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# THE COACHING PREFERENCES OF FEMALE ATHLETES: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master's of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Amanda J. Murtland
August, 1999

**Acknowledgments**

Let me begin by thanking each of my committee members: Dr. Craig Wrisberg, Dr. Joy DeSensi, and Dr. John Lounsbury. Each of you has contributed so much to this thesis and to me personally.

Dr. Wrisberg: Your support and guidance during my two years at UT has been awesome. In addition, your editorial corrections have made me a better writer.

Dr. DeSensi: Your interest in the female athletes' experiences and their socialization opened up my mind and led me to this thesis topic. Your questions throughout this process have kept me on my toes and with the desire to continue to research gender in sport.

Dr. Lounsbury: Your humor and good spirit have helped me throughout this thesis process. Your constant support has helped me realize that I could finish.

A special thank you goes out to the participants in this study. Thank you all so much for sharing your experiences with me. Additionally, thanks to Joe Whitney for conducting my bracketing interview and enlightening me to my own biases.

I would also like to thank Ted Butryn, Pete Giacobbi, Jennifer Pledger, Emily Roper, and Joe Whitney for their assistance in our weekly qualitative research meetings. The insight and guidance you all gave me helped to keep me on track and assisted in the completion of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their constant love and support throughout my collegiate career. This thesis would not have been possible without you.

**Abstract**

A number of researchers have investigated female athlete coaching preferences and have found inconclusive results dealing with the gender of the coach (Medwechuk & Crossman, 1994; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997; Weinberg, Reveles, & Jackson, 1984; Whitaker & Molstad, 1988). Vernaccia (1977) and Johnson (1998) are the only qualitative studies examining the coach-athlete relationship thus far. Neither study focused solely on female athletes' experiences. Dale (1996) stated that sport psychology researchers can learn a great deal about athlete's experiences via interviews where they are free to describe their experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to utilize qualitative research methodologies to explore collegiate female athletes' experiences of being coached by men and women. A second purpose was to examine female athletes' general coaching preferences. Six National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I female athletes from different sports were interviewed on their coaching preferences and their experiences of gender in coaching. A semi-structured interview was used to examine this phenomenon. Results revealed two themes of coaching preferences: Personal Relationship and Sport Insight. In addition, the theme of Gender was prompted by me and therefore is representative of these athlete's experiences of being coached rather than their coaching preferences. The theme of Personal Relationship had five subthemes: Respect, Trust, Supportive, Warmth, and Individual Too. The subthemes of Sport Insight were: Motivational, Knowledge, Mental Preparation, and Organization. The subtheme of Knowledge had a smaller subtheme of Experience. The Gender subtheme of Female had the following subthemes: Competition and Living Vicariously. Then, for the subtheme of

Male: Father Figure. Results of the present study support and expand on previous research on leadership styles and gender in coaching. This study concluded with recommendations for future research in gender and sport.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Since the passage of Title IX in 1973, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of males coaching female athletes. In 1972, 90% of the coaches in female athletics were women (Acosta & Carpenter, 1988). By the 1990's 52 % of the coaches in female athletics were men (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994). In addition, from 1978 to 1992, of the 1744 new positions in women's athletics, 24% went to women and 76% went to men (Acosta &Carpenter, 1994). Typically, male athletes have male coaches while females are coached by individuals who are either male or female. Thus, female athletes are probably exposed to a greater variety of coaches and coaching styles than are male athletes.

In one study, Holmen and Parkhouse (1981) found that between 1974 and 1979 there was a 37% increase in the number of individuals hired to coach female athletes. Of these, 724 males and 44 females were hired. Holmen and Parkhouse (1981) also found a large decrease in the total number of female head coaches over the five year period. The data from this study clearly indicate a trend toward an increased number of male coaches for female athletes.

There are several possible explanations for the tendency of administration to hire a male coach rather than a female coach. First, there is the perception males are more qualified than females in terms of experience and technical expertise (Beck-Rex, 1979; Margolis, 1978; Neal, 1977). Second, males may have more political connections in the sport domain and therefore are contacted first when there is a job opening. Third, and

most ironic, is the fact that the passage of Title IX has produced more job opportunities for male as well as female coaches.

Coaches, regardless of their gender, have an enormous impact on their athletes. In the sport psychology literature, several investigators have examined the impact of the coach on the athlete. Coaches have been found to influence an athlete's self-worth and self esteem (Barnett, Smoll, &Smith, 1992) and athletes' perceptions of their own performance (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Schleisman, 1987; Horne & Carron, 1985; Challadurai, 1984). In particular, the type of feedback the coach provides has been found to have a compelling effect on an athlete's self-worth and satisfaction (Solomon, Stiegel, Eliot, Heon, Maas, and Wayda, 1996).

While most researchers have used survey methods to examine the athlete-coach relationship, there have been a few investigators who have taken a qualitative approach. A case study by Vernaccia (1977) on an All-American runner included a small section on the athletes' experience of being coached using a qualitative inquiry. More recently, Johnson (1998) used an existential phenomenological interview approach to examine eight athletes' experiences of being coached. The results of these studies provided further support for the notion that coaches exert a powerful impact on their athletes. To date, no researchers have solely examined female athletes' experience of being coached. Therefore, the present study was conducted in an attempt to discover more about the female athlete's experience of being coached. Specifically, female athletes' experience of being coached by male and female coaches was explored.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to utilize qualitative methodology to explore collegiate female athletes' experiences of being coached by men and women. A second purpose was to examine female athletes' general coaching preferences.

### *Limitations and Delimitations of the Study*

There are two limitations to this study. First, as with most qualitative studies, the sample size is small, involving only six participants. However, the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize findings to other populations, but to examine the experiences of the participants being interviewed.

Second, even though the interviews were conducted until the participants exhausted recall of their experiences, it is possible that they may have recalled additional information at a later time. Some athletes had to recall their experiences with coaches they had in the past and might have benefitted from more time for reflection.

Lastly, the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews were delimited to my own perceptions and those of members of the qualitative research group that assisted me.

### *Significance of the Study*

The results of this study could benefit coaches by providing an in-depth look at the coaching characteristics that female athletes prefer and the differences that some female athletes perceive between male and female coaches. In addition, female athletes may better understand how their relationship with their coach affects them. Finally, this study may benefit sport psychology consultants in assisting athletes and coaches with issues that

influence athletes' satisfaction and success during their competitive sport experience.

# Chapter 2

## Review of Literature

In this chapter I discuss the distinguishing characteristics of males and females and the possible uniqueness of the female athlete's sport experience and their relationship with coaches. I devote subsequent sections to discussions of the normative model of decision styles in coaching (Chelladurai and Haggerty, 1978) and to the nature of qualitative research methods.

### *Female/ Male Differences*

Assuming that women and men are the same is not only naive but, when it comes to sport participation, it biases the treatment of women who are often evaluated on the basis of norms developed for men (Tannen, 1997). According to Tannen (1997), boys and girls grow up in essentially different cultures. Therefore, communication between men and women might be considered a type of cross-cultural communication.

Tannen (1997) contends that women and men use language and conversation differently. Women use conversation as a way of establishing relationships and negotiating while men use language to preserve independence and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. Tannen suggests that men are taught from a very young age to use talking as a way to receive attention. On the contrary, women are taught to be seen and not heard. Such socialization practices give men the dominant role and women the passive role in conversation. The pattern of male communication is often that of linear or legalistic argument, depersonalized and direct. Women, on the contrary typically use a deferential pattern that is indirect and involves rational thinking in argument. Men tend to

use a more confident voice while women are more flexible when speaking (Kolb, 1997). As a result, female communication is sometimes viewed as being weak or lacking in clarity. To compound matters, it is not easy for women, especially in business, to act forcefully and competitively without inviting criticism and questions about both their femininity and ability (Kolb, 1997).

Goldberger (1997) has stated that, "Today both women and men in the Western world are taught to value what is assumed to be the objective, male mind and to devalue knowing that is identified as female and emotional and personalized. Our androcentric culture sends out the message to women that in order to succeed they need to learn to think like a man" (pp. 256). These types of thoughts may make women doubt themselves and their intelligence, giving them the sense that they are out of the mainstream. In extreme cases, women feel they do not know the right way to think.

Women and men, in addition to communicating differently, also have different ways of knowing (Goldberger, 1997). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1996) discovered five epistemological perspectives in their interviews with women. These perspectives included silence, received knowing, subjective knowing, procedural knowing, and constructed knowing. Silence is the perspective from which women feel subject to powerful external authorities (Belenky et al., 1996). Some women feel that to speak is to court danger and retaliation. They are distinguished from other women because of their isolation and fearfulness. Received knowers are women who feel capable of receiving and reproducing knowledge from external sources but not capable of creating their own knowledge (Belenky et al., 1996). These women carefully listen to authority, but tend to

discount the importance of their own experience in knowing. Subjective knowers find the truth internally. Thinking is not part of their process of knowing. They have come to know in this manner because of a rejection of what they have experienced as failed male authority. Procedural knowers emphasize learning and apply objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge (Belenky et al., 1996). These women assume that authority resides in the external, but unlike received knowers, the procedural knowers believe that it resides with the intellectual elite. This type of knowing mainly women who have had experiences in higher education. Finally, constructed knowers view all knowledge as contextual and relative (Belenky et al., 1996). These knowers are creators of knowledge and truths, and believe that facts need to be evaluated in the contextual framework within which they arise.

In sport and physical activity contexts, females are usually perceived as yielding, affectionate, loyal, sensitive to others, and characterized by traits that maybe incompatible with athletic success (Bem, 1974). Conversely, males are usually perceived as self-reliant, independent, assertive, analytical, competitive , and instrumental. When young males do not succeed in sports they are labeled as sissies and when young females succeed they are considered tomboys (Richardson & Tandy, 1985).

Beginning in elementary school, females are told that sports are not ladylike (Hart, 1976). This sets up the conflict of the female deciding whether to be a lady or to be an athlete. When females become more proficient at sports, their level of personal investment increases, which may lead to social isolation (Richardson & Tandy, 1985). Therefore, internal conflict arises because the female athlete attempts to remain feminine while

playing sports at the same time. In some sport settings, like Olympic Games sex-testing, females may have to provide evidence of their gender. Throughout their lifetimes, females are conditioned to believe that the gym is "off limits" and are discouraged from taking pride in an active and strenuous body. Men however are conditioned to do the complete opposite (Hart, 1976).

Female athletes have been historically compared to males and have had male performance placed before them as their model of excellence. Young girls participating in sports have always heard sayings like, "That girl runs so fast she could beat the boys." "You throw like a girl." "Susie loves all sports, she's our little tomboy."

It should be noted however, that many of these stereotypes come from a domain (i.e. sport) and a literature base that is male dominated. In order to move beyond these stereotypes, researchers need to examine the experiences of both males and females in sport. Coaches of female athletes, particularly male coaches, need to understand the potential gender role conflict that female athletes may experience. In addition, since females tend to attribute success to external factors (Richardson & Tandy, 1985), coaches may need to assist female athletes in evaluating their performance realistically and in cultivating internal attributions for success.

