“MAKE SOMEONE LOVE SOMETHING AND SHARE YOUR PASSION”: PERCEPTIONS OF COACH CARING AMONGST ELITE WOMEN’S RUGBY SEVENS ATHLETES

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

Sierra Morris
May 2019

Copyright © 2019 by Sierra Morris
All rights reserved.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all of my rugby teammates and coaches. No matter what rugby team I played for, they instantly became like family and will always hold a special place in my heart specifically, my Marist Women's Rugby Team coaches and teammates. Without you all, I would never know how much the world of rugby could offer. Thank you for always being family. I hope this work helps everyone continue the fun and welcoming environment of rugby.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many people made this possible. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Fisher for guiding and helping me through every step of this process. From the very beginning of my time here at the University of Tennessee, you have been my mentor and someone who has pushed me to challenge my own ways of thinking. Thank you so much for all of your time and energy that you put into your students and into my thesis. Second, thank you to my thesis committee: Dr. Dzikus and Dr. Z for your input and support throughout this process. Your feedback and encouragement mean so much to me and I'm honored to share the journey with both of you. Thank you Jordan, Matt, and Zaria for being on my research team and for all of your time, effort, and contributions. I enjoyed working and collaborating with all of you. Also, thank you Dr. Knust for your efforts as my external auditor. I appreciate the time you took out of your work and travels to contribute to my work, and thank you for your work in care research.

None of this would be possible without the support and help from my family. The biggest thank you goes to my boyfriend, Michael. You have been beyond supportive and encouraging. I admire the amount of time and effort you spend every day making yourself better, striving for excellence, and enjoying life. You serve as such an inspiration to me and I thank you for being such an important part of my life. Thank you for always believing in me and lending me an ear to bounce ideas off even if you can't contribute as much as you want to. I am so happy to share this journey with you, you are my best friend, and I look forward to the next 100 years of our life together. I love you!

Thank you to my parents for supporting me from the moment I entered this world. Mom and Dad, you have both taught me that reaching my dreams and goals is always possible with the love and support of family. Thank you for everything you have done for me over the years and all of the amazing and truly perfect opportunities you provided for me. What an amazing life it's been so far! I also want to thank my siblings, Taylor and Eli for being the best sister and brother I could have asked for. Taylor, thank you for being someone I can look up to and someone who has been increasingly supportive and excited for my life. Eli, thank you for always being my buddy and I am so proud of your determination and resilience. You both are such hard working, intelligent, and kind human beings. I love you all so much!

ABSTRACT

Previous researchers have explored the effects of caring (see Noddings, 1992) on self-efficacy, motivation, and, ultimately, performance in physical activity contexts (e.g., Gano-Overway et al., 2009). However, the construct of coach caring has only recently been explored with coaches at the U.S. National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) level (Fisher et al., 2017a, 2017b; Knust & Fisher, 2015). Results suggest that DI coaches define caring as fostering strong relationships, providing athletes with everything they need to succeed, and developing the whole person for life outside of sport. Since DI coaches believe that coach caring can lead to greater performance, a logical next step was to explore student-athletes' perceptions of coach caring at the elite level. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to explore elite women's rugby sevens athletes' perceptions of coach caring. At this level, each athlete is striving to become a member of the USA women's rugby team. Using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR; Hill, 2012), ten elite sevens rugby athletes participated in semi-structured interviews that lasted 45-60 minutes. Six domains were constructed by a five-member research team, including an external auditor: (I) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' perceptions of how they learned coach caring*; (II) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' definition of coach caring: Athlete-centered coaching;* (III) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' description of the demonstration of coach caring;* (IV) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' definition of a lack of coach caring;* (V) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' description of the relationship between coach caring and athletic performance;* and (VI) *additional influences* such as power dynamics, unethical behavior, and gender differences, and were

also highlighted. Some unique findings of this study included rugby sevens' players' desire for caring coaches to pay more attention to safety and injury protocol and also for them to create more meaning for them during their sport experience. Practical implications for certified mental performance consultants (CMPCs) as well as coach education and future research directions are also given.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 1
Brief Personal Sport History 1
Brief Literature Review 4
Statement of the Problem 7
Purpose of the Study 7
Limitations 7
Delimitations 8
Definitions 8

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW 11
The Coach-Athlete Relationship 11
Care Ethics 12
Display and Effects of Care in Sport and Physical Activity 13
The Coach Care-Athlete Performance Relationship 18
Lack of Care in Coaching 20
Context: Women's Rugby Sevens 23
Summary 24

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY 26
My Postitionality as a Researcher 26
Method 28
Procedures 29
Data Analysis 33

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 37
Domain I: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Perceptions of How They Learned Coach Caring 37
Domain II: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Definition of Coach Caring: Athlete-Centered Coaching 41
Domain III: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Description of the Demonstration of Coach Caring 43
Domain IV: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Definition of a Lack of Coach Caring 48
Domain V: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Description of the Relationship Between Coach Caring and Athletic Performance 54
Domain VI: Additional Influences 57
Summary 60

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 62
Major Findings 62
Limitations 64
Practical Implications for Sport Psychology Professionals and Others 64

Future Directions for Research 66
Final Thoughts 67

REFERENCES 69

APPENDIX 77

VITA 84

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I offer a brief history of my sport experience, a short literature review of coach caring, a problem statement, and the purpose of the study. I end the chapter with the limitations, delimitations, and definitions of terms used throughout the study.

Brief Personal Sport History

I became interested in coach caring because I had two very distinct and opposite sport experiences. Participating in sport can teach athletes so many valuable life skills and should be an experience that everyone should have at least once in their lifetime. However, a coach can make or break a sport experience for someone and can potentially ruin that sport for them forever. On the other hand, a coach can create opportunities for an athlete that they never thought was possible.

I grew up playing soccer and basketball and went on to play club soccer and AAU basketball in high school. At the time, I had considered soccer to be "my sport", and so I was on a club soccer team that would help me get recruited to play in college. This coach was extremely verbally abusive. This was my worst sport experience of my life. I felt very unwelcomed on the team, there were cliques, the coach played favorites, and I was so afraid of making mistakes and getting yelled at. For these reasons, it made me feel as though this coach did not care about me as a soccer player or a person. I only played for this team for about three months and then I decided to change to a team that fit my needs. However, the damage had already been done. My skills had not developed and I believe that I actually regressed and lost all of the confidence that I had. The love of soccer was

not there anymore and I decided to leave the club team and finish my soccer career in high school.

This was fortunate because the best, most caring coach that I had ever had was my college rugby coach. I joined the Marist College Women's rugby team when I was a freshman at Marist College. The only previous experience that I had with rugby was watching my sister's college club team play one game three years before that. I was completely new to playing the sport and had no knowledge of the rules or skills involved. However, I was not alone in having no experience; most of the other people who were new had also never played rugby but wanted to give it a shot.

Our head coach took the time to work with us individually, teaching us all the rules and basic skills that we needed to learn. For someone who was not a full-time rugby coach, she traveled an hour each way to practices and games and put in the extra time and effort to make sure that every player had the right attention to become a great rugby player.

After the fall season in my sophomore year, I started to finally grasp the concept of the game. I had a great mind and eye for the game; in other words, I was able to see gaps to exploit, make quick decisions, and was growing more confident in my skills. My coach saw this, too. She started giving me more playing time and more feedback on how to make little changes to my tackle or passes that would make me a better player. She always made practices fun but challenging by having us play games that involved rugby skills and fitness, switching drills to keep us thinking and on our toes, and she continued to explain how to get better or why we were doing the drills she had set up.

Rugby is a high-contact, intense, and often dangerous game. It is important to understand how to tackle the right way and how to be tackled in order to avoid injury and injuring others. One of the first drills that we did at the beginning of every season was practicing correct tackle form and how to fall to simulate being tackled. We also completed many drills practicing body control. Being in control of your own body allows a rugby player to protect herself from injury and others from being injured. By putting us through these drills, my coach demonstrated care for each player no matter how much playing time the player got or how skilled she was.

Another way my coach demonstrated care for us was her concern for any of our injuries. I was fortunate to only have one minor injury during my collegiate rugby career. Through this injury, my coach texted me every day for an update on how I was feeling and checked in with me before practices to make sure that I was letting my body heal. From talking to my teammates at the time, I know from their experiences as well that they never felt pressured or pushed into practicing or lying about their injuries to be able to play. In other words, my coach would have benched us for another week to make sure that we were fully healed rather than playing the best players just to win.

The atmosphere that my coach created at practices and games also made me feel comfortable to try new plays and make mistakes. When she would test my decision-making by putting us through different drills, I was confident that I could make the right decision; or, if I had any questions, I could ask her. My coach gave me feedback on my decisions but also encouraged me to push myself even further to take risks.

Lastly, my coach put me in the best position to play at a more elite level after I graduated from Marist. She made calls to elite teams to ask if I could guest play for them and she advocated for me when she definitely did not have to. I had never had a coach go out of her way to help me like that, and I will be forever grateful.

In summary, my college women's rugby coach constantly showed us that she cared about us, no matter our role on the team or how many games we were winning. She made sure that I was confident in my performance and had the right attention and resources to play at a higher level. As a result of her coach caring philosophy, I had an amazing four years of playing rugby at college and was able to extend my rugby career outside of those four years to the elite level. I know that even now, if I ever needed anything, I could contact her and she would help me in any way that she could.

