't help that, I mean that's out of my control, that's kind of how I look at that.

So like you've got certain coaches while you're here, they're decided for you, you don't get to pick them, whereas in golf you're used to going and picking your coaches. Um, that's definitely a disadvantage at the start, just having going to a new coach. I mean I can go back to my old coach when I'm at home but I'm here for 8 months out of 12 months so you know, I only get to see my coach for 4 months which is not the ideal situation. So that was a decision made for me, I didn't have a choice in that. Um, that's probably a disadvantage but you can't do nothing about that.

One athlete discussed how having no control over a situation made him feel

powerless:

I feel powerless a lot [laughs], especially in sport, you know, you uh, a lot of times things happen or things are done to you that you just can't do a lot about, you know, so, I mean, you feel very very small. You know, there's not a lot you can do about it because you're in the, you're in the position that you're in, so. I mean, there's an infinite amount of stories about that but, uh...

{INTERVIEWER: Can you give me one example that really stands out to you?}

Um...the one that I, I think about is a meeting with our head coach, and uh he, he came up with some rule this year that if you miss so many classes then you start losing [really important] things [...] or you have to run or whatever, and a lot of it seems really, really

pointless and stupid. But, it's his program, not much you can do about it, [...] You know, you kind of make accommodations and try to live up to that, but that's the way it is.

{INTERVIEWER: So even if you disagree with it-}

Even though about 90% of the team disagrees with it, not much you can do about it. You feel powerless.

{INTERVIEWER: Why do you not do anything about it?}

Because I'm very sure that it wouldn't change, that's why. I have a hard time making myself make a stand for things that more than likely won't change, 'cause I feel like that's a waste of my time. You know and that's, that's the battle that's not worth fighting because you're going to come up empty handed every time.

One female athlete mentioned that male athletes get treated better than female athletes and that this is an issue that is beyond even the scope of her university so she just accepts it.

I guess [the difference in treatment between men and women is] not only here, it's everywhere. So, kind of like, you just learn to accept it and there's nothing [you can do] about it, so, just go along with it.

In discussing some of the rules that the NCAA has that he disagrees with, one athlete noted that it would take someone outside of the system, someone with money, to change them:

I mean that doesn't feel great you know, but again, I think that's one of those things that, right now that's just the way things are and it may be hard for a person like myself or a student-athlete or somebody that's in the system to really be able to change it, you know, in any kind of fashion...

Sub-Theme 3: Reframing

The final sub-theme under lack of autonomy was that of reframing. Consistent with the literature (Christman, 2004; Sarrazin et al., 2002), student-athletes integrated non-autonomous choices into their sense of self, or at the very least, altered their view of non-autonomous activities as being important to them by reframing such choices and focusing on their potential benefits. Many of the student-athletes noted that those decisions that were made for them were preparing them for the future and were teaching

them about life beyond sport:

TYLER: *Well it's kind of, it's kind of life, you know. If you look at it, you, you just have to prepare yourself for the best and then, you know, any kind of business or pro team, you know, they're going to tell you what they want you to do and so the only thing that we can really control as, as humans or as business people, athletes, whatever you might be, politicians, is you just have to prepare, prepare yourself just for whatever can come. Just make sure you're the best prepared and you're kind of told where to go, so it's kind of, it's kind of life.*

{INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about it?}

TYLER: *Um, ...I like it in a way but it's kind of scary because I feel like, it feels like, kind of like uh, our society almost controls our destinies. In a way, I guess, maybe that's how it's supposed to be. They kind of, you're like a number, just like here at school you're a number, and if your number's called then you got to be prepared to be, you know, you prepare yourself to do whatever, the task at hand. [...] you know you go to the best fit and if they don't want you they tell you, "look, we need you here more." So you see that in the army, the military [.....]. It's kind of like you're controlled. Kind of, it's kind of bad in a way but it works out sometimes for the better.*

In discussing his having to go to class, Tyler noted that:

TYLER: *It's kind of part of it. When you go to a job you're going to have to show up early, you can't show up 5 minutes late. And you know this is all kind of getting us ready for it [.....] this is just like another stepping stone for us, you know, going to class, going to football, balancing all these things so when we get to our future job it's going to be like we've done it the whole time. It will kind of give us an edge over everybody else.*

Viking also reframed having to go to class and study hall as preparing her for the "real world":

VIKING: *Well I mean you might not like [having study hall and class checkers] at that point and time but in the long run it's good because there's someone here helping you, whereas if you get in the real world you have to do it on your own. And I think that being taught to do that everyday or have somewhere to be and be on a schedule it'll make it easier when you get out there on your own.*

Amani discussed that having people watching her all the time and knowing what she is doing keeps her living by her values:

AMANI: *... being in a fish bowl with everything you do. I mean, there's people always watching you. Gonna write something up on the internet about you or gonna start rumors about you, you know. No matter, no matter where you go or what you do people are always watching.*

{INTERVIEWER: And how do you feel about that?}

AMANI: *Um...it almost kind of like it makes me keep on my toes because um, I live my whole life based off of trying to live like Christ and in doing that, it just almost even helps me even more so because knowing how many people are watching me it makes me that much more not want to slip up. And, you know, revert back to how other people live their life that aren't believers, and it just helps me personally, and I kind of enjoy it.*

Viking also found it beneficial to have people watching her and expecting certain behaviors:

VIKING: *...people just view us in a different way and so we have to live up to that. It's hard sometimes, but it makes you a better person I think.*

Having a regimented schedule was something Tyler reframed and also saw as keeping him out of trouble:

TYLER: *You always have something going on so it keeps me busy, and it keeps me out of trouble, so I like it.*

Interestingly, student-athletes even reframed behaviors that they regretted:

DARIA: *Not being able to study and putting track first, sometimes I do [regret that]. But, I mean it was a learning experience so that's how I look at it.*

Summary of Lack of Autonomy

In many circumstances student-athletes perceived themselves as lacking autonomy. Their ability to reframe non-autonomous behaviors as being beneficial sheds light on the fact that many athletes continue to be engaged in collegiate sport even when part of their life is dictated by external forces. Sometimes because of their love of sport, athletes choose to continue playing because it is something they intrinsically desire even in spite of the limitations it places on their autonomy (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). Because of this intrinsic interest in sport, student-athletes are likely to find ways to integrate non-autonomous behaviors into their sense of self because to not do so could create a cognitive dissonance of sorts. As Mackenzie (2003) explains, people are able to

reject an activity and externalize it by reconfiguring their values and beliefs, or to accept it and internalize the behavior by identifying with it. She also notes that such internalization of motivation can occur simply through acceptance of the behavior or motivating force. Hence, both the reframing and acceptance of their non-autonomous experiences provided examples of student-athletes' attempt to integrate behaviors and make sense of them in terms of their self-identity.

One condition that must be met for a choice to be autonomous is that it must lead to a behavior that the individual desires and be chosen freely, not due to coercion or manipulation (Friedman, 2003). Coercion and manipulation "can distort someone's attempts to consider her options in light of what matters to her and to choose what genuinely reflects her own concerns" (Friedman, 2003, p. 5). In these situations, athletes might be unconsciously choosing behaviors based on priorities that they might not value. When they choose based on unvalued choices, the degree of autonomy they experience is less than had their choices been unmanipulated. A good example of this is the way that power dynamics influenced these student-athletes' choices. Several student-athletes felt that they had to listen to their coaches because they were authority figures and because part of being on a team meant accepting their authority. If an athlete saw him/herself as someone who stood up for what (s)he believed yet still chose to accept the coaches' control, then (s)he would not be considered autonomous because this choice was manipulated by the power the coach had over him/her. Similarly, athletes who accepted having to prioritize sport yet truly wanted to get an education and saw themselves as students above all else would be considered less autonomous in situations when they chose to sacrifice their schooling for their sport because this choice was likely to have

been coerced by external forces (i.e., scholarship, coach control, consequences).

Finally, “to be autonomous, someone should have a significant array of opportunities to act in ways that reflect what deeply matters to her. Conditions should not so limit her options that she cannot choose or act for the sake of any of her deep values or commitments” (Friedman, 2003, p. 18). In analyzing the experiences of autonomy presented by these student-athletes, it appears that the environment of collegiate sport did limit athletes’ opportunities to engage in truly autonomous behaviors. While they were able to reframe some behaviors as being important to them, the examples they provided of times when they lacked autonomy were significant. The control of the coach, academic restrictions, having to wear a certain brand of clothing, not being recognized as an individual, and power dynamics all imposed limitations on student-athletes’ autonomy.

Theme 3: Relational Autonomy

You can take as much control over your life as you want [...]. But there’s still people there influencing your decisions and what you do... (VIKING)

Student-athletes do not exist in a bubble. They interact with and are socialized by many different people, including parents, coaches, and teammates. While many researchers have examined people’s autonomy in terms of independence from others, a more recent conception of autonomy is that it revolves around relationships with others. According to Christman, “relational autonomy” refers to “what it means to be a free, self-governing agent who is also socially constituted and who possibly defines her basic value commitments in terms of interpersonal relations and mutual dependencies” (Christman, 2004, p. 143). This notion of autonomy acknowledges the fact that people’s self-concepts and identities have a social component and that people make decisions based on this

interconnectedness. “Personal autonomy is thus a product of social conditions of various kinds, both those that contribute to socializing someone as a self with autonomy-conferring character traits and behavioral competencies” (Friedman, 2003, p. 15). Hence, people can still experience some degree of autonomy even if the choices they make are based on their socialization and on their relationships with others (Chrisman, 2004; Friedman, 2003; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). Because these relationships are important to them and how they view themselves is in relation to others, they want to take others into consideration when making decisions and it is this intrinsic desire that allows these decisions to be experienced as autonomous.

The theme of Relational Autonomy is especially strong in comparison to the others because it emerged from the conversations themselves and was not directly asked about in the interview process. That is, the other major themes arose, in part, because questions were specifically asked to understand when student-athletes do and do not experience autonomy. Relational Autonomy, however, emerged from the student-athletes’ descriptions of how they made decisions.

Sub-Theme 1: Sources

The following examples illustrate the relationship between student-athletes’ decisions, their relationships with others, and the socialization processes inherent in collegiate sport. At times, the decisions that student-athletes make because of their relationships with others may differ from what they would actually choose if they had only themselves to consider. However, such decisions can still be autonomous if they were not coerced and were a result of the student-athletes’ intrinsic desires and were important to them (Christman, 2004; Friedman, 2003). In the student-athletes’

discussions of autonomy, it was apparent that they were willing to make choices based on their commitment to, respect for, and trust in their teammates, family, God, and coach.

Other examples of relational autonomy that arose in the stories of these individuals also revealed their unforced choice to allow others to make decisions for them.

Component 1: Teammates

Teammates exerted a large influence on the decisions of the student-athletes in this study. Because of their relationships to their teammates, many of the choices student-athletes made were based in and intertwined with these relationships, as demonstrated in these athletes' discussions of their teammates:

SETH: *I think I have control over a lot of decisions. Like I don't usually do something unless if it's not something I want to do. I just don't do something because everybody else is doing it, but if somebody wants me to do it because they're my friend I'll do it...*

JAY: *I think you would go the extra mile for a teammate, more so than you would for a coach. I mean I'm not saying that this person would necessarily, you know, do something that they didn't want to do just because their teammates wanted to do it. But I think they would have a greater chance of doing it because of that than if the coach wanted them to do it.*

In talking about sacrificing one's own good for the good of the team, Jay noted:

JAY: *Happens every day. And I'll see that happen more so because of your teammates, your respect and your commitment to your teammates rather than to the coach. Some people wouldn't mind taking a lesser role on the team because it's for the good of the team, and they know this because of their teammates. But if the coaches are saying, "ok, I'm not going to play you" you know for whatever reason, they're not going to respect that a lot. But if you know because your teammates are talking about it and you respect them, and you respect their commitment to the team and to the game, I think a person has a more likely chance of stepping down and taking a lesser role for the good of the team.*

Amani also discussed the desire to make decisions based on what was best for the team, noting that often what is good for the team is what is best for her as well:

AMANI: *The biggest thing for me is not letting [the team] down. Knowing the decision that could possibly be made and whether you help or hinder your team, I think that comes*

into effect because if you really are dedicated to your team or to your coach, then you really want to help, you really want to help please them, then you're going to make decisions that are going to help that.

{INTERVIEWER: For those decisions that you make based on this commitment, are they different from what you actually want to do, like if you didn't have this commitment?}

AMANI: *I don't think really, to tell you the truth, because like, wanting, wanting to help my teammates, wanting to help my coaches out, wanting to make the right decision, I always try to want to make the right decision. And whether it's gonna help or hinder the team, it'd be the same, like helping or hindering myself, helping or hindering friends, family.*

Component 2: Family

The student-athletes in this study also considered their relationships with family members when making decisions:

SAM: *Actually I made [the decision] with my family before I came to school that I was gonna redshirt coming in...*

AMANI: *I know that a lot of people back home, they have their goal of what they want me to be, or how they want me to play, or what kind of grades they want me to get, but it's basically my own, for myself, and then my parents. My family has a big role.*

{INTERVIEWER: Do they influence your decisions any?}

AMANI: *They don't make them, but they do, they can help sway one way or the other.*

DARIA: *Just because of having a spouse. I mean you can't like socially, like, I'm like "do you want to do this today?" "No." "But I do." But sometimes you have to come to an agreement, so I don't have full control just because I have a spouse. Now if I didn't have one everything would be on me...*

Component 3: God

For some athletes, God was also a source of relational autonomy in that people took their relationship with God into account when making choices:

DARIA: *Well I think my spiritual life was the most influential just because I wanted to, I didn't want to do something God didn't want me to do. So I know everything happens for a reason and he has a plan for my life, so that was, that was his plan to do whatever he has to do for me, or I have to do with my time, you know. That was his plan, so I have to go for what God has planned for me...*

Rebecca also tied her competing in her sport to her relationship with God:

REBECCA: *I don't compete for the coach's glory or my own glory, I compete just to do my best for God's glory so that you know, I put my heart out there every time and performing for him that, just having him as my sole audience I guess...*

She continued by noting:

REBECCA: *When I compete it's not for any of those reasons, it's for the love of competing and you know for the love of God and just doing everything because he gives you the ability to do so.*

When asked if there was anything he would change about being a collegiate student-athlete, Tyler remarked:

TYLER: *I think God or anybody would be upset if I said I would like to change anything just because like obviously I've been blessed with a lot of things, but there're a lot of things I'd like to change, but that's, you know, neither here nor there. It's kind of like, you just got to try to get better at the things that you're bad...*

Component 4: Coach

As is often the case in collegiate sport, the student-athletes in this study reported that coaches had a great influence on their decisions, sometimes to the extent that they made choices for the student-athletes. Allowing coaches to make decisions for them emerged as being autonomous when, 1) the student-athletes felt that the decisions were in their best interest, 2) they felt their input was listened to, 3) they felt that the coach set a good example to follow, and 4) they made the willing (*unforced*) choice to accept the coach's authority.

Best interest. The sub-component "best interest" seemed to be central to student-athletes perceiving others making decisions for them as being autonomous. This idea appeared in many student-athletes' accounts of their willingness to allow their coach to make or to influence their decisions. In several cases, this sub-component was related to feeling cared about as a person, not just as an athlete. Hence, they perceived that the

advice and decisions of others was shaping them for future success, and they were willing to listen because the significant other had the experience to know what was best for the student-athlete. Note that it appeared that student-athletes who had not refined their identity, were not experienced, had no knowledge to make a decision in the matter, or lacked confidence in their decisions were those most likely to perceive that others knew what was best for them rather than believing they knew what was best for themselves:

CHARLES: *I mean you're controlled by the university, by the coach but you know you've got to do that so it's not the kind of control where you feel like you're, you kinda have to do that, 'cause like they have your best interests in mind for you as well.*

ANIYAH: *We have a great coach. He's good, I try for him, it's never been where like I've questioned anything he's really done because I trust him, I know his history, and I know that he's looking out for the best interests for me.*

REBECCA: *Um...just respecting what [the coaches] say, doing the workouts they have planned for you even if they're not there. Um...believing that they've been here before and they know, even though we think we know what's best for us. A lot of the times we do, I know sometimes it's just communication like the coaches think you can do a certain thing but your body feels like you couldn't which is really frustrating, like 'cause it broke down before I told him it was bothering me or hurting me or whatever, um, but I guess I trusted them too much to know too much about me, when they didn't even know me at all...*

In discussing how he made the decision to redshirt, Jay noted:

JAY: *I wanted to do whatever the coaches thought was in my best interest.*

Several other athletes perceived that their coaches had their best interests in mind if they not only prepared them for sport but also for life:

VIKING: *You're more prepared for the real world 'cause that's what [coach] tells you when you sign, "I'm not only here to teach you how to be a better player, but how to become a better person."*

TYLER: *These people aren't here to only win ball games, they're here to develop you as an athlete, a student, as a person, and they know what's best for you. So when, you know it's kind of, it kind of taught me a little discipline on the fact that these people are here for you and they're here to help you to be more successful in the future...*

He continued:

TYLER: *[The coach] helps out everybody the best he can. He'll tell you that from the get go. See he's going to do everything in his power to help you reach your potential, and if you don't, it's because you didn't allow those decisions that you need made for you to help you reach you to your ultimate potential.*

On the flip side, when athletes trusted their coaches to make decisions and later found that their coaches did not have their best interests in mind, the athletes lost respect for their coach and were less likely to listen to them in the future:

[The coach] just didn't have my best interest in mind [...] because he just thought I would do whatever he wanted me to do. And I think, I mean he definitely had you know, his interest in mind there and he was trying to act like he had mine in mind and I think that, that really turned me off. I was, that really, really turned me off, and it totally turned my parents off.

He continued:

I think [when I was a freshman] I probably would have told you I [had a lot of choice and control] but looking back on it I realize that I didn't have any control virtually but I thought that I had some. Part of the reason I thought that I had some control was because I thought [the coach] was telling me the things I really needed to do and was in my best interest, thought he was giving me pretty much almost fatherly advice, which he was giving me selfish advice and I didn't know that.

He further noted:

My first year here I cared what he thought and I know that sounds terrible, my first year here whenever he told me something I was thinking that he had my best interest in mind so I would listen and I would take into consideration and think he was right because I mean I was, I thought that there's no way that this man's gonna tell me something that didn't have my best interest in mind.

Listened to. As noted, it appeared that trust may be key in athletes' perceiving coaches have their best interests in mind. Such trust may be developed by listening to the athletes, as some athletes perceived autonomy in their sport when their coach listened to them and took their opinions into consideration when making decisions:

CHARLES: *We could say to coach we want to work out this time, this day, he'll take that*

on board. So we've got control in that way, and we can interact with him and tell him what we want to do, where we want to play, you know where we want to practice, so we've got that, it's kinda whatever works for the team.

VIKING: *Because [the head coach] is really open-minded about stuff. She'll see where you're coming from, if you choose to talk to her at least. You might not get what you want out of it, you know, but she hears you.*

Coach as example. A few athletes noted that they were more likely to respect their coaches if their coaches lived up to what they expected of their athletes. When their coaches set an example, the athletes were willing to follow their requests and experienced autonomy in doing so:

VIKING: *Being under her is like it's all a learning experience. Like she instills in you what she was taught and what she thinks is the best way to be successful in life and she's a great example so it's kinda hard not to follow what she's saying. 'Cause she's done that and look at her now, [...] it's good to be like, "wow, that's my mentor" and she's teaching me things that will help me [...]. And she's always willing to help you out in any way possible. So I mean she's good, you know, everybody sees her as a tough, mean lady but you know she does have a heart, she does have feelings and you see that side from time to time. And it's just good because she's not always trying to beat you up, and beat you up just for her 'cause she wants to win, she's like teaching you tools to be a better person.*

Another athlete discussed how he felt when his coach set a bad example:

It makes me feel like he's an idiot. It makes me feel like "what is he doing?" He should be setting an example for his kids as a mature coach, somebody who makes good decisions.