### *Female Athlete-Coach Relationship*

Over the past two decades, a number of researchers have investigated female athletes' coaching preferences (Medwechuk &Crossman, 1994; Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997; Weinberg, Reveles, & Jackson, 1984; Whitaker & Molstad, 1988). Medwechuk and Crossman (1994) found that 63% of female athletes ages 10- 19 in the United

Kingdom preferred female coaches over male coaches. However, Tomlinson and Yorganci (1997) discovered that 25% of the female athletes they surveyed preferred a male coach while only 3% preferred a female coach. Respondents expressed the view that female coaches were more sensitive and understanding, but lacked control of their teams. On the other hand, male coaches were viewed as having more discipline and better able to motivate. The characteristics of coaches that these athletes "liked best" were understanding, friendship, knowledge, and good humor.

Weinberg et al. (1984) found that junior high, high school, and college female athletes had no preference in regards to the gender of the coach. In this study athletes were given a hypothetical scenario in which coaches "John" and "Mary" were described as having achieved equal accomplishments. The results revealed no differences, with regards to gender, in the way female athletes perceived these two coaches. In another study, Whitaker and Molstad (1988) found coach gender preference differences between female high school and college athletes. High school athletes preferred a female coach while college athletes preferred a male coach.

Blinde (1994) reviewed several different studies that examined various aspects of the college female athlete's experience. In general, female athletes reported the feeling that male coaches were more condescending, intimidating, coddling, manipulating of the female value system, and that male coaches took advantage of them. Officer and Rosenfeld (1985) attempted to determine whether the gender of a high school female athlete's coach influenced the athlete's amount of self-disclosure. While these authors discovered no coach gender difference in the amount of self-disclosure, they did find that

the pattern of disclosure athletes gave to female coaches was similar to that given to strangers while the amount given to male coaches corresponded to that given to friends in one-on-one situations.

Kleinfelter (1985) also examined the coaching preferences of female athletes on high school basketball teams. In this sample, the male coaches of the athletes were significantly more successful than the female coaches. The results revealed that athletes' preferences for male or female coaches were significantly dependent upon the gender of the athlete's present coach. However, the players reported that they did not feel comfortable talking to their male coaches about their personal problems. Concerning the importance of having the coach in the locker rooms, athletes with a male coach felt there was no need for this, whereas athletes with a female coach thought it was imperative that the coach be in the locker room. When forced to choose a preference for a male or a female coach, 44 percent of the athletes said they preferred a male coach and 39 percent said they preferred a female coach.

There is some evidence that female athletes prefer female and male coaches for different reasons. According to Richardson and Tandy (1985) many women athletes prefer a female coach because they think the coach can identify with them and communicate with them better. Also, they feel that the female coach has a better understanding of the athletes' physical capabilities. In contrast, female athletes prefer a male coach because they believe that males know more about sports than do females.

Eitzen and Pratt (1989) examined gender differences in the coaching philosophies of male and female basketball coaches of high school women's basketball teams.

Participants completed questionnaire that summarized the attitudes and behaviors of coaches in the following areas: the coach's role in the overall development of athletes, conditions essential to maximize team performance, team rules used and enforced, importance of sport aphorisms, and expectations of athletes. The results revealed that both male and female coaches felt they should have an active role in shaping athletes' lives outside athletics. However, compared to male coaches female coaches believed it was also important to help their athletes develop a positive self image. With regards to team rules, female coaches were more likely to have rules regarding academic performance, to practice on the day before a game, to emphasize good sportsmanship, and to discourage profanity. Male coaches were more likely to set curfews for weekdays and weekends and to have a rule concerning when team practice starts. Finally, of the seventeen instances where the differences in athletes expectations between male and female coaches were significant, the responses of female coaches were more traditional than those of male coaches fourteen times. The authors suggested several explanations for this. First, women coaches may feel more threatened and insecure about their jobs than do male coaches. Also, the philosophies of female coaches maybe more traditional because of their different socialization patterns. Finally, female coaches of female teams may be more demanding of female athletes than are male coaches.

### *Decision Making in Coaching*

Coaches are constantly making decisions that have an impact on their athletes. Coaches need to make good decisions that move their athletes toward common goals. Coaches must weigh all the options and then choose the best one for achieving the desired

goal. When making decisions coaches typically adopt one of three styles: autocratic, participative, or democratic (Chelladuria & Haggerty, 1978).

An autocratic style is authoritarian in nature; where the coach makes the final decision. The coach is the person in charge and makes all decisions with no input from athletes. For example, an autocratic coach sets up the practice and game schedules without any consultation with athletes. A participative style is one in which the coach and one other member of the group makes decisions. In this case, the coach might get input from the team captain to assist in the final decision concerning team members. A democratic style is one in which the coach might permit one or more members of the team to make the decision for the group. For example, the coach might permit an athlete to determine a component of the teams practice plan or her own race plan. In a team setting the coach works with the athletes to formulate group goals and includes the team members in the decision making process.

A study by Serpa, Pataco, and Santos (1991) on leadership patterns in international handball revealed that male coaches use the democratic style less frequently than do female coaches. Another interesting finding from this study was that male coaches perceived their leadership styles differently than did their athletes. Specifically, athletes perceived their coach's behavior to be autocratic while coaches perceived their style to be democratic. The more experienced athletes in this study preferred autocratic behavior from their coaches to a greater extent than did less experience athletes. A possible reason for this is that the autocratic style provides psychological security for athletes during times of high stress, pressure, and anxiety (Serpa et al., 1991). At the elite level of competition

the focus is usually on winning and doing one's personal best. The goal here is to take some pressure off the athletes and let them focus their energy on the task in front of them. Therefore, an autocratic style may be preferable for individuals participating at elite levels of competition. However there is evidence that younger athletes may prefer a democratic coaching style (Neil & Kirby 1985).

Researchers have found different coaching style preferences for male and female athletes as well as for individual and team sport performers. Female athletes appear to prefer a democratic coaching style while male athletes seem to prefer an autocratic style (Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Terry, 1984; Vealey, Armstrong, Comar, & Greenleaf, 1998). Compared to athletes participating in individual sports athletes participating in team sports have been found to prefer an autocratic coaching style to a greater extent and a democratic coaching style to a lesser extent (Terry & Howe, 1984; Vealey et al., 1998).

### *Qualitative Research and Sport Psychology*

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding behavior from the individual person's own frame of reference (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982). Data obtained using qualitative research methods are rich in description of people, places, and conversations. Research questions are formulated to investigate phenomena in the context of the participant. Thus, qualitative research can help investigators understand complex processes that other forms of inquiry can not (Maxwell, 1996).

Cote, Samela, Baria, and Russell (1993) were among the first to advocate the use of qualitative methods in the field of sport psychology. These authors argued that

qualitative research allows sport psychology researchers to determine what athletes are thinking and feeling in different competitive situations. Qualitative methods characterize the processes that experts use in their performances and help investigators gain a deeper understanding and description of interactions (Strean, 1998). Qualitative methodologies can also help bridge the gap in sport psychologists' understanding of performers and perhaps serve as an important guide in determining interventions (Strean, 1998; Sparkes, 1998).

The most common method of qualitative research in sport psychology is the interview. As opposed to using questionnaires, interviewing allows researchers to discover what is really going on in the mind of the athletes instead of determining the extent to which athletes agree with a series of predetermined statements. According to Dale (1996) sport psychology researchers can learn a great deal about athlete's experiences via interviews where they are free to describe their experiences. In open-ended interviews, athletes are asked questions like, "What are your experiences of competition as a national championship figure skater?" (Gould, Jackson, and Finch, 1993a) or, "What are some things that stress you out in competition?," (Gould, Jackson, and Finch, 1993b). Knowing what the athlete thinks and feels is one of the most important tools sport psychologists can use in providing the most helpful assistance to sport performers.

As in the case of other forms of inquiry, qualitative research has many core assumptions. One is particularly relevant to the study of athletes' experiences. The core assumption of symbolic interactionism is that meaning is derived from various types of

interaction (Blumer, 1969). There are three types of interactions that are examined in qualitative research. The first interaction deals with how humans interact with the objects around them. These interactions are dependent on what the object means to the individual. Different things or objects have different meanings to different people. The second interaction to do with the psychological constructs people attach to symbols and objects. The third interaction concerns the process of interpretation. An individual needs to know what constructs have meaning to him/her in order to react and to interpret the situations he/she encounters.

Athletes and their coaches interact with one another on a daily basis and sometimes interpret each other's behavior differently. Coaches may perceive their own behaviors in one way while athletes may interpret the coach's behavior in another. The qualitative researcher can not know the athlete's interpretation of the coach's behavior without asking the athlete about the meaning he/she attaches to the behavior.

Qualitative studies examining the meaning of sport and physical activity for athletes are basically non-existent in the sport psychology literature (Duda, 1991). While the number of qualitative studies in sport psychology is growing (Strean, 1998; Sparkes, 1998) few have examined female athletes' experiences. Both Duda (1990) and Fastings (1990) argue that, in sport psychology, researchers need to move beyond methodologies and theoretical frameworks that are rooted in a male perspective of sport and physical activity and begin to build theory that addresses the meaning of sport and exercise from the perspective of women as well as men (Birrell, 1984; Du Bois, 1983). Qualitative research methods appear to have good potential for deriving the kind of information that

could serve as the foundation for such theoretical revision.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I began with a general discussion of gender differences. Then, I discussed the literature in sport psychology concerning female athlete's coaching preferences, most of which was derived using quantitative research methods. I also addressed some other factors that affect the issue of coach-gender preference among athletes (e.g. decision-making styles). Finally, I discussed the basic nature of qualitative research methods and their utility for sport psychology investigators. The primary advantage of qualitative methods is that they allow the researcher to gain an understanding of the participant's experience in the participants' own words. In the present study I utilized a qualitative approach in an attempt to obtain a better understanding of female athletes' experience of being coached by male and female coaches and to identify major themes associated with female athletes' coaching preferences.

# Chapter 3

## Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the methodological aspects of this study. I begin by discussing the bias that emanated from my bracketing interview. Then I describe the participants of the study, the interview methodology, and the data analysis procedure. Finally, I discuss several validity issues.

### *Bracketing Interview*

In qualitative research, it is essential for the researcher to explore biases and assumptions at the beginning of the research process because of the potential impact the researcher might have on the process of data collection and analysis (Parker, 1994). Before conducting the interviews of athletes, I participated in a bracketing interview, using the semi-structured interview guide I developed for the study (Appendix A). The purpose of the bracketing interview was to determine my own biases about female athletes' experience of being coached by males and females (Siedman, 1991). My responses were then transcribed verbatim and analyzed by myself and the interviewer to identify preconceived assumptions I might have had (Dale, 1996).