Brief Literature Review

Gilligan (1982) was the first to define the construct of care as based on relationships and understanding the needs of others. Gilligan's Ethics of Care is a feminist moral development theory that posits men and women shape their moral decisions differently. Women shape moral actions on the context of a situation and with empathy and compassion rather than the absolute of right and wrong.

Noddings (1984; 1992) also considered care to be important in interpersonal relationships between two people. In order to demonstrate care, a person (the carer) must have the ability of *motivational displacement*, which is putting energy into another person (the cared for) and his or her life. *Engrossment*−being completely open, responsive, and attentive to another person (the cared for)−is also necessary for caring (Noddings, 1992).

According to Noddings (1992), teaching is rooted in a care perspective. Showing care allows teachers−and, by extension, hopefully, coaches−to develop relationships with students and athletes. Learning is then facilitated through the trust, dignity, and respect that these caring relationships are defined by (Pratt, 1992). Noddings (1992) also stated that *relational knowing* is a major proponent of teaching. Relational knowing is information about students that is procured through interactions and existing relationships. Information learned through relational knowing lends itself to the point that there is no correct way to teach all students; each student has unique circumstances and experiences that must be taken into consideration. Coaches are often thought of as teachers of their sport, and, as such, they should understand that there is more than one right way to coach athletes in a caring matter.

Having a caring coach could also positively increase motivation and improve performance (Fisher, Larsen, Bejar, & Shigeno, 2019). On the other hand, athletes who perceive that their coaches do not care about them, and care more about the outcome, tend to have higher self-doubt (Gearity & Murray, 2010). Although existing research has addressed care at the Division I level (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Fisher et al. 2017a; Fisher, Bejar, Larsen, Fynes, & Gearity, 2017) and related to youth physical activity (Gano-Overway et. al., 2009), much of the research has been from the viewpoint of the head coaches or assistant coaches. In other words, no coach caring research has been conducted which focuses on athletes; in addition, no coach caring research has been done with women's sevens rugby teams or coaches. In fact, in only seven studies have researchers investigated rugby sevens training (Crewther, Heke, Keogh, 2013; Elloumi et al., 2012;

Gibson, Boyd, & Murray, 2016; Griffin, McLellan, Presland, Rathbone, & Keogh, 2017; Higham, Pyne, Anson, Hopkins, & Eddy, 2016; Ma et al., 2016; Vescovi & Goodale, 2015) and only two of the seven focused on women's sevens rugby players (Griffin et al., 2017; Ma et al., 2016; Vescovi & Goodale, 2015). Furthermore, only one study has been focused on American Women's rugby sevens (Ma et al., 2016).

Since rugby sevens was included in the 2016 Olympics and there are plans for the sport to be in the 2020 Olympics, women's sevens rugby participation has grown 30% from 2012-2015. Inclusion in the Olympics has also increased funding (World Rugby, 2015). An increase in participation, funding, and opportunities for all levels of rugby means that more athletes, coaches, and parents will be interested in how to improve performance. Therefore, it appears a good time to conduct research to explore the experience of women's sevens rugby players.

In summary, previous research has not been conducted exploring the perceptions of athletes regarding the relationship between coach caring and their performance, and, in particular, elite women's rugby players. Such research is necessary so that researchers can understand how athletes think their coaches define care (e.g., in terms of a whole person development; Fisher et al., 2019), and engage in coach caring (e.g., take time to get to know players on a personal level, ask about their schoolwork and how things are going out of sport context; Fisher et al., 2017b). Athletes who perceive that their coaches care about them as people instead of just as a pawn in their sport may try harder in practices and games (Fisher et al., 2019). Athletes' performances may then increase because they are giving more effort (Fisher et al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Caring has been defined by Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) as a necessity in interpersonal relationships, for understanding the needs of others, and when giving energy and attention to others. Unfortunately, many coaches demonstrate a lack of care by verbally abusing, degrading, and neglecting athletes (Gearity & Denison, 2002; Kirby, Greaves, & Hankivsky, 2002). However, recently, researchers have called for more research exploring how athletes perceive that their coaches define and implement caring in their coaching practice (Fisher, Shigeno, Bejar, Larsen, & Gearity, 2017; Gearity & Denison, 2002). This, in turn, could have a significant effect on performance (Fisher, Shigeno, Bejar, Larsen, & Gearity, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine elite women's rugby sevens athletes' perceptions of coach caring. The goal was to better understand how athletes know that their coaches do or do not care for them, in addition to how caring affects performance.

Limitations

Some limitations of the current study included:

1. Athletes from only four of the nine Olympic Development Academies recognized by USA Rugby were represented due to participant responses to recruitment. Therefore, it is not known if the results can be applied to all elite women's rugby players.
2. Since all women's rugby sevens players are female, the results may not be applicable to elite men's rugby athletes. However, only women were included

in this study because there is a significant lack of representation of women's rugby within sport psychology research.

Delimitations

The population being interviewed consisted of:

1. Women's rugby sevens players who had been a part of four of the nine National Development Academies;
2. No male rugby players;
3. No men's and women's fifteens players.

Definitions

Care: Care is providing what is needed for welfare, maintenance, protection, and health of something or someone (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/care).

Care Ethic or EoC: An ethical theory that centers on benevolence and interpersonal relationships (Gilligan, 1982).

Elite Rugby: The women's elite sevens division is comprised of national teams, select sides, and top professional teams. According to the USA Sevens Rugby website, it is "Olympic quality rugby" (https://www.usasevens.com/las-vegas/divisions-2/).

Engrossment: Thinking about someone in efforts to understand him or her in a greater capacity. This capacity is necessary for caring. (Noddings, 1984).

Motivational Displacement: The needs of a person being cared for determine the carer's behavior (Noddings, 1984).

National Development Academy: Programs independently operated that collaborate with USA Rugby (https://www.usarugby.org/olympic-development-academy/).

Rugby: Rugby a game in which two teams play with an oblong ball that may be kicked, passed hand to hand, or carried. Kicking it between two posts and over the crossbar or grounding the ball behind the opponents' goal line both result in points score (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/rugby).

Rugby Sevens: Rugby sevens is taken from Rugby union, which is played with fifteen players a side. Rugby sevens is played with seven players on each side, but still on a full sized field. There are two seven-minute halves with a one-minute halftime. Because the game is so short and played on a full-sized pitch, high levels of physical fitness, intensity, power, quickness, and dexterity are required (Duthie, Pyne, & Hooper, 2003; Gabbett, 2002). Due to the short nature of sevens games, it is normal to have more than two games within the same day.

Rugby Union: Rugby union is a sport played on a 100-yard field with either 15, 10, or 7 players per side. The object of the game is to score as many points as possible by passing, carrying, kicking, and ultimately grounding the ball in the team's designated try-zone, which is at either end of the field. The ball must be passed backwards to teammates, but can be kicked or ran forward. On defense, tackles occur in attempts to stop the opposing team from gaining ground toward their try-zone (https://laws.worldrugby.org/?charter=2).

U.S. NCAA DI: The United States National Collegiate Athletic Association Division One is intercollegiate athletics at the highest level. This level of NCAA athletics includes more scholarships, larger budgets, and elaborate facilities. There are nearly 350 schools at the Division I in the United States. The NCAA also holds an academic standard for each athlete (http://www.ncaa.org/about?division=d1).

Women/Women's Rugby: Women's rugby is a played with the same rules, equipment, and same sized field, or pitch, as men's rugby.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review literature related to the coach-athlete relationship, definitions of care, sport psychology and coach caring, and women's rugby sevens. Then, I conclude with the gaps in the research in regards to coach caring in women's rugby sevens.

The Coach-Athlete Relationship

Researchers have suggested that the coach-athlete relationship is one of the most crucial relationships in sports (Jowett 2003, 2005). Jowett (2003) defined the coach-athlete relationship as "the situation in which the coach and the athlete's feelings, cognitions and behaviors are interconnected" (p. 18). This definition means that the relationship between the coach and athlete is ongoing and comprised of two separate individuals with different emotions, feelings, behaviors, and thoughts. The 3 Cs model−defined in part by the constructs closeness, commitment, and complementarity−was used by Jowett (2003) to explain the coach-athlete relationship.

For example, closeness refers to emotional connection between the coach and athlete in the form of trust and respect. Commitment is the assurance that the relationship will continue long-term, and complementarity refers to the cooperativeness and effectiveness of the relationship. The 3 Cs model illustrates how the coach-athlete relationship is created and how the relationship can be impacted. Jowett furthered this research in 2005 when she studied how the coach-athlete relationship can be improved or restored. This idea is similar to Noddings (1992) in that there is a relationship between two people, one who is the caregiver and one who is the cared for, and both people bring their own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors into the relationship.

Care Ethics

The ethics of care, first described by feminist scholars Gilligan (1982, 2011) and Noddings (1984, 1992), is about a moral orientation to relationships with people, and, in particular, the ability of people to be caring in relationship. Gilligan (1982) interviewed girls and young women aged six to seventeen years on real-life moral dilemmas and the actions they took. In addition, Gilligan also interviewed young boys regarding their decisions related to their real-life moral dilemmas. From this study, Gilligan discovered that the actions the interviewees fall under the description of a new orientation –a *care* (versus justice) orientation in interpersonal relationships. This orientation centers around understanding the context and needs of other people (as opposed to remaining objective); in addition, caring involves being respectful, attentive, listening, and considering the rights of others when trying to solve a personal moral dilemma.