Seemingly, if the coaches had behavioral expectations for their athletes the athletes believed the coaches should live up to a certain standard as well. When the coaches met this standard the athletes were more willing to follow their requests.

Made choice to accept. While the athletes' perceptions of the coaches' rationale for decisions were important, in some cases simply having made the choice to obey the coach was enough to make his/her decisions seem autonomous. Note that the choice to

accept the control of others is not always autonomous. If, in fact, the student-athletes discussed obeying the coach in a way that seemed as if it was something they *had* to do, with little choice in the matter, then it was not themed as being autonomous. Some student-athletes willingly accepted coach control and so it was themed as being an autonomous action because they spoke about it as a choice they were willing and able to make for themselves and one that was important to them:

CHARLES: *I think that the things they tell you to do you know you gotta do any way so it's all down to you. Um, you chose to come here, I mean I chose to come here so if someone chooses to do something I don't feel like I'm pressured to do that. I'm not like "Oh my God, I gotta do this, I gotta do that" I chose to come here so I should do what they say. So I feel obliged to follow that I suppose but...it's not as if I'm bothered about that.*

He continued:

CHARLES: *I don't think you should have the choice, you shouldn't have the choice to listen to them if you're part of it, but if you've made that decision to be controlled by that university then you shouldn't then have a choice of whether to listen or not.*

Rebecca said:

REBECCA: *I mean they ask us to do a lot of things and it's not always things I want to do, so in a way they have control of my life (laughs). But, at the same time I choose to accept it so...*

Note again that perceptions of autonomy is a matter of degree and that athletes who made a choice to accept their coaches' decisions can still experience some autonomy, though the degree of autonomy might be less than had they made the decision themselves.

Summary. According to the content-neutral notion of autonomy, a person "might still be choosing autonomously even if she chooses subservience to others for its own sake, so long as she has made her choice in the right way or it coheres appropriately with

her perspective as a whole” (Friedman, 2003, p. 18). Hence, athletes may forfeit future autonomy by choosing to listen to coaches and follow their authority. After choosing this lifestyle, their behaviors may be non-autonomous but the original choice to be subservient was not, because to some extent the choice to give up autonomy was based on what was important to the athletes. This is a conception of autonomy that is thought to be less autonomous on a continuum of self-determination than a substantive notion of autonomy would be (Friedman, 2003).

Perceiving that the coach had their best interests in mind played a large part in student-athletes’ desire to accept and trust their coaches’ decisions. This sub-component was connected to the idea of identity development that was discussed with the theme “personal autonomy.” When athletes developed a sense of who they were, what they wanted, and what they needed to do (and could distinguish the motives of their coaches), they also gained confidence in their ability to decide what was best for them. Hence, student-athletes who allowed others to make decisions for them because they believed others knew what’s best for them may still be developing their ideas about themselves. The notion that coaches had student-athletes’ best interests in mind also came from the belief that they cared for the student-athletes beyond the athletic field and, thus, the athletes trusted their coaches’ decisions. Caring and trust are influential in athletes’ experience of relational autonomy, as are mutual respect and commitment, the expectations of others, and the environment of the team.

Sub-Theme 2: Influences

Several factors influenced student-athletes’ desire to include others in their decision-making process. These influences included: 1) caring and trust, 2) team

environment, 3) mutual respect and commitment, and 4) others' expectations.

Component 1: Caring and Trust

Feeling that others cared for them beyond the athletic arena was key in these student-athletes' developing enough trust in others that they would take their input into account when making decisions, or even allow others to make decisions for them. This sense of caring and trust also influenced commitment to and respect for others:

I think our assistant coach is really good, I think everybody is pretty much committed to him because whenever he says something we know he's thinking about us. I mean when he tells me something he's not doing it for any other reason than he's telling me for myself and I think he's who we go to, he's who we listen to and our [head] coach nobody really listens to as far as like truly believes in him, I don't think anybody really does.

{INTERVIEWER: So, you think you are more committed to the Assistant Coach?}
Definitely, I mean definitely because he actually cares about us, I mean that's the way I feel and he shows it.

{INTERVIEWER: So you feel that if a coach shows that they care about you then you'll follow them?}

Yeah, yeah definitely, I mean our assistant coach has wanted to be more like an older brother type person than just a coach and I think, I mean and we listen to him and we know that he's wanting best for us, and if it's not [in our sport] he doesn't care he wants us to make the best decisions for ourselves.

That athlete's teammate had similar sentiments about the assistant coach:

Sometimes, it's weird like 'cause sometimes I like [the head coach] and sometimes I don't. Like I think our assistant coach would be a much better coach because he knows more about the [sport], he knows how to relate with people better. And like our [head] coach he's not very good with people. And sometimes I think he's like, he doesn't care about you as a person, he just cares about how you're playing or if you're playing good. 'Cause like say you're playing good he treats you totally different than if you're not. Like at practice he'll always be like, he'll come over and see how you're [playing] or he'll give you more attention and stuff.

In his follow-up interview, this athlete noted that as an authority figure, the coach automatically garners respect. When the coach does not show that he cares about you as a person, he may lose that respect and it is hard to earn it back.

For another athlete, one way the coach demonstrated he cared about his players

was by giving them a second chance and trying to help them learn from their mistakes:

I just think it's interesting how [the coach] can take these people from all over the country and just be kind of like a father to everybody, because I mean he's not one of those disciplinarians where he's like, "you have this one chance and you're gone" you know. He kind of like wants you to learn from that, and so he's not going to just kick you off the team, he's going to be like, "alright you did something wrong, it's nothing I haven't done before, but you got to sit down and you know, next time we're seriously going to have to think about you being gone, but you want to learn from this. You want to grow, develop." And that's one thing that's kind of helped everybody is like I think a lot of people come from like atmospheres and like different places where you know you get one chance and it's over with. And here he's giving us a chance to develop and reach our true potential.

He continued:

I didn't treat school really seriously, and when I came here [the head coach] really kind of took me under his wing and said, "you know, this is something that you could have, but if you step out of line or you keep on doing stuff that you're used to doing in high school, you know this opportunity is not going to last very long for you." He kind of instilled in me the fact that I have the [talent] for it, if I would put the time and you know all the mental exercises and physical exercise that I needed to do to get better and consistent that I could really, you know not really make a name for myself but uh, do better than if I was just to kind of do it half-heartedly. And so he's kind of been like a father figure, just not necessarily just always knows everything about [my position], but he knows a lot about life and working hard and just, you know, kind of getting better from adversity.

Similarly, another athlete said that he listened to his coach because he has always been honest with him and showed that he cared:

I would say [my position coach has more influence on me than my head coach] because I spend more time with him and he was like the one that recruited me and everything that he told me he stayed behind it. Some coaches would just shoot you the bug or to try to get you to go to their school but he stayed behind his word in everything he told me and all that. So, I kinda listen to him like the dad that I never had because he do care about his players a lot so, I look up to him.

Amani believed that her head coach influenced her because she was easy to talk to and also showed she cared about her outside of sport:

AMANI: *I think [my coach], for me personally, it's just been because she's so personable. She's more, so much more than a coach. Um, she's not a coach that sees you on the basketball floor and that's it. You know, she wants us to have contact outside of*

basketball, wants us to be, kind of like a second mom to us, which she is. Very, very caring, very personable, very approachable and in doing that, I think that on the floor it makes it that much easier to be able to communicate with her.

Trust was also key in Daria's relationship with her coach. Although she said that she did not want an extremely personal relationship with him, she believed that because he had built a trusting relationship she allowed him to direct her sport training, which had helped her to build confidence:

DARIA: *To a certain extent I don't want a lot of control with [sport] just because I trust my coach now. I know he knows what I need as far as certain things to get in shape. Now if I was in shape then maybe that would be different, but I, I know certain things I really cannot control right now.*

She continued by stating:

DARIA: *I think my confidence has built up with him because I can trust him. So he'll tell me this and then I'll run faster. You know I'm like wow, you know I'll do whatever you tell me to do now.*

Daria also discussed how commitment to her coach was demonstrated by listening to what he said and that again, this commitment was based on trust.

DARIA: *[Commitment to coach is demonstrated by] listening and agreeing with him, doing what he tells you to do. I think that's the most thing. Like I've never had a coach here that I could just totally trust just because like, when I go to the meets I wasn't prepared to do what they told me to do, as far as physically-wise. I wasn't prepared to do it, so. He doesn't prepare you for something he knows you can't handle, so if he knows that I can't run this pace, why tell me to, you know, so that's what the problem was with me and other coaches. They, I couldn't trust them because they didn't prepare me for whatever I'm going to compete for. [.....] And that's one thing, just trusting I think.*

Another example given by a football player demonstrated the influence of relationships on decisions, the positive results that may come from developing relationships, and the way that relational autonomy was formed with his position players and coach:

JAY: *My particular group, [my position], we always hold like a mini Bible study before*

we get started you know, we read different scripture or passages of the Bible and talk about things. Kind of talk about life, talk about what's going on in your life because, you know, you have to really get all of those things out of the way first and foremost before you can really get down to, "okay, here's our job, here's our work." Now you can get to this. You know, so I think that's pretty cool, you know, because our meeting is definitely different.

{INTERVIEWER: What do you think that does for you as a group?}

JAY: As a group, I think that bonds us because, you know, first thing, we come in, we don't bring up school, we don't bring up football, you know, we're in our meeting room, we talk about life, you know, talk about what's going with you, how you've been, what's going on in your life, how you feel, are you healthy, you know. We talk about family, we talk about our thoughts and opinions on, on whatever. But uh, I think that bonds us as a group because you really get a feel for what the coach is like, what's his experiences in life been, you know, what does he think about this, that and the other, and an understanding for your uh, the other guys that play your position.

{INTERVIEWER: And how do you feel when you're in that environment?}

JAY: I feel good you know, that makes it more than work, you know. That makes the people in the room more than, you know your coach or teammates, you know, they're your friends. You're sharing things that you wouldn't necessarily share with the average person that you see on the street, or that you just maybe are an acquaintance of.

{INTERVIEWER: How does that affect you, like maybe in practice or in games or something like that?}

JAY: It makes you want to work that much harder, you know, it's like, how hard would you work if you were supporting your family, you know, as opposed to supporting yourself. You're going to work a little harder when you have other people counting on you that you care about.

When asked if his experiences differed from last year (when they did not meet for Bible study) Jay noted:

JAY: I feel like it's brought us closer together than last year, I mean, same position coach, basically the same guys that you trust them, but I don't think we were nearly as close. It felt more like just a job, you know, and you go in, you punch the clock, you do what you got to do, and then you clock out and you leave, you know. I mean, there's not a lot of bonding, there's not a lot of love in the atmosphere, you know. I mean, it's just, it's just work, you know. You do it because you have to and then move on.

{INTERVIEWER: And so you said you do it because you have to, but this year you feel like-}

JAY: It's more of a "want to" feeling. You do it because you care about people in the room. You do it because they're counting on you and you're counting on them, and it just doesn't work without one or the other. [... ..] It's sort of changed the persona of our group, you know. You take more pride in, in what we do, you know, and working together as opposed to what we did last year, that was kind of just, that was almost like going through the motions. I mean you're working hard still, but it's for a different purpose.

It was apparent that the more the athletes cared for and trusted others and the more they felt cared for in return, the more influential others were in the athletes' decision making process.

Component 2: Team Environment

The environment of the team seemed to exert a great influence on student-athletes' desire to do things for or because of their teammates. They noted that being part of a team meant compromising for teammates and working their hardest because other members of the team were doing the same. They were willing to do so because their teammates were like family and they supported each other and encouraged everyone to do their best. This type of environment also contributed to the enjoyment and fun that the student-athletes experienced.

Family atmosphere. The majority of the student-athletes in this study felt their team had a "family atmosphere":

COUGAR: *Well I feel like we're all like pretty much together, it's like a big family. Everyone's outspoken, pretty much, and we just want to have fun with each other, when we're around each other and working out, and we all just talk and joke and make our environment a whole lot better. And you know one of your teammates got your back or whatever. We stick together like brothers or whatever. It helps the environment a lot.*

JAY: *At practices it's really sort of a work environment. You're going to work and you're going to get better and tensions run high sometimes, you know, but really, I mean here anyway, it's a family atmosphere really, you know. I mean everybody's pushing each other to be the best that they can be, and that really stems from your respect and your hopes for that other person, you know. It's not anything that you wouldn't want them to succeed, you know, it's just a family atmosphere and when I'm around the team, coaches included, and anybody, it's, it's pretty comfortable, it's a comfortable experience...*

TYLER: *Definitely, [the coach is] awesome. I mean I could talk to him like he was my dad, like I've known him for 21 years of my life and I think that's the neat part because, you know he's the same way, if he ever was in a conversation about me, or about [any of the other players] he would talk like he's known you his whole life...*

REBECCA: *It was a big adjustment going from high school track where my dad was my head coach to collegiate track where they didn't really know me that well. And, I didn't know anybody when I came here and the team, the reason I came here was because I felt the team was a family, like I was comfortable with them. So that was good, I wouldn't change that, like I felt accepted and wanted to be here...*

VIKING: *Environment of the team. It's kinda like a laid-back kinda thing, you say what you want, some people get their feelings hurt, some people don't. It's just like a, like a family I guess, that's the best way to describe it, you know, a bunch of sisters...*

Of course, having such good relationships with one's teammates may also have a negative impact, as noted by one senior golfer:

SETH: *I think we get along so well sometimes that instead of going and being by yourself and like working I think sometimes we talk too much with each other or goof off a little bit too much. I think maybe that would help if maybe our team didn't get along so good.*

Common goal. Many of the athletes talked about how team members supported each other in doing their best to achieve a common goal. Even though the environment was competitive, it did not take away from the “family atmosphere” that was created. In fact, the environment that many athletes described seemed to be very conducive to working hard and performing to the best of one's abilities because they all shared a common goal:

REBECCA: *Practices, I love going to practices, just to be with the [other people in my event], we're just really, really close and we all, I guess just have similar goals and similar values, and so that's really important. Um, but just hanging out in the locker room, like I love going in there. I'll spend so much time just hanging out with the girls when I should be going to here to study or something. So, I think the environment's pretty good.*

AMANI: *My team is a lot of fun. As a personality, I think our team is unlike a lot of teams just because we have so many different personalities and when we get together, it's, the camaraderie we have is just, it's fun. You know, it's a, a really easy-going, um light-hearted, light-spirited team, and we get along real well on and off the floor. Um, on the floor we know our common goal that we have and we all want to work for each other to reach that goal and off the floor we just hang out and have fun and enjoy each other's own personality.*

Not only did team members share a common goal, but they also supported each other in working toward individual goals:

SETH: *Our team is pretty laid back, our team is, everybody gets along really good, I think. I think, like everybody on our team we're competitive but also everybody on our team wants each other to be their best. So like, it's not like "He's better than me." If he's playing better it's not like, I mean you want to beat him and you want to come back and beat him next time but say you don't make a tournament, I don't think our team is like, "Man, I hope that guy plays bad because he beats me, 'cause he beat me in qualifying or whatever." I think we have like unity between our team. There's no like fighting between our team. I think we all trying for the same goal, and that's to be as good as we can be.*

Even when everyone did not get along, there was still a sense of support and respect:

ANIYAH: *The environment of my team. Okay. Um, as far as like on the track, everybody supports each other. It's very comforting, you know, you can talk to anybody one on one, you can ask them for anything, we help each other out. As far as like socially, it's kind of like any team would be. If you have a pretty big team it's hard for us all to be one clique. It's kind of like you have your separate cliques and your own little, whatever you want to call them. Um, it's kind of like sometimes not everybody likes each other, you know that's kind of given, but we all get along. Like we all respect each other, never gotten like where we don't respect each other.*

TYLER: *I mean just the togetherness. Everybody just kind of roots for each other. We have our differences. Everybody has their differences because we're competitive, but that all just helps everybody out in the long run.*

One freshman football player felt his confidence increased when he knew that his teammates were there to support him:

COUGAR: *Well first when I'm kinda out there and I know that I have people that's with me and not against me it makes my confidence go up a whole lot more, so it makes me feel a whole lot better.*

Daria felt that if not everyone shares a common goal then the environment, and thus the effectiveness, of the team could be affected. She also noted that too much of a competitive attitude may create tension on the team.

DARIA: *So if you have a lot of walk-ons with people who are getting recruited, people*

like me who was in the top 10 in the country, it's not going to balance out at all. If they're never ranked, they weren't even in the state meet or never won anything, it's kind of just hard to train with them because they have a different attitude, you know. These ladies that I train with now have more of a win at, winner's attitude. They've been around the sport longer, they're more mature in the sport so they understand a lot more than other people used to, not like that, but then that's when the tension is highest, because we're, we're all trying to win...

As demonstrated, teams with “family” environments where the athletes share a common goal and feel supported in pursuing individual goals were associated with perceptions of relational autonomy.

Component 3: Mutual Respect and Commitment

The student-athletes interviewed in this study discussed the importance of mutual respect and commitment between teammates as influencing their decisions. For some, this respect and commitment was inherent in the fact that their teammates were essentially in the “same shoes” as they were, going through the same things, and thus had an understanding of what it's like being a student-athlete in this day and age.

Same shoes. Many of the athletes felt committed to their teammates because they lived similar lives and faced the same demands:

AMANI: *During practice [your teammates] can really help you because a lot of times you come in and you're not always gung-ho for practice. But having everybody there, being in the same shoes, being in the same situation, um, you have to go through the same thing. You know you have to practice so you might as well just work your tail off for each other to do the best that you can.*

REBECCA: *[Teammates are more influential than the coach] because they're going through the same things as me, they have similar goals as me. I know the coach expects us all to reach a certain level but he's not out there running with us (laughs) you know. So I definitely think, and they're just my peers and I mean we have stronger bonds I guess than with our coach.*

JAY: *I mean the coaches are spokesmen for the team, you know, they're the ones who draw X's and O's like I said. They're the ones who are the faces of the program. But the people that do the work, the games you go see, are the players, you know. And I think a*

person would go about doing that in a different way if they were doing it for one of their friends or someone they really respect because they're out there, doing what they do. They know the stresses that that person is going through. They know what it feels like and what it takes to get the job done more so than the coach who sits in their air conditioning office all day and makes recruiting calls, you know. It's, it's different.

Jay continued:

JAY: *How am I committed? I'm 100% committed to my teammates, and I'm about 80% committed to my coaches. And the reason for that is because my coaches don't always understand what it's like to be a student-athlete in 2003. They know what it's like to be a coach in 2003, and they might have a good idea of what it's like to be an athlete in 2003, but until you live it you don't really know. You know my teammates know what it's like. My teammates know what I go through on a day-to-day basis, and I respect them. I respect their commitment, and I'll be 100% committed to them.*

Jay also described one method the football team uses to create a mutually supportive and committed environment:

JAY: *Well our coaches this season have really emphasized what they call "cross coaching", where a coach that coaches one specific position takes a turn coaching a different position, maybe that he's never coached before, you know, just to interact with different players, and maybe change sides of the ball or whatever, so everyone can kind of get a feel of what that coach is like even though he's not your coach, per se. But you realize that it's a team game, it's a team effort every time so you really have to sort of know and interact with just about everybody so you can feel comfortable with them.*

Behavioral influence. Because their teammates shared a common lifestyle and were in the "same shoes", the student-athletes were more committed to their teammates and thus were likely to alter their behavior because of this commitment:

SAM: *There probably would be some times that I would skip practice to study because at that point that test is gonna be a lot more important than playing 18 holes of golf. But I don't skip practice because, and I do think that coach would let me, but that's because of my teammates that I don't.*

When coaches demonstrated a mutual respect and commitment they were also able to influence the behaviors of their athletes:

JAY: *If your coach shows you that he's committed to you, then I think that you're going to make that, make that extra effort. You're going to make that extra push for him*

because you know that he's committed to you 100% and that doesn't mean that you're going to be perfect in everything, but you're going to do things to the best of your ability, for the most part I think because of that common respect and that mutual bond that that creates.