In my bracketing interview, I discovered that I preferred female coaches. The female coaches I have had pushed me to work harder in a different way than my male coaches. Males just told me stuff like, "You suck and should not be allowed to play in a big game." This was after the team I was a starter on won the conference championship. The female coaches have played before and seem to have experienced what I have experienced. Criticizing me doesn't work, but encouraging me and having faith in me

does work. In my experience, female athletes have just understood me better.

### *Participants*

I distributed letters to all the coaches of female athletic teams at a large National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I university in the southeastern United States (Appendix B) to request their permission to approach their athletes to solicit participants for the study. Subsequent meetings were arranged with the athletes' permitted to participate. During this meeting, I explained the purposes of the study, the criteria for participation, and the procedures. I also obtained demographic information (Appendix C) to identify individuals who had been coached by both male and female coaches. Additionally, participants had to have had at least two coaches from both genders. This was done in an effort to gain a sample of athletes that had a variety of experiences with both male and female coaches. Participants for the study were then chosen from this smaller sample of individuals. In summary, then, the participants of this study were six NCAA Division I collegiate female athletes from the sports of soccer, track and field, swimming, and volleyball. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years. All participants attended the same university in the southeastern United States.

### *Procedure*

I contacted each of the participants individually a second time, reminded them of the purposes of the study, and asked them if they were still interested in participating. I then established a date and time to conduct the interviews with each participant. Interviews were conducted in a private room in order to minimize interruptions. Upon arriving at the interview site, participants read and signed the informed consent form

(Appendix D). Each individual participated in a semi-structured interview (Appendix A) that began with the question, "Can you tell me a little bit about the characteristics you prefer the most in a coach?" This question was followed by questions that probed the participant's experiences with female and male coaches. All interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and each was audiotaped. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim, a sample of which is shown in Appendix E, and then arranged a follow-up meeting to verify the transcript with the participants.

### *Data Analysis*

I initially analyzed the data by extracting major themes and sub-themes from the text of each transcript (Tesch, 1990). I then rearranged the themes into categories that allowed me to compare the data across all participants (Glaser & Strauss; 1967 Strauss, 1987). I also kept a reflective journal throughout the study and used it during the data analysis procedure (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to facilitate interpretation.

I then asked a qualitative research group to examine the transcripts to verify my own interpretation. After we obtained consensus on higher order and secondary themes, I further analyzed the data using Nudist Software (1997). I then examined the results with members of the qualitative research group in order to assure validity.

### *Validity*

As with any study, validity of the data is an important issue. To assure acceptable validity I followed several principles. First, I determined the number of interviews I needed by adhering to the redundancy criterion (Taylor, 1994). The redundancy principle

stated that additional interviews should be conducted until a clear pattern of themes emerge across all interviews. Second, I verified transcripts of the interviews as well as the resulting themes with all participants. This peer audit assisted in clarifying the data analysis and guarantee that respondents were not misrepresented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Finally, I used representative quotes from the participants words in the discussion of results in order to allow other researchers to assess the validity of the data for themselves and permit them to accept, reject, or modify my interpretations and conclusions (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

# Chapter 4

## Results

I began this chapter with a brief description of each of the participants. I then presented the results and discussed the themes that emerged from the athletes' responses.

### *Participant Profiles*

In order to protect the identity of participants, each individual selected a pseudonym. In the following paragraphs I provided a brief demographic description of each individual.

**Lydia**

Lydia is an 18-year-old freshman soccer player. She has had twelve years of competitive experience in soccer and volleyball and is a walk-on on the soccer team. Currently Lydia has a male head coach and two female assistant coaches. Throughout her competitive soccer career she has had a total of seven male and four female coaches.

Lydia loves being a Division I athlete and knows that she has to be completely committed to her team in order to increase her chances of playing. Along with playing soccer Lydia is a member of the concert band. She feels that soccer is the main part of her day, but she does not want it to consume her. Therefore, Lydia has a separate set of friends outside of her soccer teammates.

**Trisheka**

Trisheka is a 21-year-old junior track and field athlete. She primarily participates in throwing events, but participated as a heptathlete in high school where she also played softball and basketball. Trisheka has had thirteen years of competitive experience, seven

of which are in the sport of track and field. Currently, her head track coach is a female and her throwing coach is a male. Throughout her competitive years Trisheka has had ten male and three female coaches.

Trisheka began her collegiate career at another large Division I university in the southeastern United States. After her freshman year, she transferred to a junior college in the western United States. One year later she transferred again to her present university.

Trisheka began her collegiate career as a heptathlete. She later decided she would have a more success if she focused solely on throwing. Trisheka throws the discus, javelin, shot put and hammer. Her favorite event is the discus, but she recently began throwing the hammer and is enjoying that event as well.

**Callie**

Callie is a 22-year-old fifth year collegiate track and cross-country runner. She participates in cross-country and distance running events. Her competitive experience consists of seventeen years, fourteen of which are in her current sport. Callie also participated in basketball in high school. Her current coach is a female and in the past she has had six male and seven female coaches.

Callie began her running career at the age of five by joining other children in chasing Micky Mouse around the town square in her hometown. She was named the winner for catching Mickey.

**Dot**

Dot is a 21-year-old junior volleyball player who has played the sport competitively for seven years and has participated in several competitive sports for

fourteen years. In addition to volleyball, Dot participated in basketball and softball in high school. Currently, her head coach is a male and she has one female assistant coach. In the past, Dot has had three male and six female coaches.

Dot feels that being an athlete gives her numerous opportunities. Athletes have their own tutors, computer labs, and great athletic facilities. For Dot, being an athlete brings huge benefits, but she also feels like she lives in a fish bowl; everyone in the athletic department and the university knows her business.

**Dawn**

Dawn is a 19-year-old freshman swimmer where she participates in the backstroke. She has participated in swimming and other competitive sports for twelve years. In addition to swimming, Dawn also ran track in high school. Her current head coach is a male and she also has a female assistant. In the past, Dawn has had a total of four male and three female coaches.

Dawn feels that being an athlete is hard work and stressful, but also fun. She feels that sport involvement helps her organize her day better. Dawn schedules her day around her practice times. She became interested in swimming when her mom convinced her to join the swim team at age seven when they moved to a new city. Her mother wanted her to make new friends before school started.

**Madison**

Madison is a 19-year-old sophomore soccer player who has participated solely in the sport for ten years. Currently, Madison has a male head coach and two female assistant coaches. In the past, she has had eight male and three female coaches.

Madison feels that being a student-athlete is challenging and a lot of hard work. She is extremely glad that her coach and athletic department personnel understand she is a student first and athlete second. Along with being a starter on the soccer team, Madison is a member of the leadership team with Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and leads a Bible study for high school girls in a near-by town.

During the analysis of the interview transcripts, two themes seemed to characterize the athletes' coaching preferences. They were: Personal Relationship and Sport Insight. In addition, the theme of Gender was prompted by me and therefore represented the experience of the participants rather than gender preference.

The first theme, Personal Relationship dealt with the athlete's perception of their closeness to a coach. The second theme, Sport Insight dealt with the athlete's perception of the coaches ability to communicate the important aspects of the sport to them. The theme of Gender was prompted by me in all interviews. This theme was the athlete's experience of gender in coaching.

### *Theme I: Personal Relationship*

The Personal Relationship theme was comprised of five subthemes: Respect, Trust, Supportive, Warmth, and Individual Too. The first two subthemes suggested a relationship between the coach and athlete based on mutual respect and trust. The last three subthemes dealt with the treatment of the athlete by the coach. The subtheme of Individual Too is representative of the coach treating the athlete as an individual as well as an athlete.

**Respect**

For the participants in this study, mutual respect between the athlete and coach was vital to their relationship. As one athlete put it, it is fun to play and compete against your coach, but athletes must remember to respect the coach as an authority figure. Dot said,

> And (um), I just have fun and coaches have fun, but you respect them. You know, I think from players that is very important to have respect for the coach, and know that they are the authority and the rules are strong and they stand. And let you know that you can compete against them and have fun.

Madison said she also liked it when her coaches got out on the field with them and got involved in the drills.

> A coach who does all the drills with us is important, it's almost like you respect them because they are out there working as hard as you.

In order to be successful these participants felt that athletes needed to accept their coach's instruction. Lydia, who feels she has a better connection with males, stated,

> So with a male it's easier like I have an easier time accepting what they say and listening to what they say about the sport, about anything... But, I think with the guy we're more respectful (um), and more (ah) open to what he has to say.

These athletes also said they needed to feel that the coach respected them and the time they put in to their training. According to Trisheka,

> (Um), I prefer more of an authoritarian you know, I wanna (um) to have someone who um, respects me and my efforts that I am out there trying that, as hard as I can. And respect the time that I put in, but also (um) is very set in what they want me to accomplish for that day, the goals are laid out and we are on a program that we know what the end result.

**Trust**

Mutual trust was a significant component of the coach-athlete relationship for

these athletes. They indicated that athletes needed to trust the coach in all matters of training and performance. Lydia stated,

> Yea, I mean they have to be honest about how they're feeling that we are playing because we'll have a lot of meetings with them and they are asking us how we feel, like how the team is playing and what we can do better.

A lack of trust in their coach can have detrimental effects on athletes. Dot talked about the importance of trust in the recruiting process,

> I think trust is really important you know, they (coaches) are really awesome on recruiting trips and when you go to the school, things are different but not affecting your play you know while you are there. You are buddy buddy and you feel like you can trust them and they hold that against you later on.

The coach also has to trust the athlete in knowing their bodies and knowing what they can and can not do. Callie felt that this is extremely important at the collegiate level. She stated,

> I think it's important for a coach to trust an athlete at this level, at the collegiate level, it's not just like, you know some workout in high school it's like this hurts and I can't run today so they can get out of practice...And if a coach isn't willing to do that with an athlete then that kind of stinks because an athlete is taking a big leap of faith trusting their coach to do everything right for them and having their best interest in mind. And if you don't feel that they trust you, you know that's real difficult to take, I think.

**Supportive**

Another important attribute of the coach-athlete relationship is the feeling of total acceptance. As Dawn pointed out, she liked it when a coach accepted things of her.

> I like it when they (um) accept things, I don't know. Like when they accept things of you, they tell you, like I had a coach that would tell me I know you can do this. You know why would? Like she would, like she had her own way, she was a little different than most coaches. She had her own way of saying things that she knew I could do certain things so she would push me in certain areas like that I wouldn't see connections in.

Support from the coach can also help the mind set of the athlete. Callie discussed needing a coach who supported the mental and emotional aspects of running.

> But, (um) yea I think the mental aspect and emotional side of running especially because when you do it, you do it by yourself it is important to have a coach who's supportive. And (um), you know really behind you and believes you can do it and stuff like that. I mean if you have to do it on your own, you have to do it on your own, but it just makes it that much more difficult.