Noddings (1984, 1992) furthered Gilligan's notion of care by describing *engrossment* and *motivational displacement* as two characteristics of a person who demonstrates care. Engrossment is the capacity to give attention to the cared for while motivational displacement is when the carer places their energy into other people and is involved in their projects (Noddings, 1984). In an education setting, Noddings (1992) posited that a relationship existed between the person being cared for and the caregiver; for example, not only does the carer undertake specific actions such as engrossment and motivation, but the person being cared for also has the capacity to recognize, receive, and respond to that care.

Display and Effects of Care in Sport and Physical Activity

Caring in physical activity and youth sport camps. In their study, Larson and Silverman (2005) interviewed four physical education teachers who met a criteria based on being a caring teacher. The criteria included: showing empathy, listening to students, encouraging or praising students, supporting and helping students succeed, and showing concern for the students' personal lives. After the athletes were selected, Larson and Silverman conducted formal and informal interviews and teaching observations to examine the caring behaviors of the athletes. After the data collection stage, three main themes were created. The first theme was "teachers share similar beliefs about why it is important to be caring and cite similar influences on their teaching conduct" (p. 183); each of the athletes believed that it was their job to build and maintain relationships with each of their students, and to make sure that the students understand that they, as teachers, are supporting them. The second theme that was constructed from the data was "teachers similarly believe that physical activity/physical education makes a difference in the lives of youth" (p. 183); all four physical education teachers saw their roles as highly motivational to their students and showing their students that there are endless possibilities. The final theme was "teachers share a common interest in broadening relationships with students, and feel physical education is conducive to doing so" (p. 183); this theme exhibits the interactive nature of physical education and the ability for the teachers to connect with each student individually to make sure they are doing okay. In summary, Larson and Silverman (2005) discovered that physical education teachers who take a caring perspective create individual relationships with students; in addition, these teachers believed that showing interest in

their students and being approachable was crucial to demonstrating care. The relationships created by caring physical education teachers fostered the development of youth, their growth, increased participation in physical activity, and promoted well-being (Larson & Silverman, 2005). A perceived caring climate in youth camp also appears to promote higher self-efficacy in emotional control in athletes (Gano-Overway et al., 2009). For example, Gano-Overway and colleagues conducted a study with youth campers from two National Youth Sport Program summer camps. There were 253 athletes from the Southern United States and 142 from the Western United States. Gano-Overway and colleagues used four scales in their study: Caring Climate Scale (CCS; Newton, Fry, et al., 2007), Affective Self-Regulatory Efficacy Scale (ASRE; Bandura et al., 2003), Empathic Self-Efficacy Scale (ESE; Bandura et al., 2003), and Child Social Behavior Questionnaire (CSBQ; Warden, Cheyne, Christie, Fitzpatrick, & Reid, 2003). After the collected data was analyzed, Gano-Overway and colleagues found that children who perceived a caring climate displayed greater self-efficacy in emotional control. The increased self-efficacy also enhanced social connectedness. Therefore, it seems likely that creating caring climates within sport could have a major effect on athletes' self-efficacy, emotional control, and social connectedness

It could also be true that when youth feel connected and related to their camp or sporting environment−including to coaches and other athletes−that their intrinsic motivation will be higher. Intrinsic motivation is the highest and most encouraging form of motivation that a person can have; athletes who are intrinsically motivated are those who participate in their sport for the pure joy of participating. According to Deci and Ryan's

(2000) Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation can be fostered when peoples' three basic psychological needs are met – these are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy relates to having control over one's own choices and experience in sport. The second basic need is competence; if an athlete feels competent in their sport and their own skills, it means that they feel confident that their skills are enough to achieve the demands of the sport. The third basic psychological need is relatedness, which is feeling connected and supported by teammates and coaches.

Coach caring at the NCAA DI level. According to recent research by Fisher and colleagues (Bejar, Larsen, Fynes & Gearity, 2017a; Shigeno, Bejar, Larsen & Gearity, 2017b), head and assistant coaches at the Division I level defined care in surprisingly similar ways. For example, Knust and Fisher (2015) conducted a study with twelve NCAA Division I female head coaches who were identified by others as coaches who display "exemplary" care. The coaches coached a variety of sports including basketball, volleyball, swimming, golf, softball, and gymnastics. Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR; Hill, 2012) was used for the study; this is because in CQR, researchers use open-ended questions in interviews to gather their data, study a small number of cases deeply, recognize the importance of context, use an inductive analytic process, use a research team to make decisions by consensus and also use external auditors, and verify results with participants and by systematically reviewing their conclusions against participants' own words from the transcripts (e.g., raw data; Hill, 2012). After interviewing and data analysis using CQR was completed, four themes emerged that described the athletes' experiences. The first theme was seeing the *team as family* and caring about them like someone would

their family. The second theme that emerged was the *whole-person caring*. This means that the coaches exhibited care for each athlete outside their sport as well as in their sport. The third theme was identifying *care as part of the coaches' identity*. The final theme that emerged was *institutional care through the NCAA*. Coaches provided social support and advocated for their athletes as student-athletes. From these themes, it can be concluded that caring coaches develop student-athletes, advocate for student-athletes' well-being, and treat athletes as family.

In a follow-up study (Fisher et al., 2017a), nine female head coaches between the ages of 31-48 years and nine male head coaches aged 32-56 years participated in an interview on coach caring using the same interview guide and method (e.g., CQR) as in Knust and Fisher's (2015) previous study. The coaches coached a range of sports including soccer, golf, baseball, softball, track and field or cross-country, swimming, and volleyball. After data collection, a research team constructed five domains to summarize findings. The first domain created was the *definition of care*. For the Division I head coaches in this study, care consisted of fostering strong relationships, providing athletes with everything they need to succeed, and developing the whole person for life outside of sport. The second domain included *how coaches implement care*. There were many ways that the head coaches displayed care through their behaviors and philosophies. For instance, coaches practiced an open door policy, communication, accountability for their athletes, individualized coaching, being attentive to the needs of athletes, gendered coaching, and guiding athletes to success after graduation. Domain III was *limits to care* which included NCAA DI head coaches learning how to balance care with the want to win. The fourth

domain described *how the coaches learned to care*. There were two main ways these coaches learned to care: from role models and from being a parent. *Factors facilitating care* was covered in the fifth domain. NCAA rules, the athletic department philosophy, resources for athletes around campus, and the university academics all played a role in manifesting and maintaining care toward athletes. The sixth and final domain covered *factors that negatively affected care*. These factors included leadership at the university, parents of athletes, and interestingly enough the NCAA and athletic department. The NCAA and athletic departments were seen by coaches as hindering care because coaches felt as if facilities were limited or NCAA regulations limited practices too much; in addition, they described how athletic departmental philosophies did not emphasize academics enough. In summary, the head coaches in both studies described how communication, accountability, student success, individualization, responsiveness to needs, and being available are all crucial to creating a caring environment (Fisher et al., 2017a; Knust & Fisher, 2015). While Fisher and colleagues were able to highlight the commonality of experience for 30 caring DI head coaches, assistant coaches were not included in their sample.

Therefore, in their next study, Fisher and colleagues (Fisher et al., 2017b) used CQR (Hill, 2012) again−and the same interview guide−to understand care from DI assistant coaches' perspectives. Fourteen female assistant coaches and nine male assistant coaches who coached rowing, golf, basketball, baseball, softball, track and field or cross-country, volleyball, tennis, and swimming participated in the study. Similar to Fisher and colleagues' previous studies with head coaches, domains were created from the gathered

data. The first domain was *development of care* in which assistant coaches disclosed that their caring nature developed from their past experiences watching and playing for other coaches. They also reported that they developed care while growing up in a caring family and after having children of their own to care for. The second domain created was *definition of care*. Assistant coaches at the Division I level defined care as foundationally rooted, whole-person development, and loving each athlete. The third domain was *how assistant coaches showed they care*. Behaviors that manifested care according to the women's rugby sevens players included having an open door policy, availability, individualization, and communicating. The last domain was *factors influencing care* such as the athletic department, religious institutions, university leaders, and NCAA regulations. These factors both negatively and positively affected care. For example, some assistant coaches felt that the NCAA limited caring abilities; on the other hand, another assistant coach described her university as supportive and fostering care for student-athletes. Fisher and colleagues successfully discovered some aspects that assistant coaches defined as developing and maintaining care for their athletes. However, they did not interview athletes of the coaches in any of their studies.