REBECCA: *Our head coach? He's such a great leader, he's a man of character and so I definitely look up to him and I respect him. I think that's big, if I respect the coach then I'm really gonna want to do my best....*

When asked what she meant by “man of character” Rebecca replied:

REBECCA: *He does what he says he's gonna do and he makes time for things that I think are important too, like he makes time for quiet times, and just, he's very centered, like he knows what's important and he knows really what's best for the team. I mean he makes mistakes but he owns up to them. He's definitely, he's got integrity and I respect him a lot and I want to do well when he's around, you know. I want to do well when he's not around, when he shows up to practice on occasion I definitely want to give it a little more than I got.*

Component 4: Others' Expectations

The final component associated with relational autonomy was “others' expectations”. The student-athletes' decisions were influenced by the expectations of others provided they exhibited some of the other factors just mentioned (i.e., caring, trust, respect) and that the other person's expectations were important to them:

As long as these people have expectations for you, as long as you care about them or, or you care about what they think, and what their expectations are of you, then I think you would want to please them. You would want to like live up to that as much as possible. So that might affect your decision as to how hard you're going to push yourself in something, or what you're going to refrain from in your life, or what have you. It would definitely affect those decisions.

Mainly when other people have [expectations] for me it kinda like gave me a boost, that people kinda look up to me like. Another thing that helped me out a lot when I know there's younger kids that look up to me. That made me feel real good about myself. A lot of parents tell me how their child want to meet me and stuff, that makes me feel real good about myself.

I want to do well for [my coaches] as well as for myself, I want them to believe in me and me to believe in them, and I think right now my coach believes in me but I don't really believe in him. So I guess that would be the ideal, if you both respected each other and

you both wanted the best from each other.

When asked if she was influenced more by her expectations or by others' expectations, another athlete replied:

I'm going to have to go with both, 'cause I never want to let anybody down. It's that fear of like always, you know, never wanting to let anybody down when they tell you what they expect of...

Summary of Relational Autonomy

The notion that student-athletes make decisions based on their relationships with others is well supported by the literature, as many feminist scholars believe that it is nearly impossible to create an identity without the influence of relationships (Christman, 2004; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). It is also posited that people's lives are so interconnected with others and that people's values are so embedded in cultural identities, that interpersonal relationships constitute a part of a person's self-identity (Christman, 2004). Therefore, since making decisions based on self-identity is at the very heart of autonomy, and since relationships help form that identity, then autonomous decisions would likely be influenced in part by people's relationships with others. As such, relational autonomy is a concept that has gained popularity in recent years due to the criticism of traditional notions of autonomy that emphasized independence rather than connections to and care for others (Christman, 2004; Gilligan, 1982; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000).

Relational views of autonomy "underscore the social component of our self-concepts as well as emphasize the role that background social dynamics and power structures play in the enjoyment and development of autonomy" (Christman, 2004, p.143). Therefore, how people see themselves, and how this view of self then influences

their decisions are, in some way, the result of socialization. Hence, social dynamics (such as commitment to teammates and doing things for the good of the team) are integral in perceptions of autonomy. Because student-athletes are “socially embedded” in their environment, they are motivated for reasons that can only be explained in reference to their teammates, coaches, and to the structure of collegiate sport (Christman, 2004). For example, the student-athletes noted that they worked harder because of their commitment to their teammates and to their coaches, commitment that was formed through a team environment of support, caring, trust, and mutual respect. Therefore, it is difficult to separate the student-athletes’ deepest desires (i.e., do they actually want to be working that hard) from those desires influenced by the culture of the team that created this commitment.

Relational perceptions of autonomy also take into account “the role social norms and institutions, cultural practices, and social relationships play in shaping the beliefs, desires, and attitudes of agents” (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000, p. 22). Just because athletes base decisions on relationships with others does not mean that these decisions are less autonomous. According to relational accounts of autonomy, attachments to and unity with others may be athletes’ source of motivation and need not decrease their sense of autonomy (Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). From this perspective, the fact that athletes want to and choose to make decisions based on their commitment to and respect for teammates is likely to be enmeshed in the fact that certain behaviors are expected from collegiate athletes. When the athletes come to value these behaviors as being important to them, these behaviors then become autonomous if they are reflected on and are still seen as important, even when other options are explored (Friedman, 2003; Mackenzie & Stoljar,

2000). Note that even the other options being explored are likely to be produced by social norms and accepted practices. For example, Sam discussed how there are times when he would rather be studying than practicing, but because of his commitment to his teammates he goes to practice. In this situation, it seemed as though he weighed possible options (i.e., skipping practice to study) but decided instead that his relationship to his teammates was more important (thus a deeper desire) and made the decision to practice. Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000) would take this one step further and suggest that the athletes would also need to reflect upon their reasons for committing to others for their decisions to be truly autonomous.

Adler and Adler (1988) provide support for the idea that student-athletes make decisions based on their relationships and their loyalty to their team. The athletes in the current study discussed many of the issues raised by the athletes in Adler and Adler's work. Issues such as commitment, identification (creating a familial atmosphere), integration (group cohesion), and goal attainment parallel the present findings that relational autonomy is influenced by commitment, a family atmosphere, caring and supportive relationships, and shared goals. These researchers note that, "By fusing organizational members' conceptions of their selves with those of the group, organizations are more likely to inspire meaningful interest and devotion" (p. 404). Also, they recognize that "When individuals perceive their ultimate ends to be best served by fostering organizational goals, they will sacrifice immediate gratifications and strive for the good of the whole" (p. 404). These notions were exemplified the athletes in this study who were willing to change their behaviors for their team. Hence, the Adler and Adler (1988) study strengthens the claim that student-athletes' commitment to others and

willingness to make decisions based on this commitment is, in part, due to socialization that maintains organizational loyalty.

Another important finding of this study is that, contrary to stereotypes, it was not just the women for whom relational autonomy emerged. Both male and female athletes emphasized the impact their relationships with others had in shaping their experiences. Similarly, these athletes all acknowledged the role of caring and trust in building relationships that warranted behavioral changes and acceptance of others' decisions. Recognizing that relationships are key to men's experiences as well as women's is an important contribution to the literature because it is often acceptable for the coaches of male athletes to be tough disciplinarians with a focus on winning and on athletic performance. As the athletes in this study discussed, they were more likely to accept and to follow the suggestions of their coaches if their coach demonstrated that (s)he cared about them outside of the athletic domain.

Minor Theme 1: Effects of Autonomy

As previously stated, the amount of autonomy student-athletes experienced had definite affects on all areas of their lives. In this section some of those effects are highlighted.

Sub-Theme 1: Personal Autonomy

Past literature has demonstrated that a strong sense of personal autonomy can have many positive benefits to individuals' health, satisfaction, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Kerr & Goss, 1997). When the student-athletes in this study perceived to have control over their decisions, they also reported increased confidence, effort, motivation, and satisfaction, which they believed positively influenced their performance.

Result 1: Increased Confidence and Performance

As Sam noted, when athletes believe they are making the best choice for themselves, then they are likely to be more confident about that choice and have a more successful performance:

SAM: *I'm gonna play better if I believe over every shot that it's what I need to do this is my right club I'm gonna have my confidence over the shot. And I think that's where I'm changing my attitude toward it and which usually what I believe is what [my coach] believes but whenever I was standing over it I wasn't thinking "I know I'm doing the right thing" I was thinking "he's telling me to do the right thing" and I think that's a big difference because I mean I'll be a lot more committed to what I'm doing if I know it.*

Result 2: Increased Effort and Motivation

As Seth described, when people want to be engaged in an activity they are likely to put more effort into it:

SETH: *I like having a schedule but I wish like say I needed a day off or I wasn't feeling, like sometimes say I don't feel like practicing maybe sometimes I just go through the motions when I'm out there. Whereas if it wasn't such a strict schedule I'd be practicing harder because I'd be doing it on my own time or I'd be doing it for me and not just because I'm supposed to be out there.*

Result 3: Increased Satisfaction

The student-athletes in this study perceived that the more they made choices for themselves, the more satisfied they would be with the outcome of those choices:

BOB: *I think control is more negative. I think choice is more positive. For me, I feel better about the choices I make if I make, like I don't want- if you make a choice for me and I do it, or if you control me and I do what you want me to do and I fail I'll say, "That was smart. I didn't do what I wanted to do and I still screwed up." So if I make the choice in the end and I still screw up, [I] feel a lot better about [myself]. [I'm] the one who messed up; [I'm] the one to blame.*

VIKING: *I think if [people] would just put their foot down [and tell their parents], "This is how you raised me. I respect your opinions and your views but this is how I feel. This is what makes me happy." I can't stand around thinking about who's caring about, I mean, who all disagrees with what I'm doing. You know. I'm happy. And this is what makes me happy.*

Sub-Theme 2: Lack of Autonomy

Whereas having autonomy resulted in many positive benefits, perceiving a lack of autonomy had negative effects. Previous literature indicates that a lack of autonomy may create pressure and anxiety, which may have negative affects on athletes' performance and possibly lead to their disengagement from sport altogether (Frederick & Ryan, 1995; Sarrazin, et al., 2002). The student-athletes in this study noted that when decisions had been made for them for so long, eventually they ceased to listen and often did the opposite of what they were told. Other athletes noted that when a coach was so controlling that he made decisions or rules restricting the behaviors of athletes, the athletes found it difficult to get things accomplished. Finally, lack of autonomy also had a negative affect on the student-athletes' performance.

Result 1: Reverse Affect

The athletes who perceived their coach as being very controlling and who felt like many of their decisions were made for them noted that they often did the opposite of what the coach said or just chose not to listen to him at all:

I think it has a reverse affect, I think whenever [coach] gets on us about being advised everybody's just like, I mean he'll go off on a twenty minute speech in September about how important it is and everybody's just like, "leave me alone." I think it has a reverse affect I think everybody's like "I'll do it later, I'm not worrying about it he's just blowing it out of proportion." And we always say we have the, we use the one-fifth rule on him because he exaggerates everything, I mean he says if we don't get advised by September 2 or whatever then we're gonna have to redshirt, it's gonna mess up our whole schedule next year [...]. I mean it's just everybody's like I think it has a huge affect on, I think it's a negative affect.

{INTERVIEWER: What's the one-fifth rule?}

Everything he says we just divide by five 'cause he'll say you've gotta study 80 hours for an accounting test, I mean he just exaggerates everything.

{INTERVIEWER: And you said that has a negative effect?}

Yeah, because everybody's like, 'cause if he ever does say something that actually has some merit to it, we don't take him seriously at all.

Result 2: Makes It Hard to Get Things Done

Two athletes noted that having a lack of control made it difficult to accomplish what they wanted:

Um, I feel like...like, it's a bureaucracy. Like you go through so many different steps that are so needless just to get one simple thing done. It takes 3 days to get 1 simple thing done.

The NCAA gives every sport, or every student athlete the ability to have a job [...] but that is looked down upon by our coaches. Like you can have a job, but they're not going to recommend it and they're really going to make you jump through a lot of hoops if you really want to do that, make the extra money. Yeah, so that's not very conducive to their way of thinking and, and what they want you to do. So a lot of times there are rules in place, but they're strayed away from...

Result 3: Decreases Performance

Some athletes noted that when they did not agree with decisions that were made for them their performance declined:

SAM: *I don't practice very well, I don't, that's a big thing for me a lot of times if I have a test the next day and I'm playing golf-because my family has always stressed that grades are the most important, really that's the reason that I'm here is to get an education and I mean and that's the way I feel, I mean I firmly believe that- so I don't practice well because my mind is preoccupied and I'm thinking I just want to get done and go study.*

SETH: *...like say we go to a tournament [...] like we'll have a practice round and we do all this stuff like putting to holes that aren't like where the pins are going to be and chipping. Like I feel like I'm prepared already, sometimes I don't want to be there when we're doing all that stuff 'cause I'm ready to play in the tournament and like sometimes I feel like I get overprepared. Like I'm ready to play and I just want to, we'll just keep doing stuff and I feel like I'd be better off if I just did my own thing, like did it how I know how to do it instead of having to do it the way that he wants us to.*

He continued by saying:

SETH: *I guess one of the reasons I feel like this is because I felt like I was better, like I feel like I know the way that I do it, the way that I practice better, the way I prepare better. I felt like, like before, I used to be a lot more consistent on my scores and sometimes now I'll think about stuff too much, I used to just go out and play...*

Sub-Theme 3: Relational Autonomy

According to the examples provided by the student-athletes in this study, there are many positive results that can come from basing decisions on relationships with others. Relational autonomy was often manifested in commitment to the team or to the coach. In talking about commitment, the student-athletes felt that their relationship to their teammates, the team environment, and their desire to do what was best for the team resulted in increased performance, effort, motivation, and confidence. Commitment to the team could also be used to coerce behavior from student-athletes by creating feelings of guilt or of *having* to engage in a certain behavior out of respect for and commitment to teammates.

Result 1: Desired Behaviors

The majority of the behaviors that resulted from decisions based on relationships with others were desirable. These behaviors often had a positive affect on performance by increasing effort and motivation. These behaviors also created a more positive team environment that, as previously discussed, also influenced perceptions of relational autonomy.

Effort. Many of the athletes discussed the fact that if they had a mutual respect for and commitment to their teammates, then they would be more inclined to work hard because they knew their teammates were doing the same:

REBECCA: *Oh [teammates] definitely [influence me]. Um, just to work hard. Like if they weren't there right next to me I might not work as hard. You know, 'cause I know, not that I want to compete with them, but just knowing that we expect the best out of each other, it's definitely a good thing. I wouldn't get up at 6 in the morning if they weren't there. (laughs) You know, like, I wouldn't do things if they weren't going to be doing them with me. Which I wish I could say I would, I would have that inner drive to do it myself, but I don't all the time.*

CHARLES: *Like if I see a player one of my teammates out there grinding, practicing well I think, “you know, I respect him.” That’s like, because I know I’d do the same thing and I know that if I practice or if I’m watching my teammates practice and want it just as hard. So, I think that’s a big ingredient, just practice hard and give it your best shot, rather than just lay around. [...] So I think that shows commitment to the team, just to know that the player next to you is going to be out there trying as hard as you, I think that’s a big help.*

He continued by saying:

CHARLES: *Like giving it your best shot, I mean, I won’t say his name but there’s a player that’s really giving it his best shot on the range and when I see that I know that’s what I should do. Um, yeah definitely. And I can see that he was in the same boots probably as me say a year ago, um, and I can see that he’s doing, all his practice is paying off now, and I can see that. And I think that helps you, that helps you to keep going, to bring your game up a level and practice a bit harder.*

Jay discussed how, when he knows that teammates are putting in the extra effort, he is more likely to make the decision to put in the extra effort as well, even if it’s something he doesn’t really want to do:

JAY: *If I have something to do that’s late one night and I have an 8 o’clock class the next day, then I have a decision to make, you know. Either I’m going to sleep through the class just to make practice, or I’m going to bite the bullet and get up and go to class, you know. I would have a higher chance of doing that because of my respect for my teammates and I know that somebody else is doing that too. Somebody else is dog tired getting up, making that 8 o’clock, making that extra effort, making that push for me, and so I make it for them. But if a coach just says, you know, “go to every class or I’m going to run you” I can handle that. That’s not a problem.*

Many of the student-athletes believed that having close relationships with teammates and coaches made athletes work harder because they realized their behaviors impacted others:

JAY: *It makes you want to work that much harder, you know. It’s like, how hard would you work if you were supporting your family as opposed to supporting yourself? You’re going to work a little harder when you have other people counting on you that you care about.*

Well we were in a relay, and my stomach was hurting, and we did have an alternate, so I could have easily you know [just said], “my stomach’s [hurting].” But um, no I ran and

we got the school record, and it turned out pretty good, but I was always thinking like that kind of influenced and I was like I don't want to let my team down, I want to do this. I'm going to do this...

TYLER: *I don't want the team to falter because I wasn't meeting my expectations. So it kind of works, you know, [coach] kind of is a uh almost like someone to look at and say "Look, I want to make this man's job easier because he's going to make my job easier by keep getting hard on me and keeping me intact and a good work ethic."*

Tyler continued discussing how his relationships with his teammates and coach influence his work ethic:

TYLER: *Well it gives us the sense that we need to strive to not only meet our goals, but meet the team's goals and [the coach's] goals. You know he wants to win the national championship, and if I don't work hard all summer and leading up all the way into the season, making sure I'm ready for every possible situation, or if you're [any other position], if you're not ready for that situation you're hurting the team. And so he's really, [the coach] really instilled a work ethic that you want to not only please yourself and fulfill your goals, but everybody's goals, because everybody's goal is to do the best they can, like the [conference] championship, national championship and everything.*

When asked how she could tell if somebody was committed to the team, Amani responded:

AMANI: *You can tell because of how dedicated they are to not only the system of [the coach], but how, how dedicated we are to each other knowing that we're going to again, work hard for our own selves and our own desire to play, but also as a team as a whole. You know, it's not just an individual sport.*

Motivation. Sometimes, just being around team members made athletes want to be engaged in a certain activity:

VIKING: *Sometimes I don't want to be [at practice] and there's a teammate that either don't want to be there with you and we got to make this better or you know, or real positive and they want to be there and you see them getting, you see them working hard and trying to get better and that kinda motivates you to like, be like "Alright, I'll take my day off another day. I'll take my day off on my day off."*

{INTERVIEWER: *So that helps you when you see other people going through the same thing?*}

VIKING: *Yeah. I'll look at [Teammate] and be like "[Teammate], I don't want to be here." And she'll be like "Me neither" then we go at it. You know it's good 'cause then like me and [teammate] go all out 'cause we don't want to be there so we'll just act goofy*

just to pass the time. You know, we're still getting better, we're still working hard, but we know we don't want to be there so we need to have a lot of positive stuff going on (laughs) and laid back and just laugh a lot. 'Cause I think that laughing gets rid of the negative energy in the body so.

Team atmosphere. Recognizing the value that a positive team atmosphere can have, some athletes made a conscious decision for the good of the team to have a more positive attitude toward the coach. Note the impact group dynamics can have in producing either a negative atmosphere where there is dissension towards the coach or a positive atmosphere where athletes adjust to and accept the coach's behavior:

I guess most of our whole team he was just getting on our nerves and it was like just every little thing he would say somebody would have a problem with it and it would make the other person-it was just we were feeding off each other and just getting more mad at him. And this year we try not to do this as much as before, most people are a lot more positive. I think like, we don't have anybody on the team that's like, if somebody like, if he says something we don't agree with like this year, we say, "Don't worry about it." I mean, it just hurts the team if you're just sitting there whining about it and stuff.

Result 2: Coerced Behaviors

Although benefits can be derived from relational autonomy, strong relationships with others can also be used to coerce behaviors for both positive and negative results. As in the examples presented below, coaches, teammates, and parents may use their relationships with the student-athletes to coerce various behaviors:

I'm not that type of person who needs to be in control every single time. I mean, I definitely try to help people, like you said my role on the team, I definitely try to help people get better, I want to motivate our team, I'm really big on that, working hard and stuff. You can always tell them, you can't make them, go to class or something. I can get mad at them and make them feel like shit, but, I'm not going to make them do it, I don't need to have that much control.

He continued:

Everybody has to do 3 community service activities and coach [is] pressuring us to do that, making us doing that. He's saying, "the man above wants you to do this, everybody wants you to do this." And I know he's lying.

Another athlete noted:

Sometimes you'll go in and you'll be like, "Coach I got this test I gotta take". [...] And then he'll be like, "Alright, I don't care, you can do this but understand that if I let you this person's going to come in and ask me and this person's -" He acts like [...] if one person gets off, everyone's going to try to.

For one athlete, her commitment to her teammates was the major influence on her staying with her sport and not quitting. While she was no longer enjoying her sport experience, because of her commitment to her teammates and her father, she chose to remain with her team until her eligibility expired. I do not believe that her decision to stay was truly an autonomous choice, since it appeared that this decision was coerced and manipulated. This example demonstrates the power that commitment to and relationships with others have on people's decisions:

The biggest [decision I made] is just to try to stay and finish it out, especially this past year because at some point and time I almost threw it in, said I was done with it, I almost signed the release papers but I decided not to.