At one time or another an athlete contemplates leaving the sport for whatever reason. Lydia was thankful for having a supportive coach that she could go to and talk to about quitting.

> I didn't want to play anymore and I didn't like it and it was too much of a hassle to go through it so it I had like a lot of really like really good coaches. And they, I've felt I've been able to talk to them about it and they helped me through it. Because they've been there before and they know how it is.

Athletes also want to know their coach is going to fight for them, stick up for them, and support them 100%. Trisheka said,

> I mean that I want someone's that's going to fight for me just as far and as hard as I'm fighting for them.

Simply a coach asking their athletes how their day is going can make a world of difference. According to Madison,

> Asking, "Are you doing okay today?" if we're not playing well. It's not that you are just playing awful, sometimes it's because you have other stuff on your mind and you do your best to separate the two, but it doesn't always happen. My coach understands there are other factors that play into your performance than just your performance.

**Warmth**

Coaches should be approachable for their athletes. Most athletes looked to their coach for advice or just someone to talk to. Dawn said,

> ... I like it when they're easy to talk to because if I have a problem like if I cant talk to them I feel like I don't know what to do. Like its just like I every time I get angry about something it just builds up inside cause I don't know who da, who da tell you know other than maybe other...Than what are they going to do for me (um) so I definitely like it when I can talk to them.

These athletes wanted to be able to go to their coach about problems they were having with their performance, with other teammates, or general life problems. They needed to feel that the coach is warm and inviting in order to open up to the coach about their problems. According to Dot,

> If you have a problem you have to know you can go to your coach. They are not just stone cold you know you can approach them if there is a problem on the team you know you can approach them as a person.

Lastly, some athletes preferred to know the coach loves them and is willing to show them some kind of affection. For instance, Trisheka pointed out,

> Just that... that the love you know sometimes you just need a hug you know and at practice you get frustrated, and you know they need to know that kind of thing, or you are just able to get to know your coach I guess.

**Individual Too**

The athletes in this study preferred a coach that is concerned about them not only as an athlete but as an individual as well. Coaches should be concerned with student-athletes' academic progress as well as their athletic prowess. Dawn stated,

> He was like my coach for three and a half years and it's like all the girls on the team were like his daughters you know he cares about what happens to them in and out of the pool and you know school. You know he was always concerned like how are you grades doing, are you stressin, or you know caring about your general being.

The coach realizing that the athlete is not just a player was important to these athletes. According to Dot,

> You know they care about not just the player, but they have an individual they have a person, you know they have a student, a daughter, a friend and it's the same way with you. Like a person, not just a machine like to play their game like you know.

Coaches should be aware that collegiate athletes have many aspects to their lives, and that their sport is not their whole life. Athletes must attend classes, study, and occasionally be involved in other activities as well. Lydia, who is involved in other campus activities stated,

> It's just little things like that like soccer is not our entire lives and we don't want it to consume us. And you know, it's hard for us to have a positive attitude towards it when we are being lied to and when we are hurting and they don't seem to understand that at all or take it easy at all.

Madison agreed with Lydia and said that she has many things that are important to her as well as soccer and that she likes a coach who is aware of this.

> He understands that sometimes there are things that are more important than soccer and there are some coaches that think the whole world revolves around your sport. My life doesn't and so that bothers me. I have other things that may not take up as much time as soccer, but I value just as deeply or more so and I think coaches that are understanding in that aspect are cool.

Some athletes prefer coaches to look out for their best interests. Trisheka said,

> I also need someone who (um) is kind of a care taker, you know looks out for my best interests on and off the track. That they care about me as an individual and that I can respect them, you know put them up there you know not, pretty much like a buddy you know because then there's lines to be drawn.

### *Theme II: Sport Insight*

The second theme that emerged from the data was Sport Insight. This theme was comprised of four subthemes: Motivational, Knowledge, Mental Preparation, and Organization. The subtheme Knowledge, also had a smaller subtheme of Experience. The

research group reasoned that because someone has knowledge does not necessarily mean they have experience at the sport. However, if they have experience in the sport then they should have knowledge of the sport. This theme and its sub-themes involved coaching qualities rather than the personal qualities of the previous theme.

**Motivational**

Athletes want their coach to motivate them. As Callie explained, it is nice to have not only your family and friends cheering you on, it is nice to have a coach as well.

> (Um), get excited about running you know don't just kind of sit there I think, get excited yell and I mean not yell in a mean way, but yell, "Yea let's go you" you know, that kind of thing to get really excited and pumped up (um), I think that's really cool. You know, from when you are practicing to when you are competing, you know not all the time, but when you are out there running it's nice to hear somebody getting excited about what you are doing. And obviously my parents do and your teammates do and stuff, but it's good to hear your coach as well so, that kind of stuff, just getting really excited about what you are doing.

During a game is a crucial time for a coach to be motivational. Dot explains one of her coaches techniques for keeping her and her team motivated.

> Yea, (um) well I have (um) a coach, she played volleyball in high school, I mean high school and college and she was a great athlete. And we would we would be playing and we would come into the huddle and she would be so excited. You know we would be up and she would be pumped up with us you know she would be excited for us and have a go for it attitude. And if we came in and we were down, she wouldn't just sort of you know, she would be like alright this is like right now when we win this is like right now is when you are tested. This is what we work hard in practice you know, she triggers something in mind that you are like no, like the Nike commercials at the bottom, you see the little inspirational things. And just sparks the flame inside of you to be like yea this is why I am playing the game, not man I have two more years of this, this stupid game I just want to get this game over. She gets into your head, man I started playing game because I loved it and that's why I am playing it now and that's why we're gonna come back and win this game.

Staying positive and enthusiastic about the game is vitally important for a coach.

This, in turn, encourages their athletes to do the same. Lydia said,

> (Um), if they are extremely enthusiastic about it that they make you want to play. Like they aren't just out there, they're not just out there like taking up their time because they get paid. You know, you can just tell their attitude toward, towards everything you know like if they're enthusiastic and they're out there for you, that's the attitude that they usually come across. They love what they are doing, but they are out there to make you a better player and to make you a better person.

Madison said she needed encouragement from her coach in order to perform well. She spoke about an experience with a former coach who was extremely motivating to her.

> I'm not motivated by criticism at all... it takes my confidence away. My confidence is sometimes created through my coach saying "There's no way they can stop you, you are the one on our team that is going to make it happen." Encouragement and motivation are so intertwined that it is hard to distinguish between them because the encouragement is my motivation in such a huge way. I had a female coach at an Olympic Development sort of thing (um) she had so much energy like she was so fun and so into our lives and it was only like a week that she was our coach. But she gave each of us a index card at the end of the week with just some encouraging words. Stuff that was good about our game and stuff that she knew we could do and I thought that was cool. That's kind of like how I am with other stuff, like I'm kind of a motivator in who I am. I love to motivate people and I love to show people what they are good at and help enable them to do that. And so when people are like that with me, I love that. (Um), she was like that, she had so much energy, so much confidence in us, and when she was out there, she was excited to be out there.

**Knowledge**

Most athletes depend on their coach for the knowledge to make them better and take them to the next level. Trisheka talked about her junior college coach,

> That kind of that is like when you are in practice it's serious and (ah) you really look to them for all the knowledge... I really find them as knowledgeable people and that it's kind of the somebody that, somebody that's like (um) like you have to meet this guy, he's a great guy.

The coach should know the rules of the game and the technical aspects of the game as well. As Dot explained,

> Well most sports I mean when you get to the collegiate level are extremely just technical. A lot of people don't know and you have lack of respect for you know sports, but it's so technical, there are so many plays and I mean you just can't come in and practice you know bounce around for a little bit. It takes scheduling, and knowing what you know all the different situations you could be thrown into in a game and how to put that down and work on it at the drill incorporating all aspects. You know, working on little intricate parts of the game and then working through the practice later on incorporating all of them. You can't just go into a practice and play and expect to get any better. It's not practice makes perfect, it's prefect practice makes perfect. Instead the coach knows about the game and if, knows about the current game you know with rules, regulations and just what's going on and what's worked for other teams. I think that's really important, you know.

According to Madison, coaches can have the greatest qualities in the world, however if they don't know the sport then they are not giving athletes what they need.

> My high school coach had never played soccer before and he used to make us run around and then we got an assistant coach who knew what he was doing and we finished second in the state. He still doesn't know what he is doing, he does the stupidest drills. You know you can have a coach who is motivating and encouraging and all these things, but if they don't have a clue on what to tell you then they are really not doing you much good in the game. They may make you feel great and you can go out and play. My coach that was clueless just said, "You're successful, you're too good for me to mess anything up so I don't even want to try to help you with stuff." So he never tried to get me to work on stuff because he didn't want to make me start thinking too much and I was scoring goals and we were going to states and he never tried to fix my game. I guess he thought I didn't need it or something like that.

Athletes feel secure when they know their coaches knows what they are talking about. As Callie explained,

> Yea, sometimes it helps to know that (um) your coach knows what they are talking about like, if you know a coach who is just kind of like in high school a lot of times coaches have to teach and coach so they just kind of grab somebody. And you are like what did they ever do, did they ever run or did they ever participate in anything or are they just getting this out of a book or did they learn it? So to know that your coach has had some success either running themselves or coaching other athletes because I feel that being really a good coach (um) if you are a good athlete doesn't necessarily mean you are going to be a good coach.

It is also important for the coach to know their athletes and their needs. Dawn discussed a time when it was important for her coach to know her and her teammates.

> You know I thought one of the coolest things that he did was at our conference championships (um) he knows that a lot of us struggle on the team struggle with stress and you know getting too worked up about things and I am definitely one of those people. And he knows that if we have a little less tense of a setting a more relaxed... everyone will do better because they will be more relaxed and we'll be having fun and everyone will swim better. And so we had catered meals at the hotel and the whole team was in a room eating and he said after we ate he was going to pick somebody to tell a joke and like just to set the setting for the week that we are here to have fun. You know to keep everyone lighthearted and to just joke around and stuff, but not to the extent that we don't take it seriously because he knew we would take it seriously when it came time that we are behind the blocks ready to race.

***Experience***

Just because a coach has knowledge of a sport, doesn't mean the coach has playing experience. Athletes initially assume that an experienced coach has the proper knowledge. As Callie explained,

> (Um), but then also if they were successful themselves they know training wise what works maybe not necessarily motivational, but they know training wise what to do to make you successful. So if you know that they run well themselves you know they know a little bit about what they are talking about.

Lydia felt that previous playing experience was necessary for coaches in the sport of soccer. A player has to make quick decisions on the field and if a coach does not understand that, it could lead to problems. According to Lydia,

> (Um), okay, I prefer they've (coaches) played the sport. If that makes sense. I've had a few coaches who like the high school coach that never played before because his daughters had both played. And it was hard for us, it was hard for us personally because he was like incredibly demanding like fitness wise and of course he expected 100% from us which we gave, but it was hard for us because he never played. He didn't and the part they don't understand like how fast it is for us in the decision making process. So, I think mostly definitely had to play. I've only had

one coach ever who hadn't played and it was hard to do.