The Coach Care-Athlete Performance Relationship

Fisher, Larsen, Bejar, and Shigeno (2019) recently created a seven-step heuristic (see Figure 1) which displays NCAA Division I coaches' perceptions of the relationship between coach caring and athletic performance based on their previous research with coaches (Fisher et al., 2017a, 2017b; Knust & Fisher, 2015). The heuristic starts with

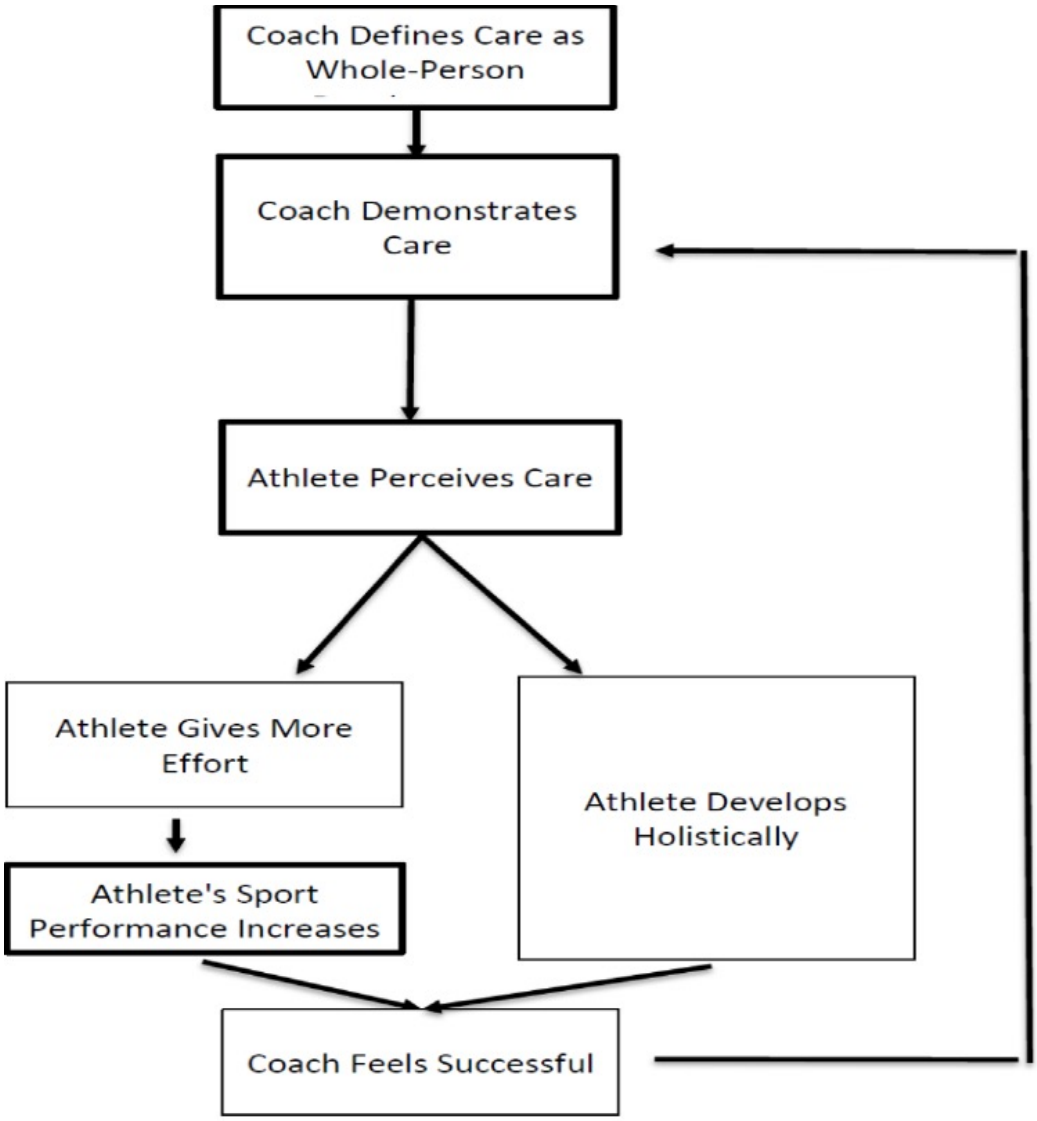

Figure 1. U. S. NCAA DI coach care-athlete performance relationship heuristic. Source: Fisher, Larsen, Bejar, & Shigeno, 2019

coaches defining care as whole-person development. The next steps of the heuristic suggest that when coaches demonstrate whole-person care and an athlete perceives that the coach cares, they are more likely to develop holistically and give more effort, which, in turn, increases their athletic performance. Athletic performance increasing helps a coach feel successful and the cycle of coach caring continues. However, they do not include in their heuristic what a lack of coach caring looks like.

Lack of Care in Coaching

What does it look like when a coach does not care about athletes? Interestingly, at the Division I level, a troubling level of lack of care has been observed. At major events, coaches can be seen abusing, neglecting, punishing, and bullying student-athletes all because of the pressure the coaches feel to "win-at-all-costs" (Denison, 2007; Kirby et al., 2002). In women's sports, verbal abuse and sexual jokes from coaches, parents, and teammates are also often experienced by athletes (Kirby et. al, 2002). In fact, Kirby and colleagues used a survey to ask 1200 Canadian female national athletes, averaging 25 years of age, four questions regarding sexual harassment. After data collection, the researchers found that verbal abuse often went unchallenged; in addition, there was a high tolerance for sexism or homophobia. There was also a significant abuse of power by coaches which caused fear in athletes (Kirby et. al, 2002). Although the findings of Kirby and colleagues' study clearly showed that verbal abuse or sexual harassment are present in women's sports, a survey does not encompass each athlete's complete story.

This uncaring nature and climate can have a massively negative effect on athletes' well-being and performance. For example, Gearity and Murray (2010) interviewed sixteen

former and current athletes who self-reported experiences with poor coaching. Following data analysis, Gearity and Murray (2010) found two major themes. The first theme was that poor coaching inhibited mental skills of athletes; poor coaching contributed to athletes' distractibility, self-doubt, lack of motivation, and lack of team cohesion. The second theme that surfaced from the interviews was how athletes cope with a poor coaching climate; athletes often adopt an uncaring attitude toward their coach and even their sport in such an environment. According to Gearity and Murray (2010), coaches often create an ego-oriented climate in which they are focused solely on winning, competency over others, and breaking records as opposed to a goal-oriented climate defined as a sport environment where self-referencing and mastery over skills is emphasized (Gearity & Murray, 2010). Athletes in an ego-oriented environment may not be focused on learning the necessary sport skills to succeed and move to the next level. Uncaring coaches can also create self-doubt within these athletes (Gearity & Murray, 2010). Therefore, athletes may be prone to being unwilling or unable to take risks and learn from their mistakes (Ryan & Deci, 2002). In addition, athletes in a perceived uncaring climate may choose tasks they know they can easily complete and may not expend much effort in practices or competitions (Ryan & Deci, 2002). One critique for Gearity and Murray's (2010) study, however, is that the athletes self-reported poor coaching. It is difficult to know, therefore, how other athletes would define poor coaching.

When athletes perceive that their coaches do not care about them, there can also be a lack of effort that may be considered amotivation. Amotivation is experienced when an athlete completely lacks any motivation to complete a task (Ryan & Deci, 2002). For

example, Cresswell and Eklund (2013) investigated amotivation and burnout in professional New Zealand Men's Rugby players. There were 199 professional players, ranging from 19 to 33 years old, who participated in their study. The *Athlete Burnout Questionnaire* (ABQ; Raedeke & Smith, 2001) was used to evaluate the awareness of burnout in athletes and the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS; Pelletier et al., 1995) was used to measure levels of motivation. Cresswell and Eklund found that there was a relationship between New Zealand male professional rugby players' motivation and burnout; players who experienced amotivation also experienced burnout while higher levels of motivation were negatively associated with burnout. The relationship between motivation and burnout in rugby players should be further researched because this study only focused on professional men's rugby players in New Zealand. Further, the rugby players studied were paid to play rugby; this could potentially provide further motivation that may not be present for rugby players – like women's rugby sevens players - who are not paid.

It appears, therefore, that coach caring could be an extremely positive influence for athletes and that a lack of care can jeopardize athletes' potential, both in terms of performance and welfare (Denison, 2007; Kirby et al., 2002). In fact, researchers like Gearity and Denison (2012) as well as Fisher and colleagues (2017a) also call for more evidence-based coach education programs to be put in place based on more research. Finally, although there is some research on coach caring at the elite sport level (Fisher et al., 2017a; Fisher et al., 2017b; Fisher et al., under review; Knust & Fisher, 2015), to date, no research has been undertaken regarding elite-level athletes' perceptions of coach caring and how they believe it affects their performance.

Context: Women's Rugby Sevens

Women's rugby sevens is one of the fastest growing sports in the world because of the inclusion of rugby sevens in the 2016 Summer Olympics (World Rugby, 2015). However, research on rugby sevens, and especially women's rugby sevens, is limited, let alone research on the psychology of playing women's rugby sevens. However, the few studies that have been conducted include women's rugby sevens' movement patterns (Griffin et al., 2017), metabolic power and physical demands (Vescovi & Goodale, 2015), and injury profiles (Ma et al., 2016).

For example, Griffin and colleagues (2017) recruited twenty-four female rugby sevens players who were between the ages of 19 and 29 years to participate in their study. The authors used Global Positioning System (GPS) to measure movement patterns that occurred within training camps. After statistical data analysis, a greater understanding of movement patterns was discovered. Understanding movement patterns is important because it could potentially minimize risk of injury and overtraining. This study can be used to inform coaches about the importance of balancing technical and tactical skills. However, the study does not include mental skills, which is also an important factor in rugby and in all sports.

Vescovi and Goodale (2015) used a cross-sectional approach to study the physical demands of women's rugby sevens matches. In total, forty-seven Canadian women's rugby sevens players participated in this study. Half of the players belonged to the national team and the other half to a university team. Women's rugby sevens players performed a physical fitness test consisting of sprinting, directional changes, shuffling, and jogging.