{INTERVIEWER: Can you talk about what influenced that decision?}

My dad (laughs), mostly.

{INTERVIEWER: In what way?}

'Cause he, he didn't want me to stop playing, and like [I took his advice, I think he gives me good advice sometimes]. So, I'm a daddy's girl, so I couldn't let him down, so that's mainly the reason why I'm here still.

She then continued by saying:

It's fine. I mean it's better to go ahead and push through it than sit at home and say, "Oh, I wish I would've done this, I wish I would've done that." But I really think at this point I wouldn't have those "I wish I would've's." I'm at a point where I'm just ready to move on, but if someone made a 4 year commitment to you, that would be [the head coach], makes you feel the need to make that commitment back.

{INTERVIEWER: So you felt committed to staying here for 4 years?}

Yeah, after a while. It took them a lot of meetings to get me to really buy into that.

{INTERVIEWER: What did they say, like what helped you-}

Just my dad being committed to him and my teammates.

{INTERVIEWER: How do you develop that level of commitment?}

I think it comes through just being there, the experience, when you have a program where you, I don't know, answer to a lot of people everyday and you see people who are there to

help you, who are committed to you, I think you just learn that type of respect and you have it for yourself but you also have it for others.

One resultant behavior of relational autonomy that's particularly problematic is that of initiation whereby older student-athletes "haze" the first-year athletes. While it may be true that he had a "choice" not to participate, as this athlete discussed, because of the need to earn the respect of teammates this choice was not a viable option:

[My team] has had the same initiation for more than 50 years I believe, and uh, you have to kind of run through the gauntlet in the locker room and they throw you in cold water and they, all kind of crazy stuff, and they beat on you. But uh, and that's something where technically you have a choice to do it or not, but if you want to be a part of the team and you want to be respected, then you don't [have a choice]. So, that was a time when I was definitely, felt pressured or obligated to something, you know. You might not want to do it or you don't want to do it (laughs) more than likely, but uh, it's something that you have to go through to, to sort of earn your stripes and show your commitment and respect for the program, the team, the people there...

This athlete continued:

You feel like a lower form of life (laughs). I mean, I mean you really know that you're at the bottom of the barrel and you're not, you're not exempt from anything, you know. You're really put to the test just like anybody else and it doesn't matter where you came from or what you're accustomed to.

This athlete also noted:

...they've never had anybody not do it. Eventually everyone has done it, so then you sort of think to yourself, you're like, "well, yes you have a choice but do you want to be the only person who's never done that?" you know. I mean you would be going out into unmarked territory, you know, I mean nobody's ever done that, you know so, I mean I think that would scare anybody away from not doing it ever.

Peer pressure is another example of relational autonomy that can lead to negative results. Although there was the option not to drink, in this situation the need to prove one's commitment to teammates outweighed this athlete's usual choice:

...there was one time when we had a big win and everyone, every scholarship [athlete] on the team went to [a friend's] house and [....] everybody was having a beer or two to celebrate the win or whatever. And I don't really drink, and I was one of the few people

there that felt that way, but uh, you know, it was kind of another thing I mean, you know, you do it out of respect for your teammates and the program, you know. I won't say it went against what I believe, but, you know, it's just something I just don't really do, don't really think about it. And uh, but I did it anyway because I didn't want to, you know, not show my teammates that respect and my commitment to them, because I know if it came down to it and the shoe was on the other foot, they would have done it.

In reviewing the effects of autonomy, it would seem more beneficial for athletes to perceive they have a choice in their behaviors because they would be more likely to exert greater effort, perform better, and be more satisfied when engaging in behaviors of their choosing. When the athletes felt they had the “ultimate choice” in their behaviors more positive results emerged, whereas beliefs of obligation to engage in an activity had more negative effects. Note that relational autonomy had a great influence on student-athletes’ choices that produced both positive and negative results. While relational autonomy seemed to exert the most influence on the student-athletes’ ultimate decisions, sometimes these decisions had negative consequences, as was the case with hazing and celebratory drinking. However, the degree to which the athletes actually experienced autonomy seemed to be less when negatives results occurred than if the behavior had more positive results.

Minor Theme 2: Model of Desired Autonomy

A few of the student-athletes in this study noted that it was good to have some control and choice but that coaches also needed to have some as well. Hence, it is possible that a model of desired autonomy may be similar to an “inverted-U”, where athletes can feel autonomous even when coaches are making decisions for them. If the coaches have too much control, then the athletes’ perceptions of autonomy decrease:

BOB: *Yeah. I definitely think so. In golf I think it's quite different in every sport, but golf's an individual sport anyway so you're going to really have a lot of-it's up to you*

what to do. If you want to be successful or not you have that choice. I mean, no one can take that away from you in the end. But if someone controls you...if someone controls, coach can try to control you all he wants but at some point it will be a negative, too much control is bad, too little is bad sometimes too.

SETH: *I definitely think that control is good, I mean I, I don't think a coach should just be like "Alright, you all have practice" and you can just be out there and he'll let you do what you want to do.*

CHARLES: *...you should still have your own opinion but you should keep a balance there, you can't be a rebel and just do what you like, um, so you've got to balance it.*

Sometimes the amount of autonomy athletes desire is rooted in their relationships with their coaches. This athlete believes that while athletes can have a personal, respectful relationship with their coaches, their coaches should have some control and not let their athletes walk all over them:

[My one coach is] like my friend. It's a good relationship but I don't know if it's the relationship I'm looking for between a coach and an athlete. Like I really like him, like I think he's a great person but he's not helping me perform to my best, like I feel like I can walk all over him which is not a good relationship.

An exact model of ideal autonomy is difficult to create since it is likely to vary from person to person. However, I would suggest as Charles did, that there should be a balance between having complete control and the constraints placed on that control. Seemingly, the athletes were more accepting of constraints on their autonomy within sport, acknowledging that decisions made had to be for the good of the team. When constraints were placed on the non-athletic aspects of their lives (i.e., sponsorship) the athletes were less accepting.

Minor Theme 3: Power

This is a power driven country (laughs). It's like if you don't have a lot of it it's going to be hard to change anything. Not saying that it can't be done because anything's possible but it's very, very difficult. (JAY)

The power dynamics that exist in collegiate sport as well as in the larger society can impact the perceptions of autonomy of student-athletes. While few student-athletes discussed societal issues that impacted them, many discussed their perceptions of their own power or of those close to them. The student-athletes in this study were able to discuss times when they felt powerful or powerless and to talk about what influenced that level of power, the related feelings, and the impact on their decisions. Examples of power were expressed throughout the student-athletes' experiences; thus, many of their encounters with power have already been mentioned. The following is a brief representation of issues of power that were acknowledged by the student-athletes.

Sub-Theme 1: Perceptions of Power

Each of the student-athletes had different definitions of power, ranging from confidence in their decisions to the actual ability to make things the way they want. Interestingly, they all defined "power" at the individual level and failed to take into account the power dynamics of the larger society:

SAM: *I would say power is probably the ability to make things the way you want them, I mean whatever situation that would be you can make it how you want it to be.*

AMANI: *Power would be [the] extra added force behind your own decisions.*

{INTERVIEWER: What do you mean?}

AMANI: *I mean like, if you make a decision, it's not the decision that you make but it's again, like, the confidence, and having everything surrounded by you, everything in your mind is totally focused and you know that that's the right decision to make. Like, you have the power to know that that's the right decision.*

JAY: *Power would be, it's overall strength I would say, you know whether that be financially or physically or whatever, it's, it's the ability to overcome whatever obstacle.*

BOB: *I feel like what I have to say has more weight to people, more meaning to it...*

VIKING: *Having something that no one else can take from you...that no one else can make that decision, 'cause you have the power.*

Sub-Theme 2: Self-Power

Self-power was a common sub-theme that emerged from the student-athletes' discussions of power. Self-power was related to: identity, control, decision-making, group, performance, standing up for oneself, influence, recruiting, and learning.

Example 1: Identity Development

Some student-athletes noted that the more they knew what they wanted out of life and had developed a more stable sense of self, the more powerful they felt:

SAM: *I do feel really powerful now and I think I did last year too, I think because actually probably second semester last year I started feeling you know powerful, because I feel like I've gotten my life straight, I mean I know it sounds bad but I've developed who I am as a person I think and I know what I want to be and the things I want to do and I'm pretty much doing the things that I do want to do so I think that I feel like I have a lot of power now 'cause I feel like I have a lot of control, and I think I'm doing what I want to do.*

Example 2: Confidence

Having developed a sense of confidence also emerged as being key to athletes' feeling powerful:

AMANI: *I think confidence gives you power. Whether it's perceived by outsiders, it could be different. But to you, individually, I think that confidence gives you power.*

TYLER: *I don't think I ever feel like powerful or anything, but it's more like confidence...*

Example 3: Correct Decisions

For some, power came in knowing they were making the correct decision:

BOB: *I guess if I make the right decision and the right choices I'll have more power, "power" per se I guess. People will listen to me more because you're more credible, they're more likely to listen to you because you are.*

AMANI: *...if you have the power to make a choice, in order to make that choice and have the power to do so, I think you have to have that confidence to know that is the right choice to make. Therefore, giving you the power to make that correct choice...*

Example 4: Group Power

Two of the student-athletes in this study noted how a group may be more powerful than an individual in enacting change:

I think it helped to have everyone else around because like I was saying earlier, I've talked to [the coach] before just about stuff I didn't agree with but I think when you get him individually he's always like defending himself, like he never sees your point of view he's just like, well, he just tries to defend himself. But I think that our whole team, I think it was pretty good, I think like he saw our point of view better that way.

{INTERVIEWER: Why do you think he's defensive when it's with individuals but not when you talk to him as a group?}

Just because, on an individual [level] I think maybe he doesn't, he thinks it's just a problem with you, you're the only one that's having problems, not everyone one else is pissed off about it.

In discussing how he wished that he could go home for the holidays instead of having to practice, this football player noted that the only way to get the NCAA to create a rule banning competition over holidays would be through group protest (though he laughed this off as unlikely to happen):

COUGAR: I don't know. We could all protest it. (laughs). If every college football team protested it, I don't know, that's probably, I don't know, it's something to think about.

Example 5: Performance

Several athletes believed that the better they performed the more power they would have:

SETH: Say if you're the best on the team you have more power so therefore you've got probably more, like if you did something maybe the consequences are less, like if you're the best then you've got more power over the coach because you're the best so you can probably get away with more stuff.

He continued by noting:

SETH: Like take football. If you're the star of the team the coach is depending on you, he depends on you for his job, if you're the star of the team and you get in trouble and you do something you're not supposed to, if he doesn't play you or if he kicks you off the team then that's hurting him and the team but it's hurting, it has a direct affect on him.

So I think maybe in that way. Like they're more apt to let you get by with stuff then if you were just like a normal person.

Seth also said:

SETH: *I know that everybody feels the same way about like, when you're playing good then you're more important than when you're not.*

BOB: *Well like, if I'm the number 4 guy on the team it doesn't mean much, but if I'm doing better I think I have more clout to what I say. I mean I don't personally, I think, it just makes it sounds better if it's coming from someone who's doing it successfully, being successful. I mean, I don't really have a leg to stand on if I'm barely making the line up.*

BOB: *I'm trying to think of a time where I had some power in golf. Probably after I, after I played good or something, last year or this year, I felt like I belonged... a little better.*

{INTERVIEWER: *What do you mean by "belonged"?*}

BOB: *Like I felt that people respected me that I was good, that I played good. I kinda like proved myself. I felt powerful...*

CHARLES: *Every time I go out running. Um, when we go out running, like I haven't lost a race yet so I fell pretty powerful when we go out.*

{INTERVIEWER: *How does that feel?*}

CHARLES: *It makes me feel good. Um...I'm not in that stage with golf yet so that's where I want to be in golf, I want to be [like I'm running.] Man, that makes you feel pretty powerful.*

ANIYAH: *I guess after the first meet 'cause I, I did pretty good. I partially qualified for Nationals. I guess I felt powerful then. 'Cause I guess like that has something to do with like your respect, as far as um, the teammates, coaches, like they seem to respect you more the better you do...*

Example 6: Stands Up for Self

For one athlete, power was related to standing up for himself:

I felt powerful...when I went in last year to have that meeting with the head coach and my position coach, I felt powerful then because I was there, I was being frank, I was speaking my mind, and I was really talking about the things I didn't feel were right. And I mean this is too, you know I'm talking to somebody who holds a big portion of my future in their hands, you know uh, I felt powerful then because you know I wasn't afraid to do that and uh, and I really had a lot of things to get off my chest, so

He continued:

In one of my classes this semester um, I could tell probably around the third class period

that I had with this teacher that, she really didn't care too much for athletes. I don't think it mattered what sport you were in, but she really made some derogatory comments toward me and I could just tell it was going to be a long semester. So I set up a meeting with her and we talked for about 2 hours and I asked why she felt that way or whatever, and she gave me some stories about that but then I gave her my thoughts about, why she thinks that athletes think that they can get away with things or whatever and I told her that my situation had nothing to do with that because I could ace her class regardless. And I stayed in the class and I knew I had an A, you know, so uh, that makes me feel powerful in the sense that, you know I can prove her wrong. It was something that she obviously felt strongly about, but I can, I can withstand that and prove differently

Example 7: Influence

Several of the student-athletes noted that when they were in a position to influence others they felt powerful:

TYLER: *I got to talk to like 10 first grade classes. It was the funniest thing I have ever done in my life. And they have like a little pep rally and stuff like that, and you know that kind of makes you feel I guess powerful 'cause I mean you know you're talking to all these little kids and I remember when I was in like grade school and stuff like that, looking at like, you know they'd bring in a football player or a congressman or something like that. You know, all these kids, you're talking to them, and [...] they were just kind of like...just kind of staring at you and like in awe that you came to talk to them. [...] And just like we get to go to hospitals you know, you talk to these kids and you're like "stay in school, don't do drugs, listen to your parents because that's how I got to where I'm sitting at." [...] And this one kid, like I signed his little shirt and to this day he wears the same shirt to bed every day and like I said, "trust in God, go to school" he hasn't missed a day even though he's sick. He doesn't miss school, and it's just funny how like a big influence that you can have and that makes you feel like I guess confident and powerful*

{INTERVIEWER: How do you feel in that situation?}

TYLER: *I think it's awesome just because you have the ability to kind of almost mold somebody into being a better person or not necessarily into a better person but just having a better opportunity in life...*

REBECCA: *Powerful...um...yeah, um, whenever we go to the elementary schools, I think we have a big influence on the kids there because a lot of them, I mean the schools we've gone to, these kids don't plan to go to college, they might not even go to high school, things like that. And I think I guess I have influence on a few of them because I try to go visit them as regularly as possible. So I think just doing that kind of thing that makes me, to have like, I like being a role model, I definitely like having that kind of power in children's lives. Powerful with my peers, I once gave a talk at AIA one semester, like it was like my meeting, like I got to just share a lot of the gospel, a lot of the word and there were new people and I felt like I had an influence on them because I was up there. And so*

that's just like, my teaching and the power of teaching, um, to reach out to people and things like that. So anytime you're in a role model position I feel very powerful.

AMANI: *I think when I'm speaking I feel powerful. Not, not just for the attention, though, but speaking um, I speak a lot with like Christian organizations, like FCA, with just some different churches, different banquets I guess. And, I think that's like the most exhilarating feeling that I've ever felt is being able to speak on that, on like my spiritual views and beliefs being able to share that with others.*

{INTERVIEWER: Yeah. What is it about that that gives you feelings of power?}

AMANI: *Just knowing that I'm doing the right thing. It's knowing that I'm trying to help others in something more important than sports, or just life in general. Just being able to help somebody, that is the most important thing of everybody's life.*

Example 8: Recruiting

The recruiting process was an experience of power for some athletes. The athletes who discussed times when they felt powerful acknowledged that these feelings resulted from knowing they had the choice and they were in control.

COUGAR: *Powerful...ah...I guess before you become a college athlete, going through recruiting, it kinda makes you feel powerful, especially if you come out kinda highly rated or something or just good at your sport. All the coaches are wanting you so you got kinda mind control over them. You can like, recruiting is kinda a game because it's like the person being recruited really has all the power. If you don't want nobody to call you, if you want coaches to quit calling you, all you got to do is say so. Or, it's um, if you just like people sucking up to you, it makes you feel powerful.*

VIKING: *The whole recruiting process in high school. Like I knew I could go anywhere I wanted to. All these school want me.*

Example 9: Learning

Cougar noted that increasing his knowledge and learning new things made him feel more powerful:

COUGAR: *When I knew what I was doing in lifting weights probably, I felt really powerful when I knew the correct technique, the skill, it just makes you feel powerful, it makes you feel good.*

He continued:

COUGAR: *Powerless probably when not knowing your plays, 'cause if you pretty much*

know your plays you pretty much control your destiny, control your playing time. So probably when I didn't quite know all my plays or whatever I felt kinda powerless.

{INTERVIEWER: So it sounds like when you're talking about being powerful and powerless that learning something kinda new or unfamiliar-}

COUGAR: That's what power feels, it's a whole lot different from high school. College is all about learning techniques and all of that, high school it don't matter as long as you make a play. But college you gotta learn the techniques and be comfortable with them.

Each of the athletes had different experiences with power because often they had different definitions of what power actually was. When asked to describe a time when they felt powerful many could easily recall such a situation and the emotions and experiences related to it.

Sub-Theme 3: Powerless

Although there were times when the student-athletes felt powerful, there were also occasions when they felt powerless. These times included: redshirting, when they are unable to affect the outcome, sport, during their first-year, and when injured.

Example 1: Redshirting

Some of the athletes noted how powerless they felt when they redshirted:

[Coach] just treated us like we did not exist. I mean it was just like we weren't even on the planet. And so that's not gonna help your confidence, especially me 'cause I, well there was another freshman redshirting but I mean I had no clue who he was even and then he doesn't even, I don't know it was hard because...if you're older and you redshirt you know, I mean you're more settled on who you are and I mean I was just figuring out myself who I was, going through I mean just changing everything about me from High School to College I mean all aspects and he didn't help at all.

Another athlete noted:

Like that goes for if you redshirt you really get thrown down on the totem pole.

{INTERVIEWER: What do you mean?}

Like, obviously you're not a priority if you're redshirting but like you don't get to play [you sport] as much, you're like the last-which you should be, you're redshirting, but still...

Example 2: When Unable To Affect Change/Outcome

Feelings of powerlessness emerged when the athletes felt they had no control over the outcome of a situation:

Powerless? um, like I guess like, maybe like I said like when I talked to coach one-on-one before when I had problems, maybe then just 'cause he just didn't, like when I talked to him it just felt like it didn't do any good.

{INTERVIEWER: So it felt that it didn't really matter that you were talking to him?} Like I was glad that I told him how I felt but I didn't feel, like I wasn't getting anywhere, like I was just like, well, it's not like doing any good but at least he knows how I feel.

Another athlete noted:

There's some days where I'll be like, I wish it was more in my hands, like deciding to stay here and, ah, playing time, you know. I think where it comes to playing time with me I think that's probably where I feel powerless, 'cause you have no control over it. You can practice hard all week but you don't know if you're gonna play or not. You're not guaranteed anything.

Example 3: Sport Performance

In contrast to athletes believing that playing well increased their power, some athletes felt they were powerless when they performed poorly:

When you have a crappy practice, um. When you go in a situation, and, nobody knows anything about you, you're just kind of, um, there, I guess.

When I first got here and I was training and I felt terrible. I couldn't, it was just so different from high school. It was like, I can't even explain it, but I was just, practices were just killing me. I was in the back, I was just, it was the worst. I just felt, yeah I felt powerless then, for sure.

Example 4: First-Year

Their first year in school was a time of powerlessness for some athletes:

ANIYAH: *And then being a freshman too felt powerless.*

{INTERVIEWER: In what way?}

ANIYAH: *Just because I'm a freshman. It was just different. "Oh, you're just a freshman" you know, just little comments like that. "Like it doesn't really matter what you have to say", just jokingly, but you know, I felt powerless. I was like when we would go on trips, freshmen, we would eat in the order of you know your class, so, I felt*

powerless then. You can't do anything about it.