Experienced coaches can assist their athletes with their mechanics. An inexperienced coach might have difficulty doing this. Dot explained that her coach annoyed her sometimes because he had played for so long and knew so much.

> I think a coach should be experienced you know play forever. Like in every situation. Like our coach now, he has played for so long I mean everything it's almost to the point of being annoying when you can't do something, he'll tell you exactly what to do and out of spite you'll do it and the ball will go exactly where it's supposed to go. I think experience, not only playing but I mean especially playing, is very important because you know you were an athlete at one time you know what it's like.

In contrast, Trisheka's coach had no throwing experience, however he had acquired the knowledge from participation at coaching clinics.

> (Um), just I wish that my coach could be right now that he has throwing experience, but whether he does or not isn't really that important. I mean like I still think that he wasn't a thrower I mean he was a great athlete you can tell by you know when he demonstrates stuff. He knows what he's talking about and he was a great athlete you know, but it's really quick and stuff like that.

**Mental Preparation**

When training athletes for competition, it is important for coaches to prepare them both mentally and physically. Callie talked about a time when she was injured and ran well despite of her injury because the coach mentally prepared her for the evert.

> ...Like I've had a coach who I was hurt and wasn't very you know I just couldn't seem to get in the greatest shape. What I could do, I could do, but I was hurt and struggling. I couldn't run a lot of miles and this and that, but he was so positive and so motivated all the time, it just made me run that much better, you know. Like I ran well off of barely anything just because of the emotional side of and the mental aspect of it.

These athletes also experienced coaches that tested their limits. In order to properly train an athlete a coach must push an athlete to work as hard as she can.

According to Trisheka,

> That they put you to the test you know, it's kind of the test of your will and I think that is when (um) you really find that line of friendship. I mean that they know how hard you can work and they're going to work you just that hard until you're about to break and then you are about to break and go a little harder and realize that you're not gonna. I think that's really important.

**Organization**

Organization was important to these athletes in a variety of different ways. Callie is an extremely organized person who said that she preferred a routine, and liked to know her race plan in advance.

> I like routine and I'm organized. I like want to know what's going on. It helps when I've got a daily schedule and this is what we do... I can be flexible to a point, but I need a race plan with what I do each day for a meet or something. I understand you need to be flexible between meets and everything is not going to be perfect bla bla bla. But you know one day she'll tell me my race plan six days in advance and not mention another word. The next week (she'll) call me the morning of the race okay so you've got your race plan. I mean to me that's just playing games like why are you going to be like that. That kind of thing. That's abusive and you shouldn't be that way.

These athletes preferred to discuss goals and training with their coaches. Dawn said she had meetings with her coach frequently to discuss her performance goals.

> (Um), but I like that we have goal meetings that we meet every three weeks and I really like that because that like enforces being able to be you one on one with the coach and it's all you know you are talking about you. And like what your goals are for like the next three weeks or what your goals for the season or what's your goal for the off season, what can we do together to achieve them and stuff like that. You know like that kind of communication is good because sometimes I wouldn't have that and so like your coach might not always know what your goals are and their goals for you may be different. Like you want your goals to be the same so that you both you know are working for the same thing and not different things. That way you won't get disappointed in the end when neither of you reach your goals. Like he doesn't get the goal he had for me and I don't get my goal. I like that fact that we talk about that and work it all out and so that we are on the same turns and that we are working together to achieve the same things.

Callie said she liked it when a coach knew when to make their athletes work hard and when they needed a break.

> (Um), unorganized, not knowing what was going on just I don't want to put a label on them just being... but this one lady was like didn't really know what she was doing. (Um), yea unorganization and not knowing what they are doing. Not being able to give good workouts or not knowing when an athlete needs a break or not knowing where a game is supposed to be and you show up and the game's not there. Just stuff like that, (um) making you run when you know you need a break or making you do a kind of workout you know you are not ready to do or you should be doing something different. (Um), not really listening, you know as an athlete you are with your body, you have been with your body and you know your body the best and somebody else doesn't necessarily know.

Dot said she enjoyed it when the coach incorporates game-like situations during practice.

> It takes scheduling, and knowing what you know all the different situations you could be thrown into in a game and how to put that down and work on it and drills incorporating all aspects. You know, working on little intricate parts of the game and then working through the practice latter on incorporating all of them. You can't just go into a practice and play and expect to get any better. It's not practice makes perfect it's prefect practice makes perfect... And then you have a coach that's like okay today we're going to work on this because in the game last week we had a little problem and you know they like their job.

Trisheka wants her goals to be laid out in front of her so she can focus on them better.

> But also (um) is very set in what they want me to accomplish for that day, the goals are laid out and we are on a program that we know what the end result. We know where we want to be at the end of the session, practice session, the end of the week or the end of the you know the end of the season.

These athletes indicated that a coach who is organized appealed to them increased their confidence in the coach. Dot explained,

I've seen (um), offices in disarray and programs just out of control you know, just organization things set up and organized you know this way and that's (um), it just runs so much easier.

Trisheka agreed that the coach should be organized.

Very important. (Um) that goes with the respect thing that you you know you're like wow he's really got his act together you know. This program really has their act together or (um) with like scheduling trips and stuff even like that's stuff's taken care of that you not... not everybody's waiting at the airport for you know for 45 minutes to an hour and a half waiting on buses or they're not all waiting here for someone to go pick up the Uhaul. Stuff is just like set up I think that's very important to keep the respect of your athletes you know that they think you are a confident coach you know that you are on the ball, but stuff gets done. (Um), and that stuff is structured and set up and practice times are set up and people respect your practice time and they know that they need to be on time and it's shouldn't... I think that's just really important, it's just a matter of saying, sitting down at the beginning of the year at the beginning of the semester and setting up time frames, you know. And (um), that's just really important I think especially to have stuff organized on trips when you go out of town. It's really hard on everybody to travel in a group anyway, just when you've got 20 people and everyone's hungry and you know you've got to think these things through sometimes, but yea... Just it helps you believe in your coach more that you know that they know what they are doing.

### *Theme III: Gender*

The most complex theme of the study was Gender, probably because it was prompted by follow-up questions. All participants had experiences with both female and male coaches and they identified two distinct characteristics of female coaches: Competition between Coach and Athletes and Living Vicariously Through Athletes. In addition, these athletes' comments suggested that males had the distinct characteristic of being a Father Figure. Therefore, the subthemes under Gender were "Competition" and "Living Vicariously" for females and "Father Figure" for males.

**Gender Female: Competition**

Throughout the interviews, participants talked about the experience of competition they felt with their female coaches. Dot talked about competition on the fitness end of the sport and being better than the coach when the coach played.

> (Um), some of the female coaches that I have had it seems like there's a competition. There's a competition between the coaches, the female coaches and the players especially now when the ages are closer, you know colleges. And (um), who can eat the best, who's healthiest, you know. Who can condition the most, but the coaches conditioned with us and they were like who could run the best... whatever. Who could, you know when they would play with us and that would be competition, that's an okay competition you know, but when it's on eating and body appearance I think that was difficult. I mean coaches would compete you know, and you felt like you had to compete with your coaches and you felt you never could met up to their fitness. You know the thinner you are the better athlete you are, but they don't care about what you eat, just as long as you know, and that was hard and... They think when they just got out of college you know they can't break you down and make you feel like you know you're not that good. You know they push you harder and just competition with appearance you know oh, I did more cardio, well I'm gonna do more, things like that. And they put on you, well when I played I got the block record you know for the most blocks well I'll do better than her. It's just competition there's always going to be a friction between women.

Lydia described the competition she felt from her female coach as a "power trip". The coach attempted to control the athlete's every endeavor.

> Where I think male coaches are a little bit more... not lenient, but a little more understanding to like to our bodies which may seem like a contradiction, but the women I think this sounds rude, but the women sometimes have a power trip. Like they are in control now and they've been through it and they are going to put you through it worse because they've had to do it and it shouldn't be fair that we can get off easier or as easy as they did. (Um), but here we have a female assistant coach who (um), is at the reigns right now because our male head coach is away, and we have had the hardest week of our entire lives. (Um), we sort of think she has jumped on her high horse.

Trisheka said she felt that females knew what you could do and what you could

not do and that they let athletes get away with less.

> (Um), no I don't know, maybe sometimes cause they don't know really, and then a female is just like oh well I could do it, you know. My one coach my basketball coach was just like please you know you can't pull that kind of stuff with me, you know you can't pull the cramps and that kind of stuff.

Madison referred to the competition between female coaches and their athletes as an attempt by the coach to prove something.

> I think women can sometimes be really tough because it's like they want to prove themselves.

**Gender Female: Living Vicariously**

These female athletes also felt their female coaches tried to live vicariously through them. Dot talked about her coach "walking through hell" and in turn making her athletes do the same.

> (Um), some of the women, the women when they were playing had it harder because (ah) female athletes weren't widely accepted. You know, to be a female athlete you had to work three times as hard, most of the time you ended up playing with the boys to have enough people. You know she walked through hell to get to heaven and now she it seems like they expect everybody else to be you know ground breaker, I don't know, that's just my impression. They were all iron women and back in their day they had one pair of shoes and no knee pads you know it's sort of your parents old story of walking to school both ways uphill with no shoes. Coach is like we had to fight the boys because they wouldn't let us (um) you know. And I mean I think about it and if I was a coach I would also myself want to push away the stereotype of guys are better than girls. You push the girls so hard because you want them to be better and grow up to show everybody that girls are great athletes too, that you are a female yourself. ...You know I just think they want to push the girls that extra mile to make them better than the boys you know to get rid of that stereotype.

Lydia said she felt that her female coach resented her and her teammates because she had worked so hard and could beat anyone on the team in fitness.

> She sort of thinks we don't work as hard as she does, but that's her life. Like that's

> what she chooses to do with her life, like soccer is her life right now and our lives are soccer or band or school or whatever else we are in and I don't think she understands that. ...You know cause I think she resents the fact that she kills us all in fitness and that's not fair to her. But you know (female) coaches sometimes take it to the extreme and I know they want us to become better and I understand that, but I think that sometimes it's just (um) rehashing their careers.

**Gender Male: Father Figure**

Some of these female athletes saw their older male coach as a father figure. There could be several different reasons for this and Dawn described her reasons below.