Based on the data collected from the testing, three demands emerged: Locomotor, metabolic power, and heart rate demands. Vescovi and Goodale concluded that differences were seen in each demands between the two levels of players being tested. The findings of this study can be used by coaches and trainers to help athletes achieve a higher level of play; however, once again, no psychological data was gathered.

Lastly, Ma and colleagues (2016) investigated injuries amongst American women's rugby sevens players. The researchers surveyed 3,876 women's rugby sevens players ranging from non-elite to elite using a tool called *The Rugby Injury Survey and Evaluation* (RISE; Lopez et al., 2012). Ma and colleagues summarized the results of the survey in terms of types of injuries and injury occurrences suffered by these players. They reported that, typically, injuries occurred during contact and involved the neck, head, or knee. The researchers concluded by suggesting that there should be a greater understanding of and education about the risk factors inherent in playing rugby sevens; in addition, they offered that injury prevention should be a priority.

Summary

In summary, the ethic of care revolves around caring in interpersonal relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, 2011; Noddings, 1984; Noddings, 1992). For example, creating a caring environment within youth physical education classes positively impacted students' well-being, growth, and self-efficacy (Larson and Silverman, 2005). In NCAA Division I sports, Fisher and colleagues (2017a) found that head coaches believed care was a necessary component of success; developing athletes holistically, setting them up for success after graduation, being attentive and available, and individualization were included

in definitions and behaviors mentioned as caring by NCAA Division I head coaches and assistant coaches (Fisher et al., 2017a; Fisher et al., 2017b). On the other hand, when a coach does not care about athletes, research suggests that amotivation, burnout, and a decrease in performance are likely (Denison, 2007; Gearity & Denison, 2012; Kirby et al., 2002).

Therefore, it appears from previous research that both caring and uncaring coaches have a great impact on athletes' well-being and performance. In addition, only a handful of studies have been conducted to include women's rugby sevens players' experiences. Researchers conducting these studies have explored sevens' movement patterns (Griffin et al., 2017), metabolic power and physical demands (Vescovi & Goodale, 2015), and injury profiles (Ma et al., 2016) but not the psychological or relational experiences of rugby players. However, because rugby is one of the fastest growing games in the world (World Rugby, 2015), there needs to be more research on women's rugby sevens' experiences, and, in particular, on how women's sevens rugby players perceive care from their coaches.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I first describe my positionality as a researcher. Next, I flesh out the methods used for the study, including Consensual Qualitative Research methods (CQR) (Hill, 2012; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005). I end with discussion regarding how I conducted the data analysis.

My Positionality as a Researcher

First off, my epistemology and ontology are defined as developing interpretations of how I, the researcher, develop and understand the study based on the nature of reality, beliefs and knowledge. The current study was created with a constructionism viewpoint with the understanding that everyone experiences events differently based on their own social constructs, interpretations and perceptions (Hill et al., 2005). Based on these notions, I recognize that my own experiences in sport are situational and unique to myself. Similarly, my teammates have different experiences of the realities we both experienced.

Reflecting back on my thesis research experience, as with any qualitative research project, I came into their environment and asked women's rugby sevens players to disclose information about personal experiences. I believe that it proved beneficial for those I interviewed to know that I played rugby for six years and that I played at a National Development Academy for a summer. In fact, I believe that my knowledge and experience helped women's rugby sevens players feel more comfortable with me and helped them open up to me. I do have existing relationships with a few of the players and the coaching staff at National Development Academy since I played with them in 2016. I believed that my experience with rugby and National Development Academy allowed me, however, to

approach the study more casually and be seen as an insider. I was also the same age, gender, and have the same educational level as some of the women's rugby sevens players.

However, women's rugby sevens players may have seen me as an "outsider" since I was not a part of their current National Development Academy experience. Differences between myself and the women's rugby sevens players also included sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. I self-identify as a heterosexual, upper-middle class, Caucasian, female, and as cisgendered. In addition, I did not conduct my interviews in person and I did not know all of the players on the team.

Overall, I tried to keep my positionality in mind during the entire research process. For example, just because I shared similar characteristics with the women's rugby sevens players (such as age, gender, education level, my own experience with rugby and the technical terms involved) and hoped that they felt more open when discussing their experiences with me, that doesn't mean that all women's rugby sevens players connected with me. While both interviewing and conducting the data analysis, I was also aware of my positionality because I had experience with the coaches at the National Development Academy I attended; in fact, I had very positive experiences with these coaches, but some women's rugby sevens players did not feel the same way.

Everyone's experiences were different because of their background, sexual orientation, race, and other identity constructs. Therefore, I tried to just listen to the women's rugby sevens players' experiences without having any preconceived expectations.

Method

The purpose of the current study was to examine elite women's rugby sevens athletes' perceptions of coach caring. In the study, I employed Consensual Qualitative Research methods (CQR; Hill, 2012; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005). I chose this particular method because Fisher and colleagues previously utilized this qualitative approach to explore coach caring.

Data was analyzed using all required CQR (Hill et al., 1997, Hill et al., 2005) procedures. For example, Hill (2012) described nine steps included in CQR research: *practicing an inductive approach, using open-ended questions, relying on a full description of an experience, taking the context into consideration, using a small sample size, using a team of researchers, agreeing on emerging themes, ethical and multicultural considerations*, and finally *returning to data collected*. Each is described below.

Using an inductive approach for data analysis means formulating a theoretical lens following analysis. This ensures that data analysis is complete and accurate. It was important to *use open-ended questioning* in interviews because women's rugby sevens players were able to discuss their experiences freely. This allowed us, as a research team (5 members), to gather the *full description of their experience*. Equally crucial was not taking anything said in interviews out of *context*. *Using a small sample* was important to make sure there was ample time to go into depth in every interview to learn as much as possible. A five-person research team was able to interpret the data with *multiple viewpoints* based on unique experiences and thoughts. *Consensus* is reached when researchers collectively and individually engage with gathered data. It is also expected that the researchers attend

to *ethics, trustworthiness, and attention to culture* by upholding the veracity of data, comparing data to search, and regulating how findings can be generalized. Lastly, researchers *continually return to the data* to be sure findings are based on data instead of biases and assumptions (Hill, 2012).

Procedures

Participants. The participants in the study were 10 elite female rugby sevens athletes, ages 22-35 years (see Table 1). Hill and colleagues (Hill et al., 2005) have suggested that anywhere between eight and 15 participants are appropriate to interview in a CQR study; in addition, there were 10 participants because 10 women's rugby sevens players responded to recruitment. Most had been playing rugby for an average of seven years. Seven self-identified as Caucasian, two as Asian, and one as Caucasian and Hispanic. In terms of sexual orientation, three self-identified as gay, three as mostly straight, two as bisexual, one as straight, and one did not want to identify her sexual orientation. Many (four) identified their religious or spiritual identity as Catholic although two are not practicing, three were Christian, one as non-denominational, one as agnostic or atheist but still considers herself spiritual, and one is not practicing religion. Three women's rugby sevens players did not have any current injuries or issues that made it hard for them to participant in rugby, but seven identified injuries including knee injuries, labral tear or surgery, dislocated elbow, broken back, and broken foot.

Context. There are several elite rugby clubs in the United States that focus on rugby sevens. For this study, I invited players from four out of the nine identified USA rugby Olympic Development Academies among other elite rugby clubs around the

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information (Full chart Appendix A)

Pseudonym	Age	Years playing	Religious/Spiritual Identity	Racial Identity	Sexual Orientation	Injuries/Body issues
Averie	24	6	Catholic	Caucasian and Hispanic	Bisexual	Knee Injury
Stacey	24	7	not practicing	Asian	Bisexual	None
Grace	26	6	Non-denominational	Caucasian	Gay	Labrel Tear
Sanya	23	6	Christian	Caucasian	Straight	2 Reconstructed ACLs
Stephanie	25	5	Christian	Caucasian	Mostly Straight	None
Sky	28	7	Agnostic/Atheist but still spiritual	Caucasian	Mostly Straight	None
Poppy	22	8	Catholic but not practicing	Caucasian	Mostly Straight	Dislocated, broke, and tore elbow
Charlotte	26	8	Christian	Caucasian	Gay	Broke foot and tore lisfranc ligament
Karly	30	8	Catholic but not practicing	Caucasian	Gay	Labrum surgery
Bri	35	9	Catholic	Asian	Did not want to identify	Broken Back

country. The focus was on unique elite sevens rugby national development academies, which help players prepare for a possible career on the National team, because previous research related to rugby players has not included American elite women's sevens rugby athletes. In addition, coach caring research has yet to include athletes' perceptions of coach caring.

Interview guide. An IRB was submitted to and approved by the University before data collection. Fisher and colleagues' (Fisher et al., 2017a) semi-structured interview guide used in the present study with slight modifications made for athletes versus coaches (see Appendix B).

Bracketing interview. Following IRB approval, a bracketing interview (Patton, 2002) occurred. My advisor - an experienced qualitative interviewer - asked me the questions on the interview guide (see Appendix B). Following this interview, I identified with her my potential biases that may influence the actual interviewing and themes of the proposed study. These included: having a great experience with the National Development Academy I played for as well as with the coaches and athletes; thinking that there would be sexual orientation variations in women's rugby sevens players based on my previous experience; knowing that some athletes may have different goals than I did while going through the National Development Academy; and my level of playing experience compared to others.