{INTERVIEWER: How do you feel in those situations when you feel powerless?}

ANIYAH: I don't like it. I like, I don't really like necessarily being in control but I like to have some say or some kind of power or something, I don't like feeling powerless.

SAM: My freshman year I didn't think I had any power really because that was a point when I didn't feel like I had very much control and I knew that I wanted to keep playing golf and I knew that I was doing the right, I mean you know, and then I mean not that I made bad grades or anything but I mean my grades weren't as high as I wanted them to be or I mean, you know, and I kind of felt powerless then I guess and I hadn't met that many people, it was just an awkward, hard time you know just adjusting to college is hard so I mean I pretty much felt powerless.

{INTERVIEWER: And how did you feel when you felt powerless?}

SAM: It's hard to be happy you know, I mean because you can't be content with yourself and it's hard to really like yourself when you feel completely powerless, it's kind of, you're not really happy, not that you're unhappy but you're just not as happy as you could be.

{INTERVIEWER: Are there any other situations where you felt powerless?}

SAM: That's probably one of the few, I mean that's probably one of the only times that I have felt that way and at the time I didn't even know I was feeling that way it was more looking back on it and understanding you know what I was feeling.

Example 5: Injury

Two of the athletes in this study noted the lack of power they experienced when they sustained major injuries:

TYLER: I did feel powerless for about 9 months because I couldn't, you know I was in a straight cast, I was on crutches, and you know everything that I knew in my life which was athletic was gone, what I thought, and so I, I felt absolutely powerless...

REBECCA: Being hurt you definitely feel powerless, you feel out of control. 'Cause it's not what you want, in your mind you know exactly what you hope and expect to be and then when your body can't physically do it you definitely feel like you have no power over, it's just the whole mind-body thing, you know what you're capable of but if your body won't let you do it you feel out of control. "Like I can't even control my own body-what?!" (laughs)

Similarly to identifying times when they felt powerful, the athletes could easily recall times where they felt powerless. While the athletes' experiences with powerlessness varied from person to person, there seemed to be an overarching

perception that they lacked control or they were not respected when they did not feel powerful.

Sub-Theme 4: Others' Power

In discussing the times when they felt powerless, the student-athletes noted who did have power. For most, this was their coach. The athletes discussed many situations when their coaches had the power to control their behaviors. Having power over scholarships and playing time were two reasons student-athletes said the coaches were powerful and had control over them:

It's like coach signs your scholarship check and you don't want to say anything too negative to him.

Another athlete noted that if athletes are not completely committed to their coaches and they try to challenge them, they risk losing playing time and possibly their scholarship:

Your coaches want you to be 100% committed to them and this program and that's it.

{INTERVIEWER: yeah. And if you're not?}

And if you're not, then they have the option of getting rid of you, or you know, putting you on the back burner and not letting you play or whatever, whatever they want to do towards you

{INTERVIEWER: Does anyone ever challenge that, some of the things that the coaches had you do that maybe a lot of people don't agree with?}

Definitely, but those are the guys who are put on the back burner, or you know, gotten rid of, you know. I mean, you're at their mercy. I mean you can speak your mind, it's a free country, but that doesn't mean that you're not going to be put in the room and you know, close the door shut on you. I mean they have the option of listening and taking constructive criticism or just getting you, getting you kicked off the team or whatever.

{INTERVIEWER: What usually happens?}

The latter of the two. You don't get your scholarship renewed or something happens and you, you just don't play any more or whatever.

One athlete discussed the idea that coaches sometimes have power even beyond the athletic setting:

Like for instance a college coach in his home state at a Division I school, [...] they have a lot of pull [...] if they really want to get one of their players like out of a speeding ticket they probably could if they really wanted to and if they could.

Another athlete remarked that even though she trusts that her coaches have her best interests in mind, she still feels powerless in her relationships with her coaches:

With the coaches I don't feel very powerful, I feel like they have all the power.

{INTERVIEWER: Why not?}

Um, because...just because I know, or I trust that they have my best interests so I know that what they say is the right thing. I never really questioned them, which I guess I should have questioned them my freshman year because I knew I was in a bad situation 'cause I was just hurt and like emotionally a wreck because, it's just I couldn't do anything, I couldn't compete and I was frustrated, and all that stuff. And, um, I don't know, they definitely had the power to encourage me (laughs) or make me feel like crap...

Sub-Theme 5: Socio-Structural Power

Issues of power in society and in collegiate sport also arose throughout the student-athletes' discussions. Many of the golfers talked about how Title IX was powerful in shaping their experiences. Money was also noted by several student-athletes as being a major source of power, as was football, often due to its connection with university revenue. The NCAA, scholarships, and social norms were also sources of power identified by the student-athletes.

Example 1: Title IX

The three golfers who were from America had strong feelings towards Title IX. When asked the demographic questions, "Are you on a scholarship?", "Is it full or partial?" and "How do you feel about this level of scholarship?", each of the three golfers discussed the influence of Title IX. They felt that Title IX was outdated and that their sport has less scholarship money because of it. They all believed in the concept behind it, equality for everyone, but they felt they were not getting their equal share. Even though

none of them sought to challenge the way their athletic department awarded the scholarships, they felt that it needed to be changed on the national level. They believed this was unlikely to happen:

BOB: ...Title IX's outdated, it's from the 70's, for equal opportunities for women. And they put football in the equation, and there's no women's football team and it has to equal with the number of women at the school, the ratio, so they put 88 football scholarships, or however many scholarships, into the equation. So there's going to be more than 50 scholarships on the women's side than on the men's side just because of football. But football shouldn't be taking any because there's no women's football.

{INTERVIEWER: So you feel that your sport gets slighted a bit.}

BOB: Oh, yeah, a lot of sports do. I mean, it's different at different schools. I know at [another university] their golf team has 2 scholarships and the baseball team has 5. It's bullshit, it really is. I mean how do you expect them to compete, and it's a big school, it's a [big] conference school.

{INTERVIEWER: And who do you think is at fault for this? Who do you think has the power to decide this, or change this?}

BOB: I guess right now the Supreme Court has the power to change this, Title IX. But I think it's good, I think it's good that everyone gets a chance, I just think it's outdated.

SETH: Yeah, like I think we should have it where everybody can have like 70%, 50% [funding] at least.

{INTERVIEWER: Why do you think it's the way it is?}

SETH: That Title IX I guess.

{INTERVIEWER: Title IX?}

SETH: Yeah, to make up for the football.

{INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about it?}

SETH: I don't think it's very good. I think they need to change it personally.

These athletes discuss football and archaic legislation as being the “problems” with Title IX, yet similarly to when they lacked autonomy, they seem to accept their own lack of power to enact change.

Example 2: Money

Many of the athletes discussed the power of money. They talked about how the teams that make money are the teams that can influence policy. They talked about how many decisions are made based on money and that people who don't have money don't

have power. For example, in discussing why he thought that smaller, “less popular” teams don’t have much say as to what goes on in college athletics, Bob noted:

BOB: *They don’t make the money. I mean that’s why...[thousands of] people aren’t coming out every Saturday to watch us play golf.*

In discussing Title IX, this senior golfer felt that football has a lot of influence on policy because that sport produces revenue. When asked what he thought it would take to change Title IX, Seth responded:

SETH: *Somebody in the NCAA I guess.*

{INTERVIEWER: And what do you think would influence them to?}

SETH: *They get influenced by money, by football, they bring in the money, basically.*

{INTERVIEWER: Do you think like athletes and people like you could change it?}

SETH: *No...because we don’t bring in the money, we’re just kinda, we can’t change anything.*

Cougar talked about how if he could change anything it would be to be able to go home over the holidays. He noted that it is money that keeps the NCAA from creating a rule that would allow this to happen:

COUGAR: *I guess probably the making of the money. Probably families together on holidays and sometimes they go, the ones that like football, go to a game as a family like a family tradition or something. That’s probably why they won’t change it ‘cause they don’t want to miss out on more money.*

Critics of college sport claim that many of the decisions universities make are made to turn a financial profit. Sage (1998) argues that intercollegiate sport is an example of how the labor force is oppressed at the hands of big business. As collegiate sport becomes more commercialized and revolves more around making money, some argue that collegiate athletes have the right to be paid (Coakley, 2001; Sage, 1998). Critics also claim that the tuition waivers and room and board wages allotted to scholarship players are little compensation for the amount of time and work student-athletes put into their

sport (Sage, 1998). Nevertheless, the NCAA insists that collegiate sport is a form of amateurism and, therefore, that athletes cannot be compensated; in fact, any revenue generated is given to the university rather than to the players who earn it (Meggyesy, 2000; Sage, 1998). Hence, the amount of the scholarship does not compare to the millions of dollars produced by the labor of the athletes, but instead works to strengthen the power of the athletic department (Coakley, 2001; Sage, 1998). The focus on producing revenue leads some athletes to feel that they are controlled by their sport and have little autonomy in the choices they make on a daily basis.

Some athletes feel such criticisms do have merit. One athlete discussed how he felt used because of all he is expected to do for the small “payment” in the form of a scholarship he is given for all his hard work:

You feel used sometimes, you know, it's like the NCAA is making a lot of money off of you, the university is making a lot of money off of you and your teammates, and so are your coaches, and you see a very very very very very small percentage of that, you know in your scholarship and bowl check if you go to a bowl game and stuff like that, but they can sell your jersey, they can sell all your football products, and, and you don't get any compensation for that. And here you are, you're, you're going hard at this to the best of your abilities, but you know if you slip up or if you have an injury, then you're used goods and you're put in the back of the line, you're put on the back shelf, you know. And they end up bringing somebody else in who's fresh, and start all over again and you'll be forgotten.

{INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about that?}

That feels bad [laughs]. It also feels bad. Uh, yeah, that's a part, you know, as, you know, living in a capitalistic country. [...] everything for the love of money, you know. That's greedy, yeah.

He continued by noting that he felt he was giving the university service in return for a scholarship:

Service. Yeah, service. I mean, I'm, I'm obviously out there playing my sport, you know, helping get the university and the program recognition, helping to get the coaches fame and recognition, and also to be a good promoter of the university and of this staff and this program once I leave because anything I do after this stage of my life, you know I'll

always have [this university] stamped on me, as being a product of this school.

He continued:

Yeah, I mean, it is, that's wrong, you know, just X amount of money put in for you to school or whatever, but you know, college, especially at a public university, it's not incredibly expensive. I mean you can, you can work a job and put your way through school, which is basically what we're doing [laughs]. That's, that's basically what it is, you know, it's just, it's a little different.

Example 3: Football

As several athletes noted, football has a great deal of power and popularity when it comes to collegiate sport. Often, this power is derived because of the perception that football makes a tremendous amount of money for the school:

REBECCA: *I mean I know [football] brings in a lot of revenue for the school, I mean they make money for the school, I don't know why it happens, I don't know why track doesn't do that for people, you know. It's just something that like the sport, um, and I guess the more money you make for the school the more popular your team will be and things like that. But I don't understand why certain sports don't do as well as other sports. I mean definitely certain sports are much more interesting but I don't know why. Like swimming or diving, nobody goes to their meets, you know. Track, they're starting to because the men do so well. But, I think it's just, I don't know what it is (laughs)*

Rebecca also recognized the perks that come with playing such a popular sport:

REBECCA: *I know my boyfriend's on the football team they get so much stuff just for going to the [a bowl game]. Like he was injured all year and didn't get to play and he still gets like an X-box. It's like, it's like ahh, I was frustrated, you know. It's like with the men's, not just looking at the women's program, but, yeah, that, that just seemed wrong. Whereas, I know my teammate like her boyfriend plays golf and like he works just as hard as some of the football players and I don't think that's right that they get so much more stuff just 'cause it's football. Like I know, I'll go to games and it's raining and I'm just like, "Why are we standing in the rain just with all these people just to watch the football game?" You know? And I love football, my dad was a football coach and it's tons of fun but I just don't understand why they get so much attention, you know.*

The popularity of football was definitely felt by athletes in other sports:

BOB: *I mean we're not seen as the big man on campus like the football team or baseball, you know, we're not really seen as, the perception of us I would think is real a...I don't know how to say it. I think people look at golfers as like low on the totem pole in the*

athletic thing, team thing.

And those in football recognized that they had a higher status than others both in college and in society:

JAY: *I think my experiences differ because this is one of the most major sports on campus. It's one of the most major sports in the country. [.....] So I think my experiences differ because football is put under a spotlight, you know, on most campuses, and uh, so the rules and regulations differ for us than they do for students of other sports and anything we do gets pumped up, you know, and blown out of proportion a lot of times because of what sport we play and our role on campus and in raising money for the school.*

As this senior football player noted, the popularity of football can bring about positive results:

TYLER: *Football, you play big football games and you get interviewed and when you get interviewed people hear what you say and when people hear what you say they talk about what you say, and that's the, that's the thing that I like best about football is you get opportunities to go talk to kids that normally wouldn't, normally opportunities wouldn't you know arise if you're playing another sport.*

Tyler also noted that football is powerful because it can increase the opportunities people have in life, possibly increasing their social status as well. Research supports this claim, arguing that athletes see sport as a means of upward social mobility (Sage, 1998). With the importance of sport in American culture, the media continues to relay the message to young children, especially African-American and working class males, that participation in professional sport is their way to make it in the world and to advance themselves socially and financially (Gatz, Messner, & Ball-Rokeach, 2002; Sailes, 1998).

As some athletes noted:

TYLER: *...some of these kids here have been here for 3 or 4 years and they don't have a car yet, and it does, it hurts my heart some, but it's just kind of a different atmosphere and that just goes more to the point where football helps some of these kids and even me get to a point that wouldn't be attainable unless we had football. It's something that if we didn't have we wouldn't really have anything.*

{INTERVIEWER: And how do you feel about that?}

TYLER: *Thank God for football. Kind of I mean, it's uh, with my parents they do well business wise as well, you know I can't put myself in the same position as some people but um, I just, it's just astonishing to look at some of these people and the backgrounds they come from and all the sudden, you know they're getting an opportunity to get a really good education at [this university], they're getting you know, the uh, the opportunity to play in front of [thousands of] people, where people can look at you on every Saturday of the whole fall, because you know we're televised every Saturday, and so it just gives them the opportunity that these kids would never have unless there was football opportunity.*

These sentiments were echoed by another football player who felt that his ability to play football provided him with the opportunity to get an education at a major university, an opportunity that most people in his family did not have:

COUGAR: *[Football] gave me that chance to go to any college that I wanted to, it made me feel pretty good.*

He continued:

COUGAR: *I don't like school that much but, um, I got to have it and I got to be in it to do something I like doing so that I can get a job someday. And right now I'm kinda happy that I made it 'cause I'm like the first out of my family to be at a Division I, out of my entire family, and probably the first in my family to be on a full scholarship at a Division I. I know I'm the first in that.*

When asked if he felt he would have gone to college if it had not been for football Cougar replied:

COUGAR: *Ummm...honestly...it's about 50/50...I would say....ah, honestly, no, I probably wouldn't.*

{INTERVIEWER: What do you think you'd be doing?}

COUGAR: *Um, probably working in my mom's [business] or one of my family's businesses. Probably something like that.*

{INTERVIEWER: So do you think it's good that you ended up here?}

COUGAR: *Yeah, so I can have my own life and not have to depend on nobody, I'll get my own education, I'll get my own job, and just do my own thing.*

He later continued his discussion of the power of football in his life:

COUGAR: *I love football and football has brought a lot of happiness to me really. Um, it's probably, besides my family it's probably the next best thing that's ever happened to*

me really [...]. Probably, I know that if I wasn't playing football I would have been probably been somewhere having kids, pretty much, I'd probably have a bunch of little kids running around or something, so football it keeps me occupied...

Football is one of the most popular sports in America. Because of this popularity many of the athletes felt that football players have greater power than other athletes.

Although there are some drawbacks to such popularity, there are also some advantages, such as social mobility and opportunities to be a role model. Note that at different universities, different sports are popular and more powerful but this power is often linked to sports that are thought to generate revenue.

Example 4: NCAA

The NCAA was also mentioned as being powerful since they create many of the rules that restrict the behavior of collegiate student-athletes:

BOB: *The NCAA has stupid rules. If they could just change the rules, why couldn't everything be fully funded or something like that? Why are there rules on scholarships? Because some schools, maybe the NCAA is at fault 'cause they have really strict and sometimes outdated rules too.*

Example 5: Social Norms

Surprisingly, only one student-athlete noted the power of societal norms. This athlete was very passionate about the issue and felt that it truly affected her decisions, her power, and her control. She had a great deal to say about how social norms are created, how they affect people, and how they can change. Some of her discussion on this topic is presented here; the rest can be found in Appendix H. As Viking stated:

VIKING: *You have control over the decisions you make in life. Alright. Well, what power is, like the social norms. Like that has the power because that's not right compared to everyone else in America. Whether you choose to date a black person if you're white then you're in control of that, it's something you did. But the power is that it's not normal. The norm has the power but you're in control of [what you do in the face of] it.*

She continued by saying:

VIKING: *I guess what I'm saying is that control is more of an individual basis and power kinda affects more things.*

Later in the conversation, Viking talked about how these social norms made her feel powerless sometimes:

VIKING: *I think life kinda makes you powerless sometimes too.*

{INTERVIEWER: *In what way?*}

VIKING: *Because there's a lot of people here who's living in the same world you're living in and doing different things and they have things they want to do and society has things that are normal and what's not. And, just like you feel powerless [...]*

{INTERVIEWER: *Can you talk about, um, you said society sometimes with the norms-*}

VIKING: *Yeah, like, mmm, like [everybody thinks they know] what's wrong and what's not. Being heterosexual is normal, being any other way, bi, gay, whatever, it's not normal. You know, you feel [left out] like that 'cause someone's always saying, (in a mocking voice) "Oh my God! That's awful!" [...] Um, abortion, people have their opinions. Society says it's not normal, it's not the right thing to do. You know, we're in [this state] too, it's kinda like the Bible belt and it's not right. Interracial dating, it's not right. You know.*

She also discussed what she felt could be done to change people's attitudes:

VIKING: *I don't think it can change. It can get better and I think through time, like now it's more accepted than it was in like 1950 or something. So I just think time is the only thing that's going to change people's minds about things. And just, it's more about acceptance and people just stepping up out of the box and being like, "Alright, it's gonna happen, it's out there so there's no need for me to spend another day of my life worrying about two guys walking down the street holding hands or three guys kissing." There's no need, there's more important things in life. You could die tomorrow and you're gonna worry about, you know, the black and the white, a black guy and a white guy walking down the street. There's just bigger things, there's bigger things out there to worry about.*

{INTERVIEWER: *Do you think you on an individual level can impact that at all?*}

VIKING: *Just make it better. I can give this speech to everybody else (laughs). But you know, you never know. Some people are just set in their ways.*

{INTERVIEWER: *What do you think keeps it from changing?*}

VIKING: *Stubbornness. And people being brought up that way. It's hard to break, you know, it's hard not to be like that when you're brought up that way 'cause day and night, say you're raised in a family that, you know, you've got to marry, you're raised in a white family and your parents say, "You are to marry a white man." And that's not how you feel, you know, you're in love with this black guy and whatever and you feel like you can't bring him home, like that's just, I don't know.*

Discussion of Power

What power actually is may differ depending on the person defining it. Power can be about conformity or individualism (Burstyn, 1999). Power can be “embodied, institutionalized, and instrumentally wielded to promote the interests of specific groups of people” (Burstyn, 1999, p. 33). Or, power can be fluid and changing, depending on the situation, who is in power, who is being constrained by the power, and how power is conceived by all those affected (Brackenridge, 2001; Foucault, 1979; Gruneau, 1999). Influencing each individual definition of power are societal forces that identify what is important in American culture. Although there are many sources of power- individual, cultural, and societal- the majority of the athletes in this study defined power at the individual level (Brackenridge, 2001). In follow-up interviews, I asked some of the athletes why they didn’t discuss issues of power in the larger society. I was told that it was because they couldn’t do anything about it so they didn’t focus on it. This is similar to how they handled other areas of their life where they lacked autonomy and had no control- they accepted it and just got used to it.