> I guess because I don't really see my real father that much and I don't really care to talk about my step father, I talk to him (step-father) about things like how I am feeling. Like, my old swim coach he was a like the type of guy who loved to give you hugs like if you were looking down, he would try to get you to smile. He would act like a father would like make his little girl happy, give her a hug and ask her what's wrong and try to fix her problems if he could. Like when I made National Honor Society President, I ran and told my male swim coach and I told my male high school coach. I wouldn't have gone and told my female coaches because it was just like I don't know like I may have said it in a social setting. I wasn't excited to tell them, I got excited to tell the male like I got excited to tell a parent you know like how I told my mom. They would in turn get excited about that with me and they are happy when you accomplish something. They just want the best for you. They want you to grow up and live happily ever after like any father would want their daughter to. My coach now calls us his little girls and his girlfriend yelled at him saying they are not little girls, they are women. It's hard I think for coaches when you see each other so much you are like my family. Not only do I look to him as a father figure, he looks at us as his little girls. He looks out for us and cares for us and cares for us more than just in the swimming pool.

Callie and Trisheka describe their experiences with their father figure coaches in a similar fashion.

> Like we had a male coach in high school and he was older and he was a grandpa, he was real nice very fatherly and you know he was just like, yea I really liked him as a coach. (Callie)

> You know that he just really cared about me and (um) that it was just all business you know, I totally put my faith in him as a coach and as like father type figure. (Trisheka)

**Additional Comments About Coach Gender**

Participant's comments about gender preferences were somewhat unique to each athlete. Throughout her interview, Callie attributed coaching characteristics to individuals and not to their gender. However, at the end of her interview she made the following statement.

> Well, just in thinking about this and talking about it some of the conclusions that I have drawn about the characteristics and coaches that I like it seems like the male coaches that I have had are just like better like at everything. Everything that I said the women coaches that I have had bad they just have not been good. I can think of like one that I liked. And the men have taken me to a higher level definitely. They (men) come closer to the whole package that I was talking about. Just when I was thinking about it things that are important to me, it seems like the male coaches have had that more for me than the women.

Dawn said that she had positive experiences with both male and female coaches, but that there definitely was a difference between the two. However, Dawn said she preferred having both a male coach and a female coach, which is the present case for her.

> ...I've had positive experiences with both (um), I don't know. Oh yea, there is definitely a different way you talk to them, there is a different way you respond, a different way they respond. ...Like I kind of like having both, like how I have now I have a head coach that's male and a female as an assistant, we have both extremes.

Dot explained that she had positive experiences with both males and females, but had negative experiences with only females. She did not want to attribute anything to a coach based on their gender. In response Dot had the following comments.

> *What is it about the gender of a coach that is important?
>
> I don't think there is, you know, it doesn't make it different. Well, I mean don't want to judge somebody just by their gender you know that is why I don't want to say there is particular stereotype for men and women coaches.

*So nothing about gender has anything to do with their coaching?

Well, on an individual basis, the stuff I have been talking about is specific instance, but I don't want to say. I don't want to make a generalization, I can't really.

On the other hand, Lydia said she preferred males coaches and that she did not like females.

Ah...male coaches, I like male coaches much better than I like female coaches. Um, I don't like female coaches that much because sometimes they've been in our shoes before and they've been female athletes collegiately, most of my coaches at least.

Madison at first stated that she preferred a female coach. However, after some thought she agreed with Dawn that having both a male and a female coach is the best situation.

I like women because I think women sometimes understand better. They understand what it takes to excel as a woman (um), especially with the development of soccer at this point, (um) because the women are the up and coming group. In some cases if it's possible a male and a female is the best combination, but I don't think that is always possible... So, for males and females I guess the whole males not understanding (um) as well that kind of makes me favor females a little more. But it the coach is understanding and is a good motivator then you know then it's probably about even.

Trisheka said she has been unable to develop a personal relationship with a female coach. However, she has had personal relationships with male coaches in the past.

I just (um) I don't know why I just I think maybe that the women coaches that I have had are kind of passive and I'm really a boisterous type person. I'm pretty bold and maybe our personalities just clashed. I'm sure they may have had that relationship with other athletes, but it just wasn't my relationship with them.

**Summary**

Throughout this chapter, I presented the major themes and subthemes and provided supporting quotes for each from the interviews. The athletes in this study

preferred to have a personal relationship with their coach and preferred a coach that had a great deal of insight into the sport. These athletes also experienced gender differently. The gender theme was prompted by me and therefore may not be an issue of athlete preference, but more of the experience of these athletes.

# Chapter 5

## Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter I discuss of the results of this study in relation to the previous research on the athlete-coach relationship. In the remainder of the chapter I offer conclusions and recommendations for future research.

### *Female Athlete's Coaching Preferences in Relation to Previous Research*

Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) created the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) which is a scale that can be used to address athletes' preferred and perceived behaviors of their coaches. This scale contains five factors that are important to the athlete-coach relationship: Training and Instruction, Democratic Behavior, Autocratic Behavior, Social Support, and Positive Feedback. Each of the sub-themes from this study can be related to these five factors (see Table 1).

The results of several studies (Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995; Schliesman, 1987; Horne & Carron, 1985; Chelladurai, 1984) have shown that training and instruction, social support, and positive feedback are coaching behaviors that contribute to athletes' satisfaction. The results of the present study obtained with a qualitative interview approach are consistent with these findings.

In an earlier qualitative study, Johnson (1998) interviewed 8 athletes (4 females and 4 males) about their experiences of being coached. The themes that emerged from those interviews are comparable to the themes and sub-themes found in the present study. Johnson's first theme, "There for Me/Not There for Me", can be compared to the sub-

Table 1. Comparison of the Five Factors in the LSS and the Themes and Sub-themes in the Female Athletes Coaching Preferences

| **Leadership Scale for Sports** | **Themes/Sub-themes of Female Athletes Coaching Preferences** |
|---|---|
| Training and Instruction | Sport Insight (Organization, Knowledge, and Mental Preparation) |
| Democractic Behavior | Personal Relationship (Individual Too, Trust, and Supportive) |
| Autocratic Behavior | Female (Competition and Living Vicariously) |
| Social Support | Personal Relationship (Individual Too, Respect, Trust, Supportive, and Warmth) |
| Positive Feedback | Sport Insight (Motivational) |

themes of Supportive, Warmth, Knowledge, and Mental Preparation of the present study. Athletes in both studies said they needed to have a coach that was there for them all the time, when they were performing well as well as when they were struggling to compete.

His second theme of "Knowing and Being Known Personally" seems to coincide with the sub-themes of Trust, Individual Too, Motivational, and Respect. There was a need for athletes in both studies to be known as an individual and to have a personal relationship with their coach. A mutual relationship between coach and athlete was important for the athletes in both Johnson's (1998) study and in the present study.

The last of Johnson's themes, "Authority/ Power", appears similar to the sub-themes of Competition, Living Vicariously, and Father- Figure under the Gender theme of the present study. Athletes in both studies perceived the power and authority of their coaches. These traits emerged more from the Gender theme than from the other themes

found in the present study. The participants in the present study experienced a sense of competition between themselves and their female coaches. In addition, they sometimes felt their female coaches were trying to live vicariously through them. At the same time, they felt their male coaches played the role of a father figure. All of these subthemes seem to have a connection with the "Authority and Power" theme from Johnson's (1998) study.

As noted earlier, Tomlinson and Yorganci (1997) found that the characteristics their female athlete participants "liked best" in their coaches were understanding, friendship, knowledge, and good humor. The characteristic of understanding seems to coincide with the subtheme of Supportive in the present study. Athletes having the feeling of a friendship with their coach is comparable to the Personal Relationship theme in the present study. Finally, the athletes in both studies said they preferred to have a coach with a good knowledge of the sport.

In an earlier study, Eitzen and Pratt (1989) found that female coaches of female teams were more demanding of their athletes than were male coaches of female teams. Females in the present study indicated that they felt in competition with female coaches or that female coaches lived vicariously through their female athletes, as evidenced by the female gender subthemes of "Competition" and "Living Vicariously." These findings suggest that further examination of the within-gender dynamics of female coaches and athletes is warranted.

### *Conclusions*

Based on the results of the present study the following conclusions are offered:

1. These female athletes believed that a personal relationship between the coach and the

athlete is important;

2. These female athletes indicated it was important for their coaches to have good insight about their sport;

3. These female athletes emphasized the personal characteristics of the coaches to a greater extent than they did coach gender.

### *Recommendations*

The following recommendations are offered for future research in the field of sport psychology. First, a critical analysis needs be conducted of the interviews data of this study to determine how issues like power, perceived male dominance in sport, race, class, and sexual orientation are figural in the experience of these female athletes. There is little literature examining these issues from the female athlete perspective. Secondly, researchers might attempt to identify males that have had the experience of being coached by males and females for comparison purposes. Lastly, further investigation of the phenomenon of female coach-female athlete competition appears needed.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Tell me a little bit about the characteristics you prefer the most in a coach?

2. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the characteristics of coaches you prefer?

3. Tell me about any preferences you have for male or female coaches?

4. What is it about the gender of the coach is important?

Debrief: How do you feel about talking about this issue?

## Appendix B

Address: Women's Athletic Department
123 Sport Complex
Campus 4567

Dear Coach:

My name is Amanda Murtland. I am currently a master's degree candidate in sport psychology working with Dr. Craig Wrisberg. For my master's thesis I would like to examine female athlete's experiences of being coached by male and female coaches. My hope is to uncover some major themes associated with female athletes' coaching preferences.

The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance in this study by allowing me to present the idea for my project to the members of your team. The presentation would take no more than 5 or 10 minutes. I would ask the athletes to complete a brief questionnaire (attached) to identify those athletes who have had both male and female coaches. Those who meet that requirement will be contacted at a later time and invited to participate in an interview to discuss their experiences. Strict confidentiality will be observed throughout the study (see attached consent form) and no person's identity will be revealed in either the thesis or in any publication that results from this study. Participants who are interviewed will receive a brief description of the results.

I realize that your time and that of your athletes is a valuable commodity. I assure you that I will do everything in my power to minimize the time required of each person who chooses to participate in this study.

Thanks for taking the time to read this letter. Please indicate your willingness to permit me to speak to your team by returning a signed note on athletic department letterhead. You may return it in the enclosed campus envelop. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Amanda Murtland
322 HPER
1914 Andy Holt Ave.
Campus 2700
974-8768

## Appendix C

Demographic Information

Please respond to the following questions:

1. Age:___

2. Year in College: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other

3. Sport:_____

4. Years of Competitive Experience:_____
In Current Sport:_____

5. What number of coaches have you had from each gender?
____Male ____Female
In what sports?_____

6. What is the gender of your current coach?
____Male ____Female

If you checked both "male" and "female" in number 5, I would like to invite you to participate in my study. If you are interested, please write your name and campus phone number below. Thanks!

_____ _____
Name Phone Number

## Appendix D

Title: The Coaching Preferences of Female Athletes: A Qualitative Investigation
Informed Consent

This is a research study on female athlete's preferences for coaches and is a partial fulfillment of my thesis requirement. During the interview, I will ask you to talk about some of your experiences with your coaches. This interview will be conducted in a private room in the HPER building. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to an hour. The interviews will be audiotaped, transcribed by me, and developed into thematic categories. These transcripts, as well as the interview, will be kept strictly confidential and only used for the purposes of this study. Your identity will never be revealed without your permission. You will select a pseudonym (i.e., fictional name) which will be used to identify your responses.