Pilot interview. Following the bracketing interview, a pilot interview was conducted by me – using the same interview guide - with a female who plays competitive rugby in the Knoxville area. The purpose of that interview was to make sure that the

sequencing and content of the interview guide questions were getting at their intended purpose (Patton, 2002).

Main study interviews. I then used convenience sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to recruit women's rugby sevens players for the main study. For instance, I reached out by Facebook messenger to my former teammates who were playing at one of the national academies last year and asked if they, any of their teammates, or anyone they knew from the other clubs were interested in participating in the study about coach caring. I also posted on a Women's Rugby Connection page to see if any players were interested in participating. Three of the 10 participants were recruited through this Facebook page. After women's rugby sevens players contacted me via Facebook, I worked with them to set up times and dates for interviews that were convenient to them.

All of the interviews were conducted via phone or Skype at a location that was private for the participant as well as myself. Since the interviews were being held via phone (2) or Skype (8), an informed consent (see Appendix C) was emailed to the participant ahead of the scheduled interview time. The participant was asked to sign the consent form and email it back to me before the interview was conducted. Not interviewing in person may have created an impersonal barrier between myself as the interviewer and the participant. However, as Iacono, Symonds, and Brown (2016) stated, it appears from previous research that Skype and phone interviews can be just as beneficial as in–person interviews in terms of gathering information about participant experiences.

Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and were audio-recorded using a digital recording device. Women's rugby sevens players were also asked to choose a

pseudonym prior to the start of the interview (four); if they did not want to choose a pseudonym, one was assigned to them (six). Once the interview was completed, the audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim by an undergraduate research assistant interested in the research process.

Women's rugby sevens players received a copy of their transcripts via email and were asked if they accurately represent their words. There were no changes requested by women's rugby sevens players. All transcripts, audio files, and consent forms were stored on my personal password-protected computer.

Data Analysis

A four-member research team plus an external auditor was selected for use in the current study. As Hill (2012) stated, research teams and external auditors are important because everyone contributes unique interpretations of the data and brings in their own experiences and worldviews. The research team was made up of five members. All members on the team were United States citizens. Four of the members were Caucasian, and one was African American; Four were female and one was male. One member of the team was a Professor in sport psychology, two were master's students and one was a doctoral student in sport psychology, and one was an undergraduate kinesiology student. All had participated in organized sport and one was a current rugby player. The external auditor who holds a PhD in sport psychology was selected because she has extensive knowledge and experience with CQR as well as coach caring.

Researcher bias statements. Before our first meeting, each researcher identified and shared their biases with the research team. Going into the study, the research teams'

general biases included: perceptions of coach caring may be influenced by age, level of rugby play, training environment, and previous experiences. In addition, the research team made it known that they were unsure how faith, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation would impact perceptions of coach caring.

Once interviews were completed, each research team member −who first signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix E) −was given transcripts of each of the interviews. Members were expected to read through each transcript on their own and search for athletes' perceptions of coach caring themes. As stated above, prior to the initial meeting, each team member wrote up his or her own biases, assumptions, and experiences related to the topic under investigation (Hill, 2012). Then, at the initial consensus-building meeting, the research team discussed and challenged each other regarding their biases as well as the individual themes they came up with.

In addition to the nine steps in the CQR process as described previously, the coding structure in CQR involves coding data collected into domains, which are major themes that come through the interviews. The creation of the domains is based on previous literature and a review of the current study's transcripts. Within each domain, different ideas, developed from the raw data, are sorted and labeled into categories. Lastly, core ideas emerge from the summaries of the domains and categories (Hill, 2012).

Also, Hill (2012) believes that consensus should be reached in terms of the final coding structure. The research team reached consensus for the final coding structure (e.g., domains, categories, and core ideas) collectively as a research team after much discussion with each other. As Hill and colleagues (Hill et al., 2005) wrote about consensus:

> Consensus, an integral part of the CQR method (Hill et al., 1997), "relies on mutual respect, equal involvement, and shared power" (p. 523). Similar to both feminist and multicultural approaches to psychology, a diversity of viewpoints is valued, honored, and protected (Williams & Barber, 2004). In fact, the use of consensus has been shown to improve decision quality (Michaelsen, Watson, & Black, 1989; Sundstrom, Busby, & Bobrow, 1997) by taking into account both commonly held and minority views (Miller, 1989). Because subtle meanings may be conveyed through the interview process in CQR, this variety of viewpoints and experiences among the team members may help unravel the complexities and ambiguities of the data. Thus, a common understanding of the data is sought while preserving the right of individual team members to hold differing worldviews. To attain consensus, the CQR process demands that the team members discuss disagreements and feelings, which requires that team members have strong interpersonal skills as well as like and respect each other (p. 197).

Cross-analysis. A cross-analysis was also done (myself and my advisor) utilizing all interview transcripts and the final thematic table to check and assess the frequency of each category under each domain. A cross-analysis involves returning to the data and then counting the frequency of each category within the domains (Hill, 2012).

Our external auditor was sent all transcripts, the finalized thematic table, as well as the interview guide. She was asked to provide feedback regarding how/if/in what ways the table accurately represented women's rugby sevens players' interviews. Her feedback was

then sent to the research team and slight changes were made to the table following a second cross-analysis.

Once the coding table was officially finalized, I emailed the table to each interviewee for member-checking (Hill, 2012). The purpose of the member-check is to gather feedback from the interviewees on the research team's interpretations of the interview, and whether or not it accurately represents their understanding of the phenomenon. No interviewee asked for any changes to be made.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss results derived from the CQR analysis. As previously stated, a four-person research team and an external auditor carried out the analysis. Six domains and 18 categories (see Table 2) were constructed: (I) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' perceptions of how they learned coach caring*; (II) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' definition of coach caring;* (III) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' description of the demonstration of coach caring: Athlete-centered coaching;* (IV) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' definition of a lack of coach caring;* (V) *Elite women's rugby sevens athletes' description of the relationship between coach caring and athletic performance;* and (VI) *additional influences* such as power dynamics, unethical behavior, gender differences, and different parts of the season and level of competition. I present these findings using domains, categories, and core ideas along with quotes from women's rugby sevens players and relevant literature.

Domain I: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Perceptions of How They Learned Coach Caring

Domain I was constructed to describe how and where women's rugby sevens learned about coach caring. There were two categories within this domain: (a) direct experiences; and (b) indirect experiences.

Category a: Direct experiences. When asked about where athletes had learned about what coach caring is, all women's rugby sevens players stated they learned from their previous experiences with coaches. Charlotte discussed comparing one coach who displayed care and one who did not:

Table 2. Participant Results: Domains, Categories, and Core Ideas

Domains/Categories	Illustrative Core Idea	Frequency
Domain I: How Women's Rugby Athletes Learned Coach Caring		
a) Direct Experiences	Comparing previous coaches; Coaching others	10 of 10
b) Indirect Experiences	Seeing others coach; Hearing from other players' experiences	4 of 10
Domain II: How Women's Rugby Athletes Defined Coach Caring		
a) Holistic Care	Inside and outside of the sport; physical, mental, emotional	10 of 10
i) Personal/Life Skills Development	Interested in life and school; Teaching mental toughness outside of rugby; Using rugby to teach life skills	9 of 10
iii) Player Development	Skills; Developing to their potential; Developing players to work together	9 of 10
ii) Safety	Concussion Protocol; Injury Protocol	4 of 10
Domain III: How Women's Rugby Athletes Described the Demonstration of Coach Caring: Athlete-Centered Coaching		
a) Relationship-Building	Approachable; Invested; Engaged; Mutual Respect; Individualizing; Supportive;	10 of 10
b) Giving Feedback and Challenging	Honesty; Giving positive and instructional feedback; Taking feedback; Communication; Goal setting; giving athletes a voice	10 of 10
c) Perspective-Taking	Rugby isn't everything	4 of 10

Table 2. Continued

Domains/Categories	Illustrative Core Idea	Frequency
Domain IV: How Women's Rugby Athletes Defined Lack of Coach Caring		
a) Neglect	Not allowing feedback from players or giving feedback; lack of communication; Disconnection; Ignored; Lack of Attention; No opportunity to grow	10 of 10
b) Focus on Winning over everything	No injury protocol; playing favorites; Technical skill vs. effort/heart	9 of 10
c) Authoritarianism	Aggressive; Having their own agenda; Coach's voice is the only voice; Manipulative; Selfish	7 of 10
d) Fear of Failure/Making Mistakes	Make one mistake and get yelled at; Only one change to prove yourself	4 of 10
Domain V: How Women's Rugby Athletes Descripted the Relationship Between Coach Caring and Athlete Performance		
a) Increased Motivation and Efficacy	The more the player feels cared for by the coach, the harder she works; Increased effort; Increased Motivation; Then Confidence increases	10 of 10
b) Team Cohesion	Team Bonding; Togetherness	3 of 10
Domain VI: Additional Influences		
a) Power Dynamics	Privileged positions (Captains, starters); Cliques; Politics	6 of 10
b) Unethical Behavior	Overinvolved; Drinking; Dating Players	5 of 10
c) Gender Differences	Male vs. Female	3 of 10

> It was like night and day between the two coaches so that was really clear to me when you could see like two people coaching the same group of girls at the same sport, at the same level, um, and how different it was.

Athletes learning about care from previous–both direct and indirect–experiences with coaches is congruent with the findings of Fisher and colleagues (2017b) who found that NCAA Division I assistant coaches said they developed care from watching or playing for other coaches.