Brackenridge (2001) provides support for this finding, as she claims that when beliefs about power rest on how society is structured, little agency to change the balance of power is given to the individual. Some researchers believe that when looking at power from the viewpoint of its beneficiaries- in this case, revenue producing sports, athletic departments, and the NCAA- this cultural power can be negotiated and resisted and thus leaves room for change (Brackenridge, 2001; Foucault, 1979; Gruneau, 1999). Unfortunately, the student-athletes in this study did not see power this way; all they vocalized was the fact that football had money and thus was powerful. Even though they

recognized the power of money in society, the student-athletes felt powerless to create change even when this directly affected them (i.e., scholarships and Title IX).

The athletes did recognize the impact power had on their autonomy. In most instances, they recognized the limitations of their ability to make decisions for themselves when they lacked power. They also recognized that the times when they did feel powerful were times when they also had the ability to make choices for themselves, to influence others, and to exert their control. Hence, the athletes were able to be autonomous agents when they experienced self-power, but lacked feelings of agency when they felt powerless or when they were constrained by societal powers. This parallels Mackenzie and Stoljar's (2000) suggestion that we reconceptualize agency "as an effect of the complex and shifting configurations of power" (pp. 10-11).

Summary of Findings

The present findings provide a description of student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy. First, a description of student-athletes' **personal autonomy** (their belief that they have the ultimate choice) emerged. The biggest influence on student-athletes' abilities to experience personal autonomy was the reshaping of their identities and reevaluation of their values. When student-athletes were able to further develop their self-concept and to identify their deepest desires, they were able to make decisions for themselves based on these desires. Baxter-Magolda (1999) reported similar findings when looking at the development and decisions of students over the course of twelve years, beginning from when they entered college. She found that once people recognized that they could make informed decisions for themselves they began the process of "self-authorship" and were able to make choices based on their intrinsic desires. She noted

that, people must have firm convictions about what is important to them, convictions which arise from their mature ability to evaluate relevant information and make decisions after thinking about what it is that they believe in. It would seem then that Baxter-Magolda's notion of "self-authorship" is akin to autonomy. In both her study and the current study, this sense of personal autonomy brought with it many positive benefits, including increased confidence, performance, effort, motivation, and satisfaction.

Second, student-athletes discussed times when they **lacked autonomy**. Coach control, academics, sponsorship, power dynamics, and lack of recognition of individual differences were all examples of times when the student-athletes perceived that they had little choice or lacked control over situations. Student-athletes often accepted the times when they lacked autonomy because they had committed to a restrictive lifestyle. Because they had made the autonomous choice to commit to being a collegiate student-athlete, they felt that their behaviors within this environment were partially under their control since they had "signed the line" and had chosen to accept diminished autonomy. Athletes also reframed behaviors that were externally controlled to avoid having to constantly renegotiate their identity and also to avoid focusing on the lack of autonomy they did experience. Instead, they focused on the benefits of having a restrictive lifestyle. Lack of autonomy had a reverse effect when student-athletes didn't listen to their coaches at all; this increased the difficulty athletes had in accomplishing desired tasks and it resulted in decreased performance.

Third, **relational autonomy** (defining oneself and making decisions based on relationships with others) was a consistent influence on the decisions of student-athletes. Student-athletes' caring, trusting, committed, and respectful relationships with their

teammates, families, God, and coaches formed the basis of many of the decisions they made. These relationships with others increased student-athletes' effort, motivation, and their desire to keep a positive team atmosphere. These relationships also had the potential to coerce behaviors (making student-athletes less autonomous) and, in some cases, these coerced behaviors were detrimental to the athletes (i.e., hazing, drinking).

In comparing student-athletes' perceptions of power with their perceptions of autonomy, it seems that these student-athletes were constantly negotiating between their own desires and the athletic obligations imposed by the structure of collegiate sport. Through further examination, it would appear that these negotiations are balanced on issues of power and founded on their self-concepts. That is, when the student-athletes perceived themselves to be more powerful than the coach or their obligations of sport, they were likely to be more autonomous. For example, the student-athletes noted that once they refined their identity, they had both autonomy and power and were more likely to decide what was best for themselves versus blindly accepting the instructions of the coach. However, when the coach had more power, (s)he was able to influence the choices of the student-athletes, thus decreasing their autonomy.

This situation holds true when looking at relational autonomy as well. For example, many athletes noted that their commitment to teammates was more influential in altering their behaviors than was commitment to their coach. Since making decisions based on caring relationships (teammates) emerged as being autonomous, when student-athletes chose to listen to their teammates rather than to their coach, the perceived power of the coach decreased.

Overall, student-athletes' lives were not completely autonomous, yet they did not

fully lack autonomy either. Within the confines of the collegiate sport environment, there were many limitations on student-athletes' abilities to be autonomous individuals. Seemingly, most of their decisions were based on commitment, mostly being committed to teammates and to the "requirements" of being a collegiate student-athlete. Possibly, then, the heart of student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy lies in their relationships with others. Perhaps because they have a strong sense of commitment, they create a self-concept based on this commitment that then becomes a constant factor in their decision-making process.

Finally, it appears that student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy are dynamic and fluctuate depending on context and their ability to reframe and integrate these experiences into their sense of self. Hence, perceptions of autonomy seem to exist on a continuum from completely lacking autonomy to having ultimate choice. Figure 1 in Appendix F presents the notion that autonomy is a matter of degree. An existing model of motivation (Weinberg & Gould, 2003, p. 137) presents motivation as existing on a continuum, with the degree of intrinsic motivation experienced increasing as an individual becomes more autonomous, as evidenced by their including a "threshold of autonomy" in their model. This threshold represents the point in which athletes move from feeling that they "have" to engage in a behavior to feeling that they "want" to engage in a behavior. In contrasting this model of motivation to the continuum of autonomy that student-athletes perceived, when the athletes perceived they lacked autonomy they had not crossed the threshold and were thus extrinsically motivated by a sense of obligation. However, some athletes were still able to experience a slight degree of autonomy in "coerced" activities because they discussed how they reframed or

accepted such behaviors. Therefore, depending on how they had processed their lack of autonomy, the student-athletes' examples actually showed the process of moving past the threshold so that they could experience autonomy. Both personal autonomy and relational autonomy were experienced in degrees as well, ranging from some autonomy to a greater degree of autonomy. Note that when athletes made choices based on others, when these choices did not cross the threshold, the athletes experienced a lack of autonomy rather than relational autonomy. In the next section further discussion on the difference between perceived and actual autonomy and autonomy as a matter of degree is presented.

Further Analysis of Student-Athletes' Autonomy

“Autonomy is a matter of degree. No finite being is thoroughly self-determined”

(Friedman, 2003, p. 7)

Note that perceptions of autonomy might differ from actual autonomy in that people are not always aware of coercive forces manipulating their behaviors. According to the recent literature, student-athletes must meet certain criteria to be considered truly autonomous (Christman, 2004; Friedman, 2003; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). In this section these criteria are highlighted and an analysis as to whether collegiate student-athletes meet the requirements to actually experience autonomy is provided. This analysis is based on the results of the current study, previous literature and theory, and my four years experience working in collegiate sport. The criteria used to assess autonomy are based on ideas of what it is that actually constitutes autonomous behavior (Christman, 2004; Friedman, 2003). These works provide a starting point for a critical examination of student-athletes' actual (not perceived) autonomy.

To be autonomous, student-athletes must meet the following criteria:

1. *They must be able to reflect and make decisions based on authentic values and desires that comprise who they are and what they want. In essence, they must be capable of making decisions based on their deepest self-concept.*

Student-athletes have this capacity provided they have developed an identity for themselves. This identity can (and is likely to) be rooted in relationships with others and stems from a process of socialization (Christman, 2004; Friedman, 2003; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Mackenzie & Stoljar, 2000). Because they are constantly being exposed to new experiences and possibilities, student-athletes' perceptions of themselves are constantly in flux (Baxter-Magolda, 1999). Recognition that knowledge and values are contextual can lead people to restructure their views of themselves, their identity, and thus, their choices and values (Perry, 1970 as cited in Baxter-Magolda, 1999). Hence, identity development is "a fluid and dynamic process rather than a more linear and static stage model" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 411). It also appears that as athletes develop and realize that there is life beyond sport, they are more likely to have a stable sense of self. With this stability comes a greater likelihood that their decisions are based on their authentic wants and values, thus providing a higher degree of autonomy. As Baxter-Magolda (1999) found in her study, such identity development is possible; yet, "As was the case in most studies of college student' intellectual development, participants in this study had not yet reached the mature capacity to hold firm convictions by the end of college" (p.333). She did find that many students had surpassed simply accepting the request of authority figures and recognized their own power to make decisions, even if they were hesitant about what decisions to make. Hence, most people are still refining their identities beyond their college years.

2. *They must recognize that their self-concept and desires are the result of socialization and be able to reject or accept those desires through a process of self-reflection.*

Student-athletes can meet this criterion, provided they are given the encouragement and knowledge to do so. As is the case with many people, student-athletes may just go through life accepting the limitations of their choices and control (Baxter-Magolda, 1999). They may never question *why* they do things or *why* different desires are important to them. Since the discussions of the student-athletes in this study lacked an acknowledgement of issues of power in society, it may be possible that the student-athletes in this study have not yet engaged in a thorough examination of their beliefs. It might be argued, however, that Viking is a good example of someone who has engaged in this process and because of this, has a more realistic assessment of her autonomy.

3. *They must have reflected upon their values and identity “free from the influence of factors which we know severely restrict free consideration of one’s condition and one’s options” (Christman, 2004, p. 154). Hence, social and psychological factors cannot limit their ability to assess their views and they must be able to imagine realistic alternatives and to imagine themselves in such alternative situations.*

Overall, the student-athletes seemed to meet this criterion, yet there were obstacles to their doing so. First, there were many social norms that limited their ability to imagine realistic alternatives. Second, the student-athletes’ acceptance of the strength of power dynamics and socio-structural forces may have limited their ability to imagine

realistic alternatives and to create a value system based on these alternatives. Third, some athletes were dependent upon their scholarships and thus could not imagine not doing what was required for fear of losing the scholarship. Fourth, the relative acceptance of the coaches' authority leaves one wondering if these athletes had ever seriously contemplated what their life would be like if sport was more democratic. Some of the athletes in this study provided proof that they had thought through alternative and valued options (i.e., freedom to practice when one wants, spending a holiday with family), yet few acted on those options, demonstrating a diminished capacity for autonomy. As Baxter-Magolda (1999) notes, moving beyond simple acceptance of authority is key in defining one's deepest values and identities.

4. Behavioral choices must be rooted in values and wants important to the individual and must not be the result of coercion, deception, or manipulation.

As noted by some of the athletes in this study, their relationships with others were used to manipulate their behaviors (i.e., hazing, going to practice). When looking at issues of power, having to earn scholarships every year manipulated the behavior of student-athletes. The very values that student-athletes carried could be the result of coercion, since coaches can pass on their ideology and affect the decisions of student-athletes (i.e., "you're in control of your attitude", "you control your preparation", "you need to work hard because your teammates are"). Even *having* to go to practice to receive playing time could be a form of coercion if it wasn't something that the athletes truly desired (and many noted that, at times, they didn't want to be at practice).

I think this is one of the most difficult criteria for student-athletes to meet because much of what they "choose" to do is based on understanding the consequences of their

actions (or non-actions if they choose not to do something), consequences that are often imposed by the structure of collegiate athletics. While many consequences for any action are in fact “structural” (i.e., not attending class may result in a decreased class grade), collegiate student-athletes are exposed to additional consequences that exist separate from those imposed by the structure of college itself. For example, there are several possible consequences if student-athletes choose to skip class. First, they may perform poorly in the course because they were not there to learn the material. Poor performance is a more “natural” consequence that can be learned from and, if it is important to the athletes to learn and to do well in school, it is likely to be a behavior they will change. Poor performance is not coercive or manipulative; it is simply an experience that can shape the values and identities of student-athletes. A second consequence for skipping class might be that the coaches make the student-athletes come early to practice and run. This is a consequence imposed by the structure of sport, created to manipulate student-athletes’ behavior. Because this is a form of coercion, student-athletes who begin to value class attendance as a way of escaping punishment are not enhancing their autonomy.

5. *They regularly choose these behaviors even in the face of resistance or unpleasant circumstances.*

If an athlete truly desires to get an education and do well in school, would she skip practice to study for a test? If an athlete sees himself foremost as a Christian and deeply believes in Christian values, would he continually choose those behaviors even if it meant losing the respect of his teammates? These are difficult questions to answer and, as with each of the criteria, it comes down to the individual. The deeper people’s identities and values, the more likely they are to make decisions that hold true to these

desires, and thus, the more autonomous they become. When looking at the life of these collegiate student-athletes, the problem comes when the “unpleasant conditions” are powerful enough to make individuals act against their desires. Again, losing a scholarship, losing playing time, or being the focus of a disparaging news story are all consequences that the student-athletes in this study noted as exerting a powerful influence on their behavior and that made it difficult to meet this criterion.

6. *They have “a significant array of opportunities to act in ways that reflect what deeply matters to” them (Friedman, 2003). When social conditions thwart attempts to engage in autonomous behaviors the individual may be oppressed.*

As previously mentioned, the opportunities student-athletes have to engage in desired behaviors are often limited by the constraints imposed by the structure of collegiate sport and limit the degree of autonomy they are able to experience.

7. *They oppose a subservient lifestyle.*

The student-athletes noted that by “signing the line” they committed to accept the authority of the coach and the obligations and responsibilities that come with being a student-athlete. Hence, to some degree they actually lived a subservient lifestyle since they were expected to be submissive to the requests of the coach. Friedman (2003) would argue that, although opportunities exist to be autonomous within the collegiate sport environment, the degree to which student-athletes are able to experience autonomy is somewhat constrained.

Overall, these criteria would suggest that student-athletes’ autonomy depends on the strength and pervasiveness of their identity and the power of their values based on this identity. Student-athletes must constantly reassess their true desires with those that

are created by their participation in collegiate sport. The more stable their identity, the more likely they are to be autonomous, in spite of the constraints placed on their autonomy by the structure of collegiate sport. There are limits to the amount of autonomy they are able to actually experience because of the power dynamics and social-structural constraints that influence student-athletes' decisions. Note, however, that their actual autonomy may be less than their perceived autonomy because the athletes choose to reframe and accept these constraints. In the next chapter some ways this knowledge can be beneficial for sport psychology consultants are suggested along with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 4

APPLICATION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Applied Sport Psychology

Much of the information gathered in this study can be useful for sport psychology consultants, student-athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators. The three things that I believe sport psychology consultants can do to enhance both the satisfaction and performance of collegiate student-athletes are: 1) assist them in developing their identity, 2) assist them in developing relationships, and 3) encourage increased communication between athletes and coaches.

Developing Identity

Autonomy cannot be truly experienced until athletes develop a strong sense of identity and are able to freely evaluate what is important to them. For most athletes, this includes recognizing that the sport experience will eventually end. The importance of assisting athletes in developing their identity is essential for sport psychology consultants to recognize, whether they are concerned with the holistic development and satisfaction of collegiate student-athletes, or solely with athletes' sport performance. As demonstrated in this study, student-athletes are likely to be more motivated, exert greater effort, and be more confident when they feel in control of their choices and actions. Since these perceptions of control are rooted in beliefs of what is important to them, helping athletes explore these beliefs might prove beneficial to both performance and overall satisfaction with collegiate sport. Often, student-athletes do not take the time to assess what they want to do when sport is over, or for that matter, what they really want to accomplish while in college. Sport psychology consultants working with athletes can help them set life goals

along with performance goals, and encourage them to search for what is important to them outside of sport. Sport psychology consultants can also encourage athletes to evaluate their current beliefs and reflect upon their origins and why they are important. In doing so, athletes may be able to reaffirm existing beliefs or create new ideas about what is important to them, and thus perhaps experience a greater degree of autonomy in their life. Assisting them in identifying their beliefs and values is essential for the development of a mature capacity for acting on their inner beliefs and convictions so they may succeed in life beyond college (Baxter-Magolda, 1999). However, care must be taken in doing so since in analyzing their life, athletes may realize that what they have been working to achieve is not truly what they enjoy, and thus they may become completely disaffected with sport and possibly with college.

Coaches and athletics administrators can also play a key role in helping student-athletes develop this capacity for autonomous decision-making. Baxter-Magolda (1999) suggests taking a learning-centered approach towards working with students. A learning-centered approach includes providing athletes with opportunities to make decisions and guiding them through the process of making these decisions based on their own internal desires rather than external pressures. Rather than imposing rules and restrictions on students, coaches and athletic administrators should to work “together with students to construct community norms and mechanisms through which they could be maintained” (Baxter-Magolda, 1999, p. 343). Working together includes acknowledging the interdependence of those who live in that community. In this way, “Staff maintain their voices in boundary-setting, yet invite students into the process of mutual boundary setting. The boundaries are narrow enough to avoid costly mistakes yet broad enough to

shape rather than prescribe student growth” (Baxter-Magolda, 1999, p. 343). Hence, coaches or administrators could work with the student-athletes in creating rules (and the consequences of breaking these rules) and engage the athletes in discussions about the utility and rationale of various rules. In doing so, students can learn to be interdependent and to develop their own ideas and values on which they can act.

Developing Relationships

The examples provided in this study represent strong evidence that relationships can have a huge impact on student-athletes’ decision-making processes and on their sport enjoyment. Student-athletes are often told by their coaches where to be, what to do, and when to do it. However, the majority of these student-athletes felt that they were more likely to want to follow these instructions if they felt cared for beyond the playing field and if their coaches had their best interests in mind. Also, when the activity was something the athletes wanted to do, rather than something they had to do, student-athletes were likely to exert more effort, be more focused, and have greater motivation for the activity.

Knowing that caring relationships can influence student-athletes’ behaviors, coaches might consider developing a stronger rapport with their athletes. If caring relationships were developed, instead of simply complying with their wishes, athletes might put forth greater effort at tasks they may see little intrinsic value in. I am not condoning the notion of “faking” relationships simply for the purpose of coercing behaviors because this would still limit the athletes’ autonomy. Rather, I feel that if coaches are going to require certain behaviors anyway, then perhaps the student-athletes would perceive these behaviors to be more autonomous if they have developed a

relationship with their coach, thus making their experience more satisfying.

The present findings also suggest that, in most situations, teammates are more influential in altering individuals' behavior than are their coaches. Again, these findings have strong implications for applied sport psychology in that athletes might work harder, both on and off the field, if they know their teammates are doing the same. Such knowledge is particularly useful since many coaches use threats such as running before or after practice to control behavior. However, it may be more beneficial to develop strong leaders on the team who exhibit the types of behaviors the coaches expect of their athletes (i.e., going to class, lifting weights, and watching film). Developing leaders who others will respect and follow may lead to student-athletes partaking in the behavior desired by the coach and then aid individuals in integrating this behavior into their sense of self. Manipulating behaviors in by developing leaders who exhibit desired behaviors would technically lead to non-autonomous actions, but these actions would be more satisfactory than would be obtained through strict control and punishment. Also, if athletes are able to integrate these behaviors into their sense of self, the behaviors might become more intrinsic, and thus more autonomous (though not *completely*), leading to greater satisfaction with their role as student-athletes.

Included in the notion of building relationships is the need to create a positive team environment where team members can support each other and want each other to be the best that they can be. A positive environment includes sharing similar goals and having a mutual commitment and respect for each other. This type of environment seems to be conducive to student-athletes' development of autonomy.