There are no physical risks anticipated from participation in this study. However, confidentiality is an important issue and several measures will be used to ensure it. Participants are assured that all discussions during the interviews will be kept private and confidential. In addition, the actual names of participants will not be used on the transcribed interviews, nor will they be included when the results are described in any written manuscripts. Only university members of the research team will have access to the transcriptions and they will at no time be given your identity. The audiotapes and transcripts will be stored in my office in the HPER building on The University of Tennessee, Knoxville campus. They will be stored there until August 1999, and then both audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed.

If you have any questions in regards to this study and/or your participation, please call Amanda Murtland, 144 HPER Building at 974-8768. Once the study is completed, I will discuss the findings with you.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty or prejudice. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Participant's Name (print):_____

Participant's Signature:_____

Date:_____
Witness_____ Date_____

## Appendix E

## Sample Interview

*Interview with Callie April 2, 1999 at 10 AM

*You have 17 years of competitive experience, can you talk a little bit about that?

I was just running track, it's a funny story actually.
My cousin entered this race downtown and so they just brought me along to enter it and I was thought it was cool because you got a T-shirt for entering.
And ah you were supposed to chase Mickey Mouse, this big person dressed up like Mickey Mouse outfit and you weren't supposed to caught him and I caught him.
So I thought it was cool because I won and beat everybody and I was kind-of shocked, so after that I just kept running and stuff.

*You run track and cross-country?

Yea, I've run cross-country since I was eight and track since I was nine.

*What is your favorite distance?

Um, depends which one I am running or which one I am doing better in usually., I like them both really.
Right now I'm running track, so I like track and when I run cross-country, I like cross-country.

*What's it like to be an athlete here at UT?

Um, we get treated very well because everybody loves the Lady Vols wherever you go.
When we do things in the community, little kids always want your autograph and stuff.
Um, at Nationals you know, there are little kids helping out and participating, carrying your basket and your clothes and stuff and um, it's just people look up to you and we get recognized.
And I am hardly a basketball player or you know, a highly visible sport, but it still pertains to even the smaller sports, you know they always want to talk to you and um and you get special treatment and get noticed, you know.
You get a lot of advantages and um the athletic department, not that I take advantage of the tutors and stuff like that, but they just make sure you get everything you need.
Everything you need compared to other schools I hear we are just spoiled compared to others.
We just get treated very well pretty much.
We get to travel a lot and that's cool.

*So you like being and athlete?

Yea, Yea, definitely.

*Well, um can you tell me a little bit about the characteristics you prefer most in a coach?

Um, supporting, um encouraging, motivational I think is an important aspect of a coach. Their behavior and their attitude towards you, um obviously it's good to be good I mean obviously it's good to be knowledgeable when giving a workout you know you want to have a coach who knows what they are doing when they give you a practice so to prepare you well for your competition.
But, um yea I think the mental aspect and emotional side of running especially because when you do it you do it by yourself it is important to have a coach who's supportive.
And um, you know really behind you and believes you can do it and stuff like that.
I mean if you have to do it on your own, you have to do it on your own you, but it just makes it that much more difficult.

*What things let you know that a coach is supportive of you?

Um, just in the things they say, um I guess sometimes by actions, but I can't think of an example.
But mostly by what they say like just telling me you know I believe you can do this you know this is the race plan I want you to have.
You know, you've done such and such in practice I know that you'll get out there and this, you should get out the first lap in this and you can hang with whoever you are running against.
And just in what they tell you, you know before the race and in practice like this is going to make you better, this is going to make you stronger when you get to the race.
I think mostly by what they say and their attitude towards you lets you know that they are supportive.

*What about, you talked a little bit about motivation, what kinds of things to your coaches do to motivate you?

Um, get excited about running you know don't just kind of sit there I think, get excited yell and I mean not yell in a mean way, but yell, "Yea let's go you" you know, that kind of thing to get really excited and pumped up um, I think that's really cool.
You know, from when you are practicing to when you are competing, you know not all the time, but when you are out there running it's nice to hear somebody getting excited about what you are doing.
And obviously my parents do and your teammates do and stuff, but it's good to hear your coach as well so, that kind of stuff, just getting really excited about what you are doing.

*What about you talked about knowledge too that they have knowledge of the race plan and things like that, can you talk more about that?

Yea, sometimes it helps to know that um your coach knows what they are talking about like, if you know a coach who is just kind of like in high school a lot of times coaches have to teach and coach so they just kind of grab somebody and you are like what did they ever do, did they ever run or did they ever participate in anything or are they just getting this out of a book or did they learn it.
So to know that your coach has had some success either running themselves or coaching other athletes because I feel that a being really good coach um if you are a good athlete doesn't necessarily mean you are going to be a good coach.
And if you are a good coach, it doesn't necessarily mean that you were a good athlete.
But, um sometimes there can be a good correlation and yea I feel like I have had coaches who were very successful runners, but can't put it all together as a coach.
And I have had coaches who were so so runners, but they've got the whole package as a coach.
Um, but then also if they were successful themselves they know training wise what works maybe not necessarily motivational, but they know training wise what to do to make you successful.
So if you know that they run well themselves you know they know a little bit about what they are talking about.

*You mentioned the whole package when you talked about the coach, what is that?

Um, I feel like just being able to give good workouts doesn't necessarily make you a good coach because you can have all the training in the world.
But if you don't have a positive attitude and someone pumping you up telling you you can do it, you know.
Or if they just lack interpersonal skills you can relay what they are coaching to the athlete what good will it do, you know, it's not doing much good.

*Are you talking about like communication?

Umhum, like I've had a coach who I was hurt and wasn't very you know I just couldn't seem to get in the greatest shape.
What I could do, I could do, but I was hurt and struggling I couldn't run a lot of miles and this and that, but he was so positive and so motivated all the time, it just made me run that much better, you know.
Like I ran well off of barely anything just because of the emotional side of and the mental aspect of it.

*So remaining positive is important?

Umhum.

*What kinds of things did he do to keep you positive while you were injured?

Um, no, just his attitude mostly, mostly you know okay I know you can't do that that's okay, ride the bike today or do this today, just mostly saying it'll be okay if you can't run this.
You know, because a lot of times you take confidence from your workouts to go into your meet and if you can't get the workout done how do you know what you can do when you get into a race.
So just him being there saying yea you can still do this um you know you are ready to do this just believe that you can then and him telling you that helps.
Pretty much.

*Is there anything else that you want to tell me about the preferences you have for the characteristics in a coach?

Um, yea like communication from a coach like understanding like I don't know running I think is different from other sports.
Um, like if somebody is hurt, I think it is good to be understanding when somebody needs a break and stuff, I think that's important.
Not just pound you into the ground until you can't run anymore you know some coaches are just like ah, you're okay keep running and nothing is the matter with you.
I think understanding knowing when somebody just needs a day, a break or something.

*How can they show understanding?

Um, just listening to what you say, some people just put up a wall, they take like your one word and boom it just goes in one ear and out the other.
Just listening and you know not being confrontational with what you say.
Just trying to understand and listen sincerely to what you say.
You know, not just putting up a wall.

*So knowing when you need a break, to you is also important.

Um, huh. Yea.

*Okay, can you tell me about any preferences you have for male or female coaches?

Um, I have to think... it seems like I've had a lot more female coaches, what did that thing say (demographic info).

*6 male and 7 female

Ah, I guess that's not a big difference.
It seems that I have had more women coaches.
Um, I don't know, I mean I've had male coaches that I really really like, but I've had some female coaches that I really really like.
I've had some male coaches that I really didn't care for and I've had some female coaches that I really could not stand.
So, to me I don't know if it's so much if it's a man or a woman, it's just how they are as a person and how they are as a coach.
I don't know if that is good or bad for what you are doing, but

*Just tell me a little bit about you know the male coaches that you've had that you like?

Um, well, knowledge of the sport, you know I trusted that they knew what they were talking about.
Um, motivation being able to in particular, you know motivation.
You know that mostly that is what I liked about them was just that I thought I could trust that they knew what they were talking about to coach me.
And they were good in relaying that to me as far as motivating me and getting me prepared to compete.

*What things did you like about the female coaches?

Um, well one she really made it fun like just outside of the running aspect we did so many other things besides running and she made it just really fun.
You know, she knew how to get along with people and she was a coach of great athletes.
But just as far as outside activities um, you know getting the team together and getting us bonding as a group and stuff like that.
Um, she just made it enjoyable outside of the actual running part so that the running part was really fun too.

*What kinds of things did she do?

Um, well we would spend, she had a house in New York we'd spend like a week up in New York and go like hiking and swimming and horse back riding just like hang out and run and it was a lot of fun.
In high school we did that like every year and um, she would just, she was a grandma so she would bring us food and stuff all the time.
It was just you know go to somebody's house and have like a little get together.
In college you can't do that as much, but in high school you could do that.
Um, yea so she would make us different weeks a theme for running.
Like one day I didn't really get into it, it was crazy day and you had to wear a funny outfit to practice and we would see who dressed the craziest.
I didn't really like that day, but just stuff like that like she just did like different things to

keep it fun so that it wasn't so monotonous.
Um, and that made it more enjoyable and plus she was just a good person to be around, she was a good coach.

*What about some of the other women that you have had?

Um, just one coach her knowledge of the sport and the fact that she was successful.
I could trust the fact that she knew what she was talking about and giving good workouts.
Um, yea I've had a few that I didn't really like.

*What were some of the reasons that you didn't like them?

Um, unorganized, not knowing what was going on just I don't want to put a label on them just being... but this one lady was like didn't really know what she was doing.
Um, yea unorganization and not knowing what they are doing.
Not being able to give good workouts or not knowing when an athlete needs a break or not knowing where a game is supposed to be and you show up and the games not there.
Just stuff like that, um making you run when you know you need a break or making you do a kind of workout you know you are not ready to do or you should be doing something different.
Um, not really listening, you know as an athlete you are with your body, you have been with your body and you know your body the best and somebody else doesn't necessarily know.
Um, it's just not the same I think... are the characteristics of a couple of coaches that I've had that I just did not like at all.
It's difficult to get along and very hard to be successful with someone like that, I think.

*Okay, the coach understanding your body what?
I mean they can't really because you are in your body they can only know what you tell them.
And so, I think it's important for a coach to trust an athlete at this level, at the collegiate level, it's not just like you know some workout in high school it's like this hurts and I can't run today so they can get out of practice.
I mean, if a collegiate athlete is saying, you know something is the matter then, you have to trust that that is true and just try to deal with it as it comes.
Not just say oh well they just want out of it.
I don't know other sports, but I know running, um any little thing can turn into a big injury if you let it.
It's important to listen to your body as you go.
And if a coach isn't willing to do that with an athlete then that kind of stinks because an athlete is taking a big leap of faith trusting their coach to do everything right for them and having their best interest in mind.
And if you don't feel that they don't trust you, you know that's real difficult to take, I

think.
You know it makes the relationship harder.