Category b: Indirect experiences. Some women's rugby sevens players said they had learned about what coach caring (or lack thereof) was from hearing about other athletes' experiences of coaching or seeing how other coaches treat their rugby players. Sanya stated:

> More so the not coach caring aspect so again learned secondhand or stories or from athletes coming from other teams or I've had other coaches in the sports that I'm coaching more so, so a learning experience not necessarily a direct effect.

Learning from past experiences is congruent with the findings of Fisher and colleagues (2017b) in which assistant coaches developed an idea of what coach caring was from their experiences of both playing for and watching other coaches. It is also important to note that four of the 10 women's rugby sevens players are currently or have been coaches themselves; this is important because they were able to understand the demands of coaching and how they can impact athletes. For example, Stacey described her coaching experience:

> I think coaching yourself and stepping out of the sport, you get a better understanding of what the coach goes through and what they see. I guess really as a coach, you should learn self-discipline and how you see yourself, and if you can't see that, then I think as a coach you're missing a big picture of how you treat people.

Domain II: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Definition of Coach Caring

Domain II was created to describe how women's rugby sevens players defined coach caring. There were two categories: (a) holistic care; and (b) safety.

Category a: Holistic care. All 10 women's rugby sevens players described coach caring as perceiving their coach caring about them as a person outside of rugby as well as a rugby player on the pitch. Women's rugby sevens players described holistic care as encompassing physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Poppy said, "They care for you as a person not only your athletic ability or anything, but they care about what you're doing outside of the sport and they care about you mentally and physically." In addition, player development was included in holistic care; women's rugby sevens players defined coach caring as coaches developing the athletes' skills. Charlotte described this idea as:

> I guess add to the players either skill level or themselves as a whole whether that is off the field or on the field the well-being of the players, and always… setting them up for success and whether that's like helping them with strength and conditioning programs or just like mental toughness.

Holistic care also included personal and life skills development in which coaches used skills learned in rugby to develop skills that can be used outside of rugby. As Sanya stated:

> It's ultimately working with the athlete to better them as an athlete but also as a person. I'm a firm believer that sports has the ability to mold a person, umm outside the pitch or the baseball field, or whatever, umm, that you're going to carry those life skills that you develop as an athlete, into the real world, into your job, into your career, your family, your friends, umm so I think coach caring is not only looking out for the athlete, but also looking out for their academics and also as a person.

Stephanie expounded on this idea when she said:

> There's so many different, um, I'm trying to think of the best word to describe it, learning principles that [coaches] teach you that, to grow to be the person you're going to be when you graduate throughout being with them so much.

Defining coach caring as holistic care in which coaches display whole-person caring is in line with previous research in which NCAA Division I coaches defined coach caring as developing the whole person as well as developing life skills (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Fisher et al., 2017b; Fisher et al., 2019). In addition, getting to know athletes individually and as a whole-person is consistent with previous research in the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2005).

Category b: Safety. Four of the 10 women's rugby sevens players also included safety in their definition of coach caring. For example, because rugby is a full-contact sport, attention to safety was deemed important to note by Poppy, "You definitely need to practice contact also knowing the well-being of the rugby players you need to do it in safe ways or ways that will prevent them from getting hurt or minimize the impact." The

concern for safety is congruent with findings from Ma and colleagues' (2016) study on injuries in American women's rugby sevens players; they found that rugby injuries typically occur during contact situations and involve the head, neck, or knee areas. They ultimately called for more education and understanding of the risk involved with playing rugby.

Domain III: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Description of the Demonstration of Coach Caring: Athlete-Centered Coaching

In this domain, women's rugby sevens players described actions and behaviors that may be observed in caring coaches. Some tenants of athlete-centered coaching (Preston & Kerr, 2013) include partnership relationships in which athletes and coaches develop a relationship and communicate honestly and openly. Coaches who practice athlete-centered coaching also foster holistic development through independence and understand that sport as only a part of life. These characteristics were apparent in players' descriptions throughout this domain. This domain is divided into three categories: (a) relationship-building, (b) giving feedback and challenging rugby players, and (c) perspective-taking.

Category a: Relationship-building. All 10 women's rugby sevens players described relationship-building as a demonstration of coach caring. Participants stated that coaches build a relationship with each rugby player through several components: by getting to know each player, how she works, providing individualized attention and being approachable; relationship-building is also evident when caring coaches are engaged with

athletes during both practices and games. Having connections with athletes on the team and sharing the passion of rugby are also important in building relationships. As Bri stated:

> Understanding that your players are still individuals. Um, I think that a coach that cares understands that we're all individuals and they can't treat us the same… they take the time to figure out how I work. Every player works differently; every team works differently. And I think it's a sign when coaches care when they are willing to take the time to learn about their team and I think it changes year to year, season to season and with different turnover and different things and it's a constant process.

Fisher and colleagues (Fisher et al., 2017a, 2017b) also found that head coaches demonstrated care by having an open-door policy, being available, and individualization. Noddings (1984) also discussed the ability for a career to give attention to the cared for in the form of engrossment. Additionally, building relationships and fostering a connection between the coach and rugby player is an example of the relatedness component of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 2000).

Category b: Giving feedback and challenging players. In the current study, all of the women's rugby sevens players also described the demonstration of coach caring as giving feedback and challenging them to become better rugby players. In other words, women's rugby sevens players expected their coaches to communicate with them and give them positive and instructional feedback. Stephanie described it this way: "If you want um feedback or you have questions like they are literally open books and will be completely honest with you." Grace also said:

> You play a game or a match or something, whether or not you played amazing or not your best, just when you get liked pulled aside and they have feedback for you…it shows that they paid attention to the game and also you, like, they don't want you to get in your head. Like, because that's something I definitely struggle with. I really get in my head a lot and so it really means a lot to me when a coach, or like my coach, is like 'hey, think about what you did wrong but move on' or like whatever kind of thing.

Another aspect of this domain was being open to and taking feedback from rugby players, including on how to be a better coach and allowing rugby players to have a voice in their own sport experience. Poppy illustrated this idea when she described the "wellness check" they went through every day where coaches gathered both physical and verbal feedback from players on how they were feeling and on what could be better:

> We did a wellness check-in. So, every morning you would have to fill out this form to say if we were sore, like, how you were doing, if you were unhappy and stuff. And the coaches would actually take it into consideration...it just gave a voice in between the coaches and players so we're all like, on the same page.

Stacey also described behaviors that she perceived as coach caring as having a voice and giving or getting feedback:

> We have one-on-one meetings once a month because she always wants you to feel like you're heard. Sometimes with a big team you don't get that, so we have these mandatory meetings to make sure your grades are doing good and to talk about what you need help on and not just rugby wise. Sometimes she'll say you don't

need help on rugby or school, you just need to tell me how you feel, and she listens. Like, 'What do you need? What can I do for you to make you a better athlete?' Or 'Do I need to help you with school?' or 'What is it that you need from me?' And I think it's nice that she makes the time and sets up those one-on-one meetings. Even though its thirty minutes like, its thirty minutes of you being able to say what you need to say and for you to feel like your opinions matter and that you count and the fact that she even takes the time to listen to what we have to say and changing the program or changing how she coaches or changing what we need from her. It's nice to know that she cares for us - that she gives us that say, and she gives us the time.

NCAA DI assistant coaches described providing athletes with feedback in order to help them succeed in Fisher and colleagues' (Fisher et al., 2017b) previous study as behaviors that demonstrated coach caring. Similarly, Noddings (1984) described motivational displacement, putting the needs of others before their own, as a crucial element of care. Giving athletes a voice within their sport experience is also congruent with Deci and Ryan's (2002) Self-Determination Theory aspect of autonomy, which can help foster intrinsic motivation. Moreover, part of athlete-centered coaching is teaching rather than telling athletes what they did wrong, which includes providing feedback with engaging questions or game-like drills (Preston & Kerr, 2013).

Category c: Perspective-taking. Some women's rugby sevens players (4/10) described the demonstration of coach caring as the coach taking the perspective that rugby is not the only thing athletes do and it does not entirely make up who they are. Women's rugby sevens players in the current study are competing at the elite level and most of them

have other obligations such as jobs and families; so, it was important for them to have a caring coach who understands that they might miss practice if their child is sick or if they have to work. As Bri indicated:

> I was having trouble like, working, trying to find work while trying to get to practice and trying to keep the rest of my life all together. Um, and like, my coach cut me a lot of slack on what I could and couldn't make. She kicked my ass when it needed kicking and kind of let me get away with a little bit more than I probably should have when I needed a break.

The women's rugby sevens players in the current study also described perspective-taking as focusing on more than just the outcomes of a game or a season. They talked about coaches who understood that rugby was not the most important entity in their life and they may have to make difficult decisions to further their career path. Stacey described this in this way:

> You have to do what's best for you in the long run and not what's best for the team at that moment. And or you know, you can love rugby, but the most important thing is finding a career or path that you like, and um, we have people all the time who just… our school is very small, we don't have a lot of majors to give. So, like, this isn't my dream job and she's like 'You know what? I want you to stay, you're great. But if you have to transfer schools to get a degree, you do that'. Things like that are important because it's not just about selfish; it's not just about winning to them. It's about seeing you become something, better than they came in. Leaving a better person than you did coming in.