Communication

And you can see it, like if you pay attention, like when people are playing and you see how she's coaching certain people you'll see the ones that she's real comfortable with and who are always around her and talk to her a lot. You'll see the difference. (VIKING)

I had a chat with coach and that was a big help as well because I didn't know where I stood with coach at the time, I didn't know what he thought of me as a player, I was always wondering what he was thinking [...]. But when I had a chat to him, it was completely opposite, he was all for what I wanted to be and what I wanted to do. So having that chat to him as well was a big influence. (CHARLES)

The importance of communication also emerged as being central to these student-athletes' experiences of autonomy as it improved their relationships with coaches and thus made their overall experience more satisfying. For some athletes to experience relational autonomy, they needed to feel like they were listened to and that the coach had their best interests in mind. Through increased communication, student-athletes and coaches may be able to work together in making decisions that are satisfying for both parties. Therefore, I would encourage an open and honest level of communication between coaches and athletes, designed to help the athletes feel listened to and respected. While open communication is often difficult because of the power dynamics inherent in the coach-athlete relationship, a feeling of mutual respect is central to athletes developing enough trust in their coaches to listen to their advice and to make decisions based upon it.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided some important insights into collegiate student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy. There were some limitations to the study that warrant consideration in future research. The first limitation is the small number of participants, as not all sports were represented and the possibility that some athletes' experiences may be excluded exists. While the co-researchers in this study varied by sport, gender, race,

and sport revenue, there were many other factors that could have been examined (e.g., socio-economic status, cultural values). Also, since the co-researchers were all from the same university, some of the identified themes may be unique to this particular institution. The purposeful sampling used in this study allowed for the selection of information-rich cases so that more could be learned about student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy (Patton, 1987; Polkinghorne, 1989; Seidman, 1998). I selected co-researchers who I believed were able to articulate their perceptions of autonomy and were willing to talk openly about this topic. The co-researchers were selected to represent some of the athletic population at this university.

Nevertheless, in comparing the experiences of the athletes who did participate, the results provided few differences in the experiences of these athletes when looking at gender, race, and type of sport (revenue vs. non-revenue; individual vs. team). One difference occurred between those athletes who had a strong sense of who they were (most often the seniors) and those who had yet to refine their identity (first-years). Another difference occurred between those athletes who viewed their coach as completely controlling and solely concerned with their performance and those who felt that their coaches cared about them beyond sport. Due to the small numbers of individuals interviewed, it could still be possible that other demographic factors (i.e., race, gender, type of sport) affect student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy. Also, the present study was limited to four sports at one university so the culture and environment could also have affected student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy.

Because of these limitations, additional research could increase our knowledge of student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy. First, research is needed to explore the impact

that identity development has on autonomy. Research on identity development could take a longitudinal approach in studying how student-athletes' autonomy and identity fluctuate and develop over time. As Baxter-Magolda (1998, 1999) has demonstrated, longitudinal research can provide great insight into the formation of identity and the resultant choices based on this identity.

Second, research needs to be conducted examining the experiences of athletes in other sports and at other universities, including both Division II and III institutions. In expanding the breadth of participants, more can be learned about contextual influences on student-athletes' autonomy. Such research could lead to the development of a scale to assess student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy and the effects of these perceptions. This instrument might then be used to obtain the views of a greater variety of student-athletes and provide more generalizable information about the nature of student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy.

Finally, since power was not the main focus of the study yet emerged as important in shaping student-athletes' experiences, I would recommend that more studies be conducted looking at this issue. Such studies would need to explore student-athletes' sense of self-power as well as how they feel their power is affected by the structure of sport and society. Future research might also examine how power influences student-athletes' decisions and further illuminate the influence power dynamics have on their autonomy.

Conclusions

The results of this study suggest the following conclusions:

1. Student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy are often embedded in their

relationships with others and are derived from having a developed sense of identity.

2. The autonomy student-athletes experience is constrained by the power dynamics inherent in the structure of collegiate sport.
3. Positive benefits result when student-athletes perceive their actions as being autonomous and negative results arise when they feel controlled.
4. Student-athletes' perceptions of autonomy are dynamic and fluctuate depending on context and their ability to reframe and integrate these experiences into their sense of self. Student-athletes' abilities to reframe those activities that are non-autonomous and to integrate these behaviors into their value system enable them to experience greater satisfaction in their role as collegiate student-athletes.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Research Journal Examples

“Bob” 11/6/03 male, Caucasian, redshirt jr/senior

- Never thought about power/control/choice before, gave some good definitions of all 3
- Felt very controlled by coach, this overlapped in other areas of his life
- Felt more “control” when he got better and older
- Talked a lot about the influence of a partial scholarship and how he deserved more next year but probably wouldn’t get it
- After interview he said, “I just want to let you know that I was being really honest with everything, I didn’t sugar coat stuff or tell you what you wanted to hear. I was really telling you how I felt about things.”
- I got the impression that he was comfortable talking about issues and he took the time to think about examples that fit what we were discussing. I could see “his wheels turning” as we talked.
- Said he would be up for a second interview
- Said he is going to pay more attention to “control” and choice in his life and see what it’s like, maybe stand up for himself.
- Overall, good interview, I was a little shakey but I think I probed well and got some good info to go off of for next time.

“Seth” 11/12/03 male, Caucasian, senior

- After interview he said he doesn’t see going to practice as a choice, it’s just something he does.
- Said he’ll always “choose” practice over social life
- He didn’t seem comfortable in the interview and didn’t expand on much
- Did give some good examples, similar to Bob
- Views on things have changed from frosh yr to now
- Felt opening lines of communication with coach through group meeting was helpful
- Athletes get more power when they are better
- Talked about how control influences choice, couldn’t really see a relationship with power
- Talked about TIX and how that influences his scholarship
- I don’t think this will be one of my better interviews, he seemed anxious to leave
- I think I need to shorten the interview a lot, they get antsy by the end and shorten their answers and I feel rushed to get through and didn’t probe as well as I should

Appendix A

Research Journal Examples (cont.)

11/24/03

Power in athletics is not just over the athlete, it is over everyone who works in the athletic department or in close contact with athletes. For example, in completing my interviews, I had a meeting set up with one athlete and she choose the academic center as a place to meet that was both convenient and confidential. However, before stopping in to meet me, she was meeting with her academic advisor. She asked her advisor if I was in yet or where my office was and her advisor asked her why she needed to see me. The interviewee responded that it was for an interview she was doing but that was all the information she had. So her advisor, in my opinion needing control over the situation, proceeded to walk her up to my office and inquire as to what the interview was about. When I informed her that I could not tell her due to confidentiality she scoffed and went and asked my direct superior why I was meeting with athletes in my office. My superior, thinking it was a joke, came in and asked what I was doing and I then had to inform her that it was confidential. They left, but the interviewee's advisor went to the director of my place of work and asked what I was doing, feeling it was wrong that I was meeting with athletes and she was unaware of why I was doing so. I told the athlete that I cannot promise complete confidentiality in this situation and she could feel free not to participate any longer, but she still agreed to continue. In this situation I felt very controlled and, as is often the case, was unable to understand why people who are employed by the athletic department are not trusted to work with athletes unless everyone knows exactly why and can have some hand in what is occurring. I do not believe that this is in an effort to control me, I believe it is more in an effort to control the athlete and the people with whom they can interact. I believe that those with "power" want to keep this power and the way they feel they can achieve this is by controlling every aspect of their athletes' environment. This makes me mad, frustrated, and ultimately, affects my own feelings of autonomy. So I wonder if other athletic department personnel feel that they have little autonomy over their actions when it influences student-athletes.

1/30/04: Analysis Ideas

There may be something in the fact that when athletes are freshmen they believe that the coach has their **best interests** in mind and so will go along with some decisions because they trust their coach to make these decisions. This seems to end as they age and realize they know themselves and what's best for them better than the coach. Also, stability and knowing what one wants out of life also seems an important factor in making decision for self as opposed to complete acceptance of coach authority. Because of this, they are more likely to take the coach's opinion into account but more likely to feel they made the decision on their own because of their needs at that time, regardless of whether or not it was the same decision as the coach's.

Appendix A

Research Journal Examples (cont.)

Confidence seems to play a big part in the maturing process I think is somehow linked to perceptions of self-control, power, and influence of non-significant/respected others (coaches).

Athletes seem to take their situation and **reframe** it to be positive (i.e., how it teaches them something, how it makes them stronger). This is similar to reframing stressful encounters. Instead of changing the situation, they change their thoughts/feelings about the situation. Possibly this gives them a greater sense of control since they are likely to have control over their attitudes and little ability to change the situation. As Rebecca (jr. track) and Viking (sr, bball) put it, the one thing you control is your attitude and how you react to different situations.

The athletes seem to accept their role and their place in the hierarchy and are ok with the fact that a lot of their life is controlled by coach, although they don't really see it as being controlled, they just see the coach trying to exert control while they have the choice to follow along or not. They usually do follow because (s)he is in a position of authority. Overall, they seem to recognize that their happiness and satisfaction ultimately lay in their hands and how they choose to perceive and react to the situation. They also seem to rationalize the coach's control as being something they accepted when they signed on to be a college athlete-they knew what they were getting into and made that choice. Thus, they are willing commit to the demands of being a collegiate athlete.

The **influence of teammates** on decisions seems to be greater than that of the coach, at least in terms of internalizing the choices as important to them. I think that an athlete would rather do something for someone they have a bonded relationship to than for someone whose only concern is for their performance. Being respected and trusted as an individual person and not just an athlete seems to be a major criterion for having developed a relationship with a person. Teammates motivate each other to work hard and thus student-athletes will put forth the extra effort on days when they don't feel up to it because they know their teammates are working hard. It helps to know their teammates are going through the same thing (in sport and life), which helps them cope with the bad days and also builds respect for them, thus they will do things due to this respect. **Mutual respect** (coach to athlete, athlete to coach, and athlete to athlete) is essential in building commitment.

Relatively no discussion on issues of power in society yet, though for golfers TIX is a major power issue that affects them. Viking has been the only one to discuss larger society's power structure and it was evident that this was an issue she was very passionate about. Jay talks about the USA as a capitalistic society and the power that money has.

The acknowledgement of **individual differences** is important in sport, school, personalities, ways athletes react to coaching styles, and lifting. (see bball, track, golf).

For some, **God/religious belief** is a major source of control and exerts great influence on choices, goals, and priorities. It also seems to influence beliefs on power.

Appendix B

Description of Co-Researchers

Men's Golf

Bob: Senior

Seth: Senior

Sam: Junior

Charles: First-year

Football

Tyler Durden: Senior

Jay: Sophomore

Cougar: First-year

Women's Basketball

Viking: Senior

Amani: Sophomore

Women's Track

Daria: Senior

Rebecca: Junior

Aniyah Thomas: First-Year

*Co-Researchers**

Gender	Race		Academic Grade			
	African-American	Caucasian	First-Year	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Female						
Basketball (n=2)	1	1		1		1
Track (n=3)	2	1	1		1	1
Male						
Football (n=3)	2	1	1	1		1
Golf (n=4)		4	1		1	2

** Demographics are not linked to specific co-researchers to protect their confidentiality*

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

University of Tennessee

Title of Study: Collegiate Student-Athletes' Perceptions of Autonomy
Investigator: Aimee Kimball, Graduate Student, 203 Thornton Center, 946-1101
Faculty Advisor: Leslee A. Fisher, Department of Sport and Leisure Studies, HPER Building, 974-9973

The study you are being asked to participate in has been designed to learn more about collegiate student-athletes' perceptions of control. By conducting this study I hope to learn more about your life as a collegiate student-athlete.

In this study you will be asked to participate in an interview and answer questions on your experiences as a student-athlete. The interview will last approximately one hour and will be audiotaped. Your identity will be protected, and you will have the opportunity to create a pseudonym for use in the study. The audiotape will be destroyed following transcription of the interview. You will also be asked to participate in a follow-up interview, which will last approximately 30 minutes. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and terminate your participation at any time. The transcript of the interview may be shown to members of the dissertation committee, but your name will not appear on the transcript. Any publications or presentations discussing the results of this study will not contain any information that would allow readers/listeners to identify you.

You are free to ask any questions that you may have about this study. If you have any further questions you may contact Aimee Kimball at 946-1101 or akimball@utk.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant please contact the Office of Research at 974-3466.

Participant:

I agree to participate in this study as an authorized part of education and research program of the University of Tennessee.

I understand the purpose of the study. I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedure. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described.

To the best of my knowledge I have no physical or mental illness or difficulties that would represent a risk to me as a result of participation in this study.

I understand I will receive no financial compensation for my participation.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent and cease participation at any time without penalty.

 Signature

 Date

Appendix D

Demographic Questions and Interview Guide

Demographic Information

Age _____

Gender _____

Race _____

Nationality _____

Year entered college _____

Academic grade _____

Sport in which you participate collegiately _____

Throughout your life, how many years have you participated in this sport? _____

How many years did you play this sport in college? _____

Did you redshirt? _____

Did you want to redshirt? _____

Why and by whom was the decision made to redshirt? _____

Have you ever had any major injuries? If so, what? _____

What is your role on the team?

Are you considered to be a:	non-starter but key contributor	starter
	non-starter, receive little playing time	other

How many people in your immediate family attended college? _____

What percentage of your friends are college athletes? _____

Are you receiving an athletic scholarship? _____ If so, what type? (full, partial)

Interview Guide**Initial question:** *Please describe your life as a collegiate student-athlete.***Example Probes:** *Describe a typical day. How might your typical day differ from a non-student-athlete's day?***Focus question:** *When thinking about your collegiate experience, is there anything you would change or wish would be different?***Example Probes:** *Why? How does that make you feel? Can you give me a specific example? What would have to happen for this to change?*

Appendix D

Demographic Questions and Interview Guide (cont.)

1. Talk about major decisions you have made since you started college. What influenced those decisions?
2. Talk about decisions that have been made for you since you started college. What were the circumstances of those decisions?
3. Tell me about how you selected your major. What factors influenced this decision?
4. Talk about expectations (in sport, school, and socially) you have for yourself or others have for you. How do these expectations influence your decisions?
5. What kind of goals do you have for yourself (in sport, school, and socially)? [Where do these goals come from? How do these goals affect you? Are your goals the same in all areas of your life?]
6. Describe the environment of your team. How do you feel during practices?
7. Describe your coach as a person and as a motivator.
8. How can you tell if a player is committed to your team? To your coach? To his/her teammates? Where do you fit in to all of this? Does this commitment ever influence decisions you make? In what way?
9. Talk about your scholarship. What are the best and worst things about it?
10. In what ways do your experiences differ from those of athletes in other sports? In what ways are they the same?
11. Describe a time when you felt pressured or obligated to do something.
12. Please describe a situation in which you felt powerful.
13. Please describe a time in which you felt powerless.
14. Tell me about a time when you felt that you had little control over a situation.
15. Tell me about a time when you felt you had complete control over a situation.
16. In looking at your overall life as a student-athlete, on a scale of 1-5, 1 being no control, 5 being absolute control, how much control and choice do you think you have over you life? (in sport, school, and socially)? How does this level of control affect you? Talk about constraints on your control that you have experienced.
17. Talk about your level satisfaction with your collegiate life so far. [What would you keep and what would you change if you could?]
18. Since you've started college, how have your views of yourself changed?
19. In what ways do you think you are prepared for life after sport? In what ways do you feel unprepared?
20. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Example Probes: Please describe. What was that like for you? How did this make you feel? How did that affect you? What did you do? What would you have changed about it? Can you think of any other examples? Do you think other athletes have experienced this? Can you think of any example of this within your athletic life? Academic life? Social life? How do the things you don't control affect you? How does the control you maintain affect you? How does control affect how you see yourself?

Appendix E

Data Analysis Examples

Example Coded Transcript

Male, first-year, Caucasian, English, golf

Example
Memos

- 92 B: My parents. Um, they just said, they just said, "If you want to come home, come
93 home." But they made me feel like, you know, if you get through this first term, I mean
94 my sisters made it through University, I mean they was only a bit away from home but
95 um, well it wasn't really in another country so they could come home on weekends and
96 see the family. But, um, they struggled but once they got through the first two months or,
97 you know, got through the first term, they were fine, you know, and they really enjoyed
98 it. So, using them as examples and like my family just being there saying "you can come
99 home when you want, it's all up to you" just giving me the decision was a big help. Um,
100 and also I had a chat with coach and that was a big help as well because I didn't know
101 where I stood with coach at the time, I didn't know what he thought of me as a player, I
102 was always wondering what he was thinking [can't understand]. But when I had a chat to
103 him, it was completely opposite, he was all for what I wanted to be and what I wanted to
104 do. So having that chat to him as well was big influence. So family and coach was a big
105 influence on my decision.
- 106 A: How did that make you feel when you're parents gave you the ability to make that
107 decision?
- 108 B: Um... [can't understand] I would say. It was nice to know that I could always go
109 home when I wanted to and my parents aren't pushy, they've never been the ones who go
110 you're definitely, I mean it was my decision to come over, my parents have never been
111 "this is what you're going to do, you're going to go over there." And so they've never
112 been like that so it's always my decision and just to know that they support me in
113 whatever I do is a big positive. Um, [that they also kind of just sided me to staying here
114 because they knew it would be the right thing for me] they knew that's what I wanted to
115 do from when I was younger was come over here, so they knew my best interests and
116 they kind of support me through that and that was a big, big help.
- 117 A: And so your parents and then your coach was, and did the coach just kind of say, what
118 did he say to you that really helped you make the decision?
- 119 B: He said, he went to a university, I mean he didn't go to another country but he went
120 here so he was living away from home. Um, he just said he went through the same thing,
121 he just said everybody goes through the same thing, which is what I had heard from
122 different people before but he went into more detail, he really, he said he was a similar
123 person to me and I dealt with problems the same way, so that was a good feeling as well
124 because I'm not the type to go out. I think what didn't help was I'm not the type to go out
125 and drink and socialize all the time, you know, I do it sometimes but it's, I mean, it can
126 take you away from what you want to be. If you're a sportsman you don't want to be
127 drinking all the time. And so I don't think that helped with kinda interaction and
128 socializing with the team because that's what they was doing all the time and I kinda split
129 myself away from that and so that's probably what made me a little bit further from
130 home. But when I spoke to coach about that he said he went through exactly the same
131 problem, he said all the other team guys are going out and drinking and doing whatever
132 they like but he said he dealt with it similarly to me, he spoke to people back at home and
133 got on with what he wanted to do and ah, I think that, that definitely helped me. Just
134 again, knowing what other people, that other people are in the same situation and how
135 they dealt with it. And so, that's a big help.
- 136 A: Can you think of any major decisions that were made for you since you've come here?

Family support
+ giving him
the autonomy
to make
the decision
to stay on
his own

- COMMUNICATION
w/ COACH

Autonomy
support

Slight
coercion

Helped to
have the
understanding
of others in
a similar
situation

ALIGN
CHOICES
w/ GOALS
(SPORT)

COMMUNICATE
SUPPORT

Appendix E

Data Analysis Examples (cont.)

Example Memo Summary

What influ. decis. to stay?

- 'rents saying they'd support either decision & letting him make the dec. on own
- knowing sisters had made it
- Coach empathizing & supporting understanding; saw similarities in experience & that help to know it was worth trying
- 'rents demonstrated autonomy support & he liked this
 - slight coercion by 'rents for him to stay cause felt best for him, had best interests in mind

→ BEST INTERESTS - same as what "strong" thought about coach, maybe in the if choose to listen

- Doesn't choose drinking cause takes away from sport (align choices w/ goals) made hard to socialize w/ team

Example Coding

CONTROL = ■

CHOICE = ■ = DECISIONS

RELATIONSHIPS = ■ support

POWER = ■

CHANGE = ■

ENJOY / GOOD = ■ = BENEFITS / PRIVILEGES

COMPROMISES = ■ = PRIORITY? = ACCEPTANCE?