*Is there something about the coach that makes them more understanding of your body?

Um, I don't know.
I'm thinking individual personality.
Yea, just the individual person is what I think.

*What about some of the men you didn't like?

Um, I thinking a long time ago, when I was younger.
Just that it was kind of like they were just doing it because they were somebody's dad or you know that kind of thing.
They really didn't know much.
Ah, yea probably just they really didn't know what they were doing.
They were just out there because somebody needed a coach.
You know, we were in grade school I think it wasn't really you know, just really not knowing what they were doing.

*So it was just the knowledge part?

Yea, because at that level, at grade school, you don't really need your coach to get you really pumped up.
And you know when you are in fifth grade like you just go out and run and if it was just like we showed up and there was somebody's dad and we stretched and just kind of hung out and talked to your friends.
It was like you know, I had a coach in grade school that was really good, we're still friends now and um, you know.
I guess I think trust is important because I've mentioned that a lot I think trust is important for starters.
And I think that factors that contribute to the trust, I guess that is knowledge of the sport, trusting that they know what they are talking about, and you know and how they relate to you as far as motivational and understanding are the same.
The trust is important because I started out having a good relationship with coaches that have turned bad because of trust and knowledge so.

*Trust on both sides like the coach trusts you and you trust them?

Ah hah, yea because if you don't have it it makes it hard I think.
I'm sure you can understand if you don't trust when they are supposed to have your best interest it makes it a little difficult to compete for them.

*So what kinds of things make you trust your coach?

I guess their actions seeing what they do like in your best interest.
But mostly their actions you know putting you in the right event, giving you the right work out, you know being honest with you, like if you catch them in a lie or something, just be up-front and pretty straight about stuff.
If they are happy with the way you ran over the week... or if they are not, just be up-front about everything.
I mean that's just my personality, I just don't like a lot of BS about stuff, I like to just be up-front about everything.

*Does it go back to the communication thing as well?

Um hum, yea it's interesting, I've never really thought about it because when you first asked me about what I think is important it's hard to really say, but as I've talk about or think about it some things stand out that are important.
I really don't know what your thesis is like I don't want to mess it up, but

*You're not going to mess it up, I'm just talking to you, go ahead.

Um, like it's hard to say because whether I'm a woman this is what, or female like this is what I think because of the type of person I am you know, I mean.

*What is it about the gender of a coach that's important, if there is anything?

Yea, gees I don't know can you ask that in a different way.

*Just when you are thinking about the gender of your coach is there anything that is important there?

Can you give me any suggestions?

*No, that would be leading you on.

Yea, I don't think gender is important.
Um, I'm trying to think right now I don't know really whether it is a man or a woman, but obviously you don't date your athletes.
In the past I have seen that happen before. (barfing noise)
You know, but yea I can't really think of anything.

*Is there any specific experience that you have had with a man or a woman that sticks out in your mind?

Just in terms of the way they have behaved because they were a man or a woman?

*Anything like that, yea.

Well, you know the one coach because she was like a grandma and she was really nice and like nurturing and stuff.
Like we had a male coach in high school and he was older and he was a grandpa, he was real nice very fatherly and you know he was just like, yea I really liked him as a coach.
Like he coached, well he was our assistant and when he became the head coach in track and she just coached cross-country.
You know because she was a grandma she kind of knew some more different fun things to do for kids and she was like real maternal and nurturing and nice and he wasn't, that's all I can think of.
Um.

*Is nurturing important to you?

Um, yea I mean I think it just goes back to being supportive and encouraging.
Um, yea not so much whether it's a woman, but there's a coach who just can't relate well to people.
Um, she's older and she's not married and she only has cats and she's just like she can play good with cats maybe that's like a daughter to her.
I don't know if that's her as a woman, but she's just like I don't know old, not old old, but she's like a grown woman and she like can't relate very well to people and I think that's a problem.

*So, relating well to people is important?

Yea, definitely.

*Does that go back to the communication?
I mean communication comes through a lot being able to relate to people as people and then as coach to athlete.
See I don't know if that's because she's just old or that's the way she is she just can't relate to people.
She's one of those people that puts up a wall and she just stops...

*So have you found any of the characteristics like nurturing or communication do you find that more in one gender than the other or is it individual personality?

Um, well I have to say, in a couple of the women coaches that I have had a good relationship with it's been there somewhat, but it's more like they can turn it on and off.
Like if they want to be that way they'll be that way and if not you know if they're not

happy with you then that's it
But um, another woman coach you know it was constant, but um in two of the male coaches it was good, it was constant just supportive and nurturing.
So I would say a couple of the men more so because it was constant.
It seemed like women coaches if they wanted to be that way they could, but if they didn't want to be then.
Just out of the coaches that I have liked um, I think it's the individual person, but I'm not sure, but yea two of the male coaches were cool.

*Is there any experience that you want to talk about you know how they turn it on and turn it off?

Oh, yea like if you are running well and you are doing well, they are supportive and encouraging what you are doing, but if you are not running the way they want you to.
Like you know if you run well they are patting your back and oh good job, bla bla bla, and like say nice things to you.
Um, but you know if you run they will do whatever for you and talk to you, but if you um like on get like on their bad side like if you run poorly or they aren't happy with your behavior or something, nothing.
You know, just like I guess if that has to do with gender or just personality if they are just jerks you know.

*So you find that in men and women that they can turn it on and turn it off?

Um, just women, two of them have been like that um, yea because all of the male coaches I have had were close in their relationship with me I guess.
Theirs was constantly for support and everything was constant.
Whereas the women coaches I had a close relationship with one was constant no matter what was going on and like the other two were the type to turn it off.
And that's definitely not a good characteristic to have as a coach because you want to know that they are supporting you no matter what is going on.

*So is that close relationship important to you?

Well, I would like to say yes although at this point I don't have a close relationship with my coach and I'm still successful in spite of that unfortunately I think.
But you have to have to be on the same page as your coach and knowing you know, what they are thinking and they know what you are thinking, I think that's really important yea.

*What kinds of things make the close relationship?

Um, just like close contact like always um, going over what you want to achieve and how

you are going to achieve it and just day in and day out communication.
And just relating to that person all the time so that like I said so that you are on the same page about where you are headed with your goals and stuff.
Communication about everything is going to be important about who's going to be in this race you know, how do I want to run this race, everything.
It's possible to succeed without that close relationship, but I think that it helps to have it you know.
It helps to have someone that you trust and in your corner and that you know wants the same things you want and that kind of thing.

*You don't have that close relationship now, but you are still successful?
When does that relationship come in and help?

Um, I guess day in and day out it helps and is important because you know you see that person everyday.
Um, at a meet especially because that's when you really meet your competition you need to be focused and it helps out especially going into competition.
So, coaches that I have had that were positive have really supported and motivational at a competition is really important, I think.

*You can still succeed without it?

Yea, I mean I guess I have to, I want to do well whether my coach is a jerk or not, I can't really control that so you know.
I'm not going to let that affect whether I achieve so.
What would nice to have someone that you are on the same level and that you could trust and everything.
Unfortunately I'm just forced to kind of do it on my own, I don't know.

*How do you feel about talking about this issue of gender and coaching?

Um, it's alright I mean like I said, I never really thought about like what I want in the back of my mind in a coach.
And what comes to mind before I think of a man or a woman is just you know the personality traits and the characteristics that I want out of a coach.
I think it's, I think about it I think of males because the male coaches that I have had more than women coaches.
I've only had like one male coach in college and the rest have been female and I have not been very happy with them on the whole.

*What kinds of things make you unhappy with them anything you haven't mentioned so far?

Everything that I've said, yea, it's just that listen and that kind of thing.

*Is there a specific experience that might tell me a little bit more about that?

Um, just one coach that I had the year I was hurt you know and not listening so I was hurt for like two years and I had to stop running for eight months to get better that was hard not to run.
When you run all the time and then not running for eight months and watching everyone compete, that was really hard just because someone was a jerk.
Um you know make a come back and now I run better than I ever did before.
Um, another coach I just don't want to get into it, but just her behavior is just you know like pretty much abusive, just game playing and like just plays games and just she's just not.
As far as having knowledge of the sport yes that's good, but as far as relating it's bad.

*What about game playing?

Just like, I don't think this has anything to do with her being a woman she's just like a jerk of a person pretty much.
It doesn't have anything to do with her being a woman from what I can see she just she's the one that just has her cats and just like lives with her cats and I don't even think they like her.
Like she just I don't know um, you know just like I don't know whether it's me as an athlete or me as a person.
I like routine and I'm organized I like want to know what's going on it helps when I've got a daily schedule and this is what we do this is.
I can be flexible to a point, but I need a race plan with what I do each day for a meet or something.
I understand you need to be flexible between meets and everything is not going to be perfect bla bla bla.
But you know one day she'll tell me my race plan six days in advance and not mention another word.
The next week call me the morning of the race okay so you've got your race plan.
I mean to me that's just playing games like why are you going to be like that. That kind of thing.
That's abusive and you shouldn't be that way.
To mean that's not acting in the athletes best interest and that's when you have to work around someone and succeed in spite of someone and I think that's unfortunate.

*Is there anything else you want to share about gender or preferences for coaches?

Like I said I think it's basically supportive, motivational, organized, knowledge of the sport, I don't think that's too much to ask, but I think it's difficult to find the whole

package, I least I can't find it, you know you just don't come across that kind of person all the time.

*Thank you.

*Turned off tape and then she decided she wanted to say something else.

*After some extra thought Callie had some more things that she wanted to say.

Well, just in thinking about this and talking about it some of the conclusions that I have drawn about the characteristics and coaches that I like it seems like the male coaches that I have had are just like better like at everything.
Everything that I said the women coaches that I have had bad they just have not been good.
I can think of like one that I liked.
And the men have taken me to a higher level definitely.
They (men) come closer to the whole package that I was talking about.
Just when I was thinking about it things that are important to me, it seems like the male coaches have had that more for me than the women.

## Vita

Amanda J. Murtland was born in Mt. Pleasant, PA on July 29, 1975. She attended Brownfield Elementary School and Frazier Jr. High School, and graduated from Frazier High School in June, 1993. In August of 1993, she began pursuing her Bachelor's of Science degree at West Virginia University. She received her degree in Sport Behavior in May, 1997. The following Fall, she entered The University of Tennessee, Knoxville to pursue a Master's Degree. During this time, she was a graduate teaching assistant for the Physical Education Activity Program. In August 1999, she received her Master's of Science degree in Human Performance and Sport Studies with a concentration in Sport Psychology. Her future plans are to enter into an academic position assisting athletes with academic progress.