■ = AUTONOMY

EXPECTATIONS = ■ = GOALS

COMMITMENT = ■

COACH = ■

THE UNKNOWN = ■

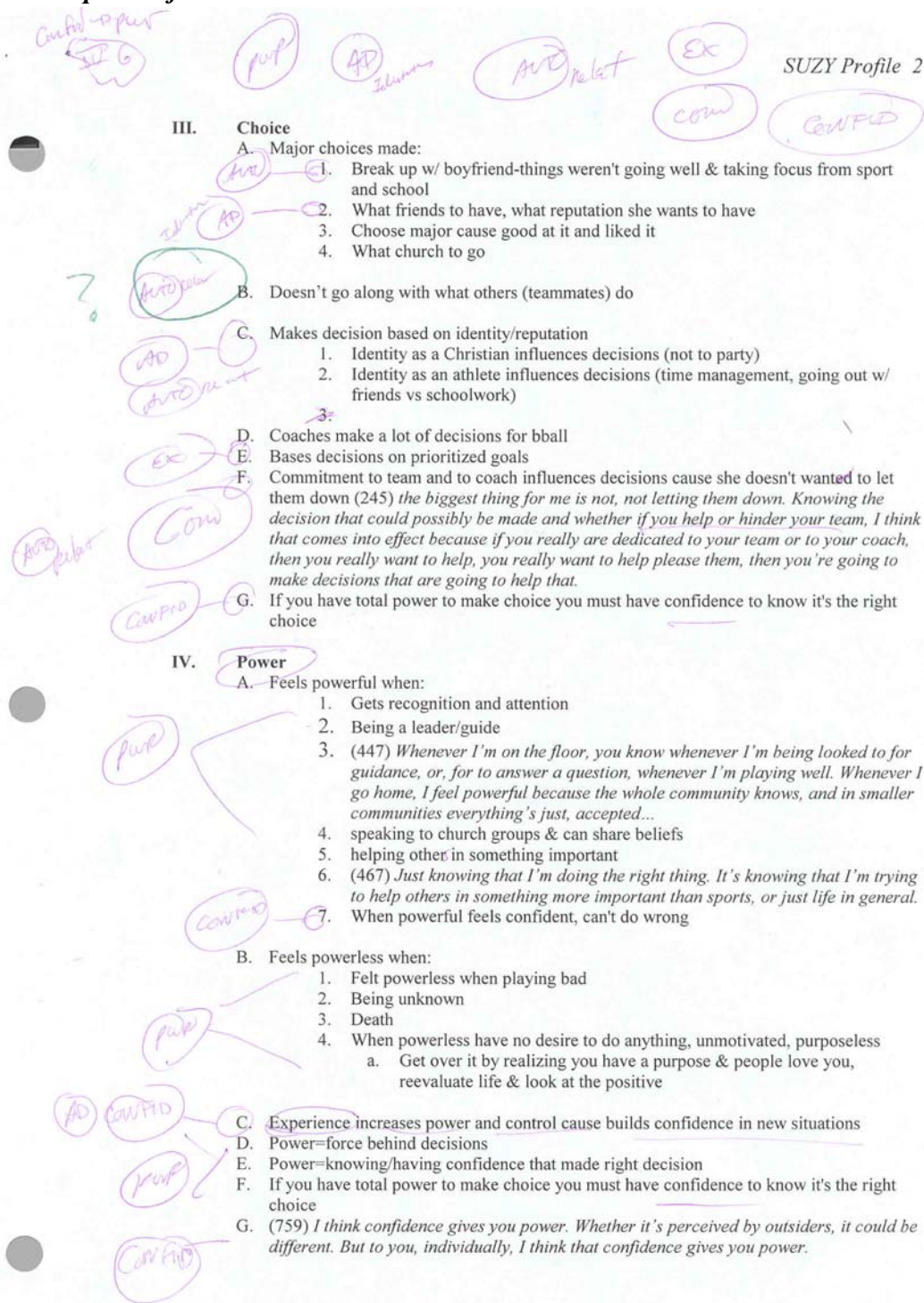
DISLIKE = ■

1

Appendix E

Data Analysis Examples (cont.)

Example Profile



Appendix F

Continuum

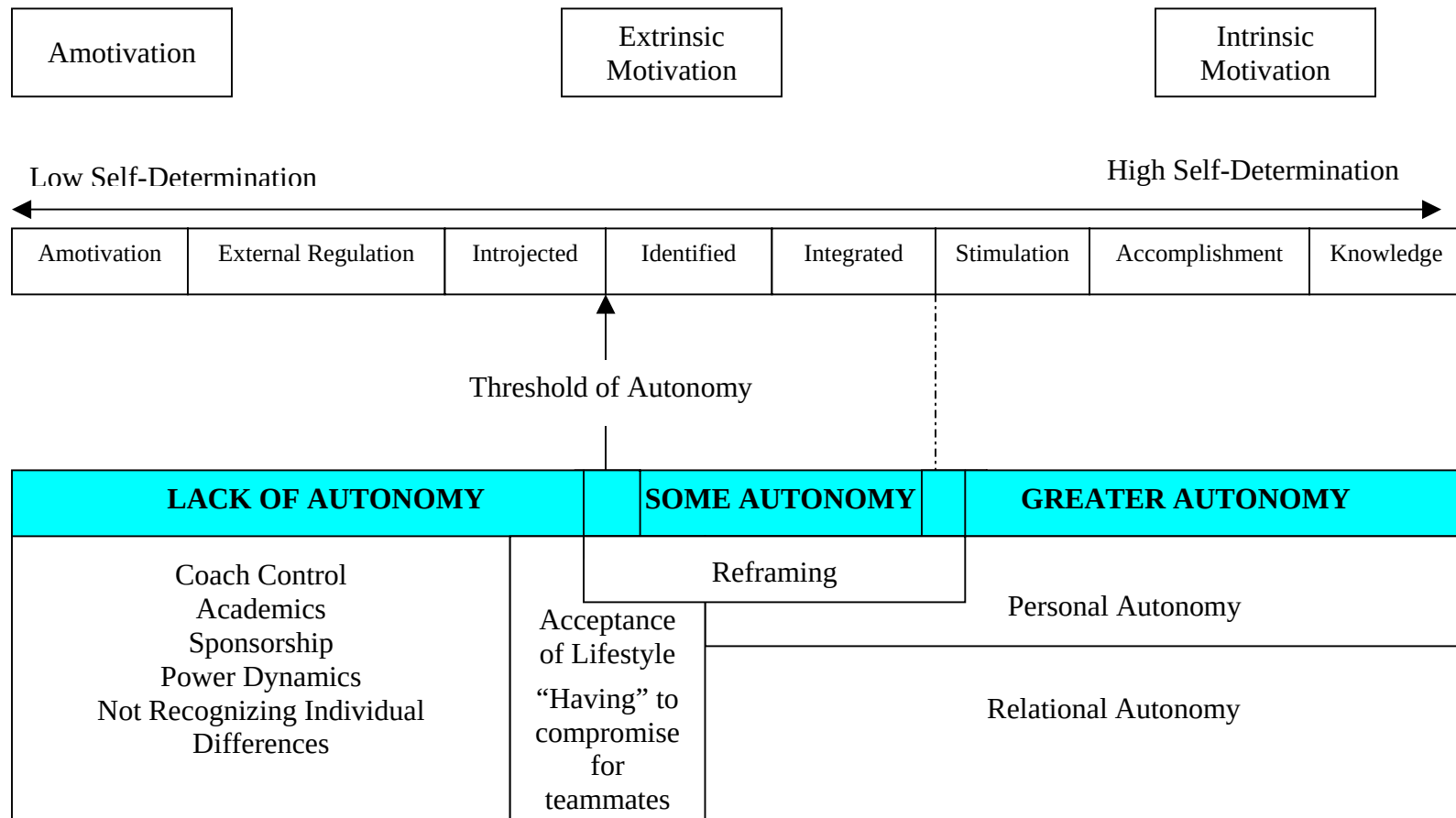


Figure 1. Continuum of Perceptions of Autonomy
(Adapted from Weinberg & Gould, 2003, pg. 137)

Appendix G

Outline of Themes

I. Personal Autonomy

A. *Ultimate Choice*

1. Decision Making
2. Control of Reaction
3. In Non-Autonomous Activities

B. *Sources*

1. Identity Development
 - a. Stability
 - b. Life beyond sport
 - c. Relational identity
 - d. Independence
2. Experience
3. Confidence
4. Expectations and Goals
5. Autonomy Support
6. Earned Personal Autonomy
 - a. Trust and responsibility
 - b. Performance
 - c. Preparation

II. Lack of Autonomy

A. *Pressure, Obligation, and Compliance*

1. Coach Control
 - a. Sport is not a democracy
 - b. Lack of coach's trust
 - c. Focus on performance
2. Academics
3. Sponsorship
4. Power Dynamics
 - a. Coach/athlete relationships
 - b. Revenue sports
 - c. Consequences
 - d. Scholarship
5. Not Recognizing Individual Difference
 - a. In sport
 - b. In society
 - c. In school
 - d. Recognition of individual differences

B. *Acceptance*

1. Lifestyle
 - a. Schedule
 - b. Sport as a priority
 - c. Commitment and compromise
2. Powerless to Change It

Appendix G

Outline of Themes (cont.)

- C. Reframing*
- D. Summary of Lack of Autonomy*

III. Relational Autonomy

- A. Sources*
 - 1. Teammates
 - 2. Family
 - 3. God
 - 4. Coach
 - a. Best interest
 - b. Listened to
 - c. Coach as example
 - d. Made choice to accept
 - 5. Discussion of coach as a source of relational autonomy
- B. Influences*
 - 1. Caring and Trust
 - 2. Team Environment
 - a. Family atmosphere
 - b. Common goal
 - 3. Mutual Respect and Commitment
 - a. Same shoes
 - b. Behavioral influence
 - 4. Others' Expectations
- C. Summary of Relational Autonomy*

IV. Effects of Autonomy

- A. Personal Autonomy*
 - 1. Increased Confidence and Performance
 - 2. Increased Effort and Motivation
 - 3. Increased Satisfaction
 - 4.
- B. Lack of Autonomy*
 - 1. Reverse Effect
 - 2. Makes It Hard to Get Things Done
 - 3. Decreases Performance
- C. Relational Autonomy*
 - 1. Desired Behaviors
 - a. Effort
 - b. Motivation
 - c. Team atmosphere
 - 2. Coerced Behaviors

V. Model of Desired Autonomy

Appendix G

Outline of Themes (cont.)

VI. Power

A. *Perceptions of Power*B. *Self-Power*

1. Identity Development
2. Confidence
3. Correct Decisions
4. Group Power
5. Stands Up for Self
6. Influence
7. Recruiting
8. Learning

C. *Powerless*

1. Redshirting
2. When Unable To Affect Change/Outcome
3. Sport Performance
4. First-Year
5. Injury

D. *Others' Power*E. *Socio-Structural Power*

1. Title IX
2. Money
3. Football
4. NCAA
5. Social Norms

F. *Discussion of Power*

VII. Summary of Results

Appendix H

Discussion of Social Norms

VIKING: I think life kinda makes you powerless sometimes too.

{INTERVIEWER: In what way?}

VIKING: Because there's a lot of people here who's living in the same world you're living in and doing different things and they have things they want to do and society has things that are normal and what's not. And, just like you feel powerless [...]

{INTERVIEWER: Can you talk about, um, you said society sometimes with the norms-}

VIKING: Yeah, like, mmm, like [everybody thinks they know] what's wrong and what's not. Being heterosexual is normal, being any other way, bi, gay, whatever, it's not normal. You know, you feel [left out] like that 'cause someone's always saying, (in a mocking voice) "Oh my God! That's awful!" [...] Um, abortion, people have their opinions. Society says it's not normal, it's not the right thing to do. You know, we're in [this state] too, it's kinda like the Bible belt and it's not right. Interracial dating, it's not right. You know.

{INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So how do you feel when you're thinking about these situations-}

VIKING: I mean it sucks, but that's life.

{INTERVIEWER: Do you think it could be changes?}

VIKING: I think people need to step outside the box sometimes and just be like look, you know, there's bigger things like hunger that we need to worry about not, there's two girls walking down the street holding hands, or two guys or whatever.

{INTERVIEWER: Who do you think has the power in that situation?}

VIKING: I don't know. I guess the president, but he's not gonna, he can't change it all, what this whole world thinks. He don't be thinking right half the time, I'm not a Bush fan, of any Bush. But, like I mean, like it's just hard because it's already set kinda, it's been this way for years so it's kinda hard to change, so nobody really had that power. And I wish President Bush was like "gay marriages is fine." "Oh God, President Bush is gay", you know, he can't win either.

{INTERVIEWER: So what do you think it will take to change?}

VIKING: I don't think it can change. It can get better and I think through time, like now it's more accepted than it was in like 1950 or something. So I just think time is the only thing that's going to change people's minds about things. And just, it's more about acceptance and people just stepping up out of the box and being like, "Alright, it's gonna happen, it's out there so there's no need for me to spend another day of my life worrying about two guys walking down the street holding hands or three guys kissing." There's no need, there's more important things in life. You could die tomorrow and you're gonna worry about, you know, the black and the white, a black guy and a white guy walking down the street. There's just bigger things, there's bigger things out there to worry about.

{INTERVIEWER: Do you think you on an individual level can impact that at all?}

VIKING: Just make it better. I can give this speech to everybody else (laughs). But you know, you never know. Some people are just set in their ways.

{INTERVIEWER: What do you think keeps it from changing?}

VIKING: Stubbornness. And people being brought up that way. It's hard to break, you know, it's hard not to be like that when you're brought up that way 'cause day and night, say you're raised in a family that, you know, you've got to marry, you're raised in a white family and your parents say, "You are to marry a white man." And that's not how you feel, you know, you're in love with this black guy and whatever and you feel like you can't bring him home, like that's just, I don't know.

{INTERVIEWER: So there's family influence-}

VIKING: Family. And it's just wrong, and then like and that makes you back off him 'cause that's your family, that's your parents, you do what they say, you know. "I want to marry this man" and they're like, "Is he going to support you?" And then you're like, "No." Then you're going to settle. You're not going to be happy 'cause this is who you're happy with, so what if he's black. You're going to settle for this white man because, that's your family that's always been there since you were born, to have them not support you and kinda like be shady towards you because, you know, you're trying to fulfill your happiness. You're not going to want that, that's uncomfortable. So you settle and try to seek happiness through settling, and that's just, so greedy.

{INTERVIEWER: So these norms that society has created, but then your own family really affects people.}

VIKING: Yeah. And I think if they would just put their foot down like you know, "This is how you raised me. I respect your opinions and your views but this is how I feel. This is what makes me happy." I can't stand around thinking about who's caring about, I mean, who all disagrees with what I'm doing. You know. I'm happy. And this is what makes me happy. I think that's what you gotta do and I think that's the only way it's going to be, be different if people just quit worrying about other people and people would just stay out of everybody's business. Like that's, that's the main thing, is people just quit worrying about who's doing what and why they doing that and "Oh my God, they're gay." "Oh my God, you're dating a black boy." It's just, haa, it's horrible. You got people who are starving, you got AIDS going around here, you got cancer you can't find a cure for, and you're worried about interracial dating. You're worried about something that has nothing to do with you, 'cause it's not up to you. If I told you to go be, you know, if you think it should be white people, white people; black people, black people; nobody's telling you to go, you know, jump in an interracial relationship, so don't knock other people who find happiness in that and that's what they want. That's not fair. You done got me going on a tangent (laughs). You got me fired up.

{INTERVIEWER: But this is good, because it's something that a lot of people don't talk about and that, in doing stuff like this, like doing stuff with student-athletes it's something that most don't bring up but it's something that I'm really interested in and how do you empower people to go against the social norms and how do you, you know, in a situation where you feel powerless if you're one of these "not normal" groups.}

VIKING: You've just got to make whatever you believe in normal. Yeah, you're breaking a social "norm" but who's to say it's normal? You know.

{INTERVIEWER: So you have to change the way people think on an individual level?}

VIKING: Mm-hum. You've just gotta have them accept it, like..I don't know, just, like, I, you know I had my opinions on like homosexuality, but once you get in college it's like everywhere. So then, you either, still hold all that prejudice and spend more time being prejudiced against it and spend more time thinking about, "Oh my god, I don't want to be around it." Then just accepting that, that's not who I am but, you're happy, that's fine. And like, the more that I was subjected to it and just being around it, the people that are involved, they're like happy, that's what they want to do, just let it, that's what makes them happy. I think people should care more about that then, just being like, "Oh my God, that's wrong." Who says it wrong, it doesn't seem wrong to me.

{INTERVIEWER: Yeah, so what do you think then has kinda shaped your opinions on this? What do you think has had the most influence?}

VIKING: mmm..ahhh...well I think in high school or maybe even before that, you're in your hometown, and, you don't see it as much. You see what goes on in your hometown because that's where you are, you know, and like where I'm from. I'm from [hometown]. Predominately white, heart of the bible belt, you've gotta do, you gotta be this way, you know, there's no interracial

dating here, and there's no little mixed kids running around here. And ah, you know, the white stick to there own, and the few black people hanging around here we stick to our own. And it's really sheltered kinda, kinda thing. You get to college and, wow. You're on a big old campus, a lot of things going on, lot of people from different countries are here, you know, you got interracial dating, people who are bi, who are gay, people who are, you know, they don't care what you think about them. And, people that come here to like be prepared for to go into the real world and I think that college is where you just learn all that stuff. You see different things and you're not living in this little box and you're not sheltered, and you've got to make your own decisions, you do what you want to do, you're not under your parents, your parents aren't telling you who you can date and who they approve of. They don't know. And I think that's where you see everything, where you learn everything, where you learn that, "Hey, I have an opinion about this now." That's where you learn more about it, once you're kind of out there.

{INTERVIEWER: So you think kinda like seeing things and experiencing stuff influences you.}

VIKING: Mmm-hum.

{INTERVIEWER: So just kinda opening your eyes to what's out there. }

VIKING: College is a whole new experience, a whole new part of your life so, it's a time to kinda, see what's going on.

{INTERVIEWER: Do you think there's been any other influences?}

VIKING: People. You meet different people from different places and they have different ways they do stuff, different feelings about things, different practices. And...those people you come across, like I think everybody you meet has, there's a reason you're meeting this person. You know, they're going to impact your life, someday shape or form, whether you might not even meet that person again just something that you share in the introduction, like, you know, you might carry with you from here on out. So I think, I'm really big about people that I meet, whether you know, just meeting them over here, you know like, "This is the head of the [academic center]." They're still going to impact me in some way shape or form and I think like when you come across those people and some people you might not, just meet them once, or some people you see them everyday and you get to know them or whatever, they may have different values and stuff. You've got to respect that because that person's in your life and you gotta respect how they feel about things. And you know, if they don't see things exactly like you do and you gotta respect and understand where they're coming from. And it's all about stepping outside the box, like you can't have all of these views and say, "Mine's right, mine's right, and this is how it is. This is how it is, this is how it should be if it ain't." That's not fair, that's being selfish.

Vita

Aimee Christina Kimball was born near Ebensburg, Pennsylvania on October 12, 1977. She attended The Pennsylvania State University from 1996-1999, graduating in three years with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and a Minor in Movement Science. She graduated with a 3.91 GPA from the Schreyer's Honors College, and was recognized as graduating Summa Cum Laude and inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. After spending the summer as an intern for the sport psychology consultant for the Pittsburgh Panthers, Pittsburgh Steelers, and Dallas Cowboys, Aimee enrolled at Miami University (Ohio). While at Miami, she worked as the graduate assistant for the academic counselors in the athletic department, coordinating the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program and assisting in academic advising. In August of 2001, she graduated with a Master of Science degree in Sport Studies with an emphasis in Sport Behavior and Performance. A few weeks later, Aimee began the Sport Psychology doctoral program at The University of Tennessee. Throughout her three years at Tennessee, Aimee worked in the Thornton Athletics Student Life Center as the graduate assistant for the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program. During that time, she was able to work with both male and female athletes on a variety of issues including performance enhancement, life skills development, and injury support. In May 2004, Aimee will obtain her Ph.D. in Education with a specialization in Sport Psychology. Her future plans include educating athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators to insure their continued success and enjoyment in both sport and life.