Once again, women's rugby sevens players in the current study described coach caring behaviors that are congruent with Nodding's (1984) idea of motivational displacement where the coach places their energy and attention into the needs of the athletes they care for and focuses on what's best for them. Previous studies have also shown that athlete-centered coaching and understanding that sport is only part of each person's life experience are demonstrations of coach caring (Preston & Kerr, 2013). For example, Preston and Kerr (2013) suggested that athlete-centered coaches develop athletes holistically by promoting education and encouraging positive attitudes.

Domain IV: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Definition of a Lack of Coach Caring

This domain was constructed to illustrate how women's rugby sevens players defined a lack of coach caring and what that would look like. As previously stated, women's rugby sevens players learned about a lack of coach caring by experiencing it directly (e.g., throughout their years of participating in sport) or indirectly (e.g., hearing about it from teammates and observing other coaches). The domain was split into four categories: (a) neglect; (b) focus on winning over everything; (c) authoritarianism; and (d) fear of failure and making mistakes.

Category a: Neglect. When there was a lack of communication or when coaches did not give feedback to players, rugby players in the current study described feeling neglected. In fact, all 10 women's rugby sevens players described neglect part of the definition of a lack of coach caring. Women's rugby sevens players also knew there was a lack of coach caring when coaches ignored them for numerous reasons, there was a

disconnection between them, and there was no opportunity to grow or develop as rugby players. Averie had an experience with a coach who gave her no opportunity to grow as a player:

> There's this one season where I just was like, I'm going to train the hardest I have ever trained. I trained for like, a full year before my season started and I was lifting more than anyone on my team and I was running faster than the people that used to be way faster than me and I was just really, really working hard and I showed up for the season killing it, doing awesome, making these big plays happen and it didn't matter what I did. I didn't get a starting spot. Our team won every tournament that season; we went to nationals, didn't get brought to nationals and … I specifically asked the coach 'What more do you want me to do? What more do I need to do to get a starting spot?' and he was like, 'Well, you need to be more aggressive' and I was like, 'Okay.' So, next tournament I was the most aggressive I've ever played. I was like, 'How bout now?' and he was like, 'Yeah, that was good.' I was like, 'Okay.' So, I guess there are times where it can be frustrating 'cause even ask like a coach, 'What do you need me to do?' and you can do it or there is just literally nothing you can do, they'll just never give you a spot. They'll never tell you why; you're just not the person they want.

In this case, Averie's perception was that no matter what she did or how she performed, it was clear to her that her coach did not see her as part of the starting line-up; her coach did not give her the attention she needed to get there. Grace also stated that she perceived a lack of attention when it came to a lack of coach caring:

> …a lack of attention sort of, um. I mean like, in a way it would look like essentially just being ignored. If you don't do something right, you get benched as opposed to trying to make you learn from a situation.

Consistent with previous research by Preston and Kerr (2013), building relationships and an individualized connection with each rugby player has a positive impact on the rugby player's sport experience. Therefore, if there is a disconnection and no relationship is built between the coach and rugby player, the rugby player's sport experience can be greatly negatively affected.

Category b: Focus on winning over everything. Nine of the 10 women's rugby sevens players defined a lack of coach caring in terms of coaches wanting to win over all other aspects of rugby player development. This included "playing favorites" toward rugby players who had technical skills but gave little effort at practices. As Sanya described:

> This coach had one intention in mind and that was to win, and he did whatever it took to get there, went so far as to ignore some of the girls on the team that were drinking and smoking the day of a tournament and he was like, 'Oh I don't care, you're one of our best'… you're just so focused on getting a win that you're not taking in to consideration like, the effort that certain players are putting in or choosing certain people that haven't been putting in the same amount of effort like, the difference between giving heart versus just like, there's a lot of technical, like behind the scene stuff that happens.

Some women's rugby sevens players also highlighted coaches as uncaring who had no injury protocols in place or when they expected rugby players to play through injuries. Sky had this same experience, where she was pushed to play through a serious injury:

> One bad thing that they push me to play so, I got a concussion one week before nationals which nationals is the biggest competition of the year, obviously where all the clubs come together and I got a concussion the week before that and I was still pushed to play and I played two full games on it.

As Poppy detailed:

> I guess like, sometimes if we're like super sore or a bunch of us are really fatigued sometimes she'll just do… like, we'll have a full contact day even if everyone is just like, 'I shouldn't do full contact. I think I'm going to get hurt. I really haven't been feeling well.' She'll be like, 'well, it's our full contact day, so were going to do full contact.'

Therefore, results from the current study suggest that women's rugby sevens players understand and recognize when coaches are "playing favorites" or have an ego-orientation. According to Gearity and Murray (2010), creating a goal-oriented climate that focuses only on outcomes−at the expense of holistic athlete development−can be detrimental to not only player skill development but can create an uncaring attitude in rugby players as well. As Karly stated:

> I've had coaches miss practices or conditionings and even if it's just certain things like why, you know. But I've played for a good range of teams um, not everyone I guess had to be as committed. I think it definitely reflected on the team, and how

they took it because if a coach isn't taking it very seriously, I don't think the athletes will either.

In addition, a clear lack of injury protocol and a drive to win above players' safety is the opposite of what women's rugby sevens players in the current study had previously defined as coach caring. Rugby is a game filled with injury potential; therefore, as Ma and colleagues (Lopez, Weinstein, Chen, Black, Gupta, Harbst, Vistoria, & Allen, 2016) have highlighted, the need for injury prevention education and understanding is critical in this environment.

Category c: Authoritarianism. Seven of the 10 women's rugby sevens players also described authoritarianism used by coaches as the lack of coach caring. They saw authoritarianist coaching as including the use of aggressive behaviors, coaches having their own agenda, and being physically punitive, manipulative, selfish, and not allowing players to have their own voice. Averie described her experience with an authoritarian coach as "…not looking at what the team needs and like, pushing their own agenda instead of seeing what's in front of them and working with that." When a coach puts their needs first and is not willing to take into account what rugby players need, engrossment and motivational displacement are no longer displayed and care is absent (Noddings, 1984). In rugby, players believe that this type of uncaring can lead to problems with team chemistry, motivation, etc.

Category d: Fear of failure and making mistakes. Coaches who yell at rugby players, bench them for making one mistake, or who instill fear of failure in them were perceived by four of the 10 women's rugby sevens players in the current study as

displaying a lack of coach caring. This is important because athletes who are afraid to make mistakes may be unable to take risks or learn from failure (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Charlotte experienced this in the following way with a coach:

> He just screamed a lot and would just like if a player, he made players scared to make a mistake. In my opinion, I think that is one of the worst things a coach can do is when players are scared to mess up because then they're not going to try. And um, he instilled that in me immediately as soon as I made it to varsity.

Averie described it another way – as her coach creating an environment where a team was competing against each other rather than together:

> You mess up one time, you're going to lose your spot. Like, people on the sideline are waiting for you to mess up so they can take your spot, which is just a really toxic environment. Everyone is just fighting for these spots, instead of trying to work together.

Using a powerful metaphor, Bri described a lack of coach caring as an expectation for rugby players to be robots on the field:

> I think it felt like, being a robot. We were expected to come out… I mean the coach had the expectation that we were expected to come out and play and perform and do what was expected of us without any feelings or emotions or lives.

Coaches who display these types of behaviors can thwart two of rugby players' basic psychological needs -relatedness and competency - which can contribute to a loss of player motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Domain V: Elite Women's Rugby Sevens Athletes' Description of the Relationship Between Coach Caring and Athletic Performance

This domain was constructed to describe how women's rugby sevens players perceived the relationship between coach caring and athletic performance. Two categories are representative of the interview data: (a) reciprocal; and (b) team cohesion and culture.

Category a: Increased Motivation and Efficacy. All women rugby sevens in the current study described the relationship between coach caring and performance as increased motivation and efficacy. They talked about how the more they perceived that their coach cared about them, the harder they worked and the more effort they gave. Additionally, women's rugby sevens players noted that the more they felt cared for, the more motivated they were to develop their skills and the more confident they felt. For example, Poppy discussed feeling more confident:

> I definitely play better knowing that I am supported by my coaches as opposed to, sometimes, when I feel like I'm not cared for. Like, I don't feel like I'm supported. So, I question what I do on the field when like, I know what I'm doing but like, if I don't feel supported by my coaches, I'll like question if I'm doing things right.

This finding is congruent with Fisher and colleagues' (Laresen, Behar, & Shigeno, 2019) previous work which suggests that when athletes feel cared for holistically, they might give more effort, which will increase their performance.

There is a relational factor as well that plays a role in how much effort rugby players give. Deci and Ryan (2000) proposed that fulfilling the relatedness aspect of Self-

Determination Theory could increase intrinsic motivation. Bri's experience supported this idea as she explained:

> I think that people are willing to do more for people that they feel like care about them. I think that on average you'll work harder for a coach that cares about you then for a coach that doesn't. So, I don't know if that makes you a better athlete, but it certainly makes you try harder and that may make you a better athlete simply by virtue of you put in more effort every day.

Further, some women's rugby sevens players described the relationship between coach caring and athletic performance as creating meaning for playing. Stacey exhibited this idea when discussing her coach sharing her passion with the athletes:

> To make things fun and to make someone love something and to share your passion and it actually be successful shows that you did your job, you spread the love. You made rugby happy and that showing that care and taking the time, you do something that's kind of meaningful and its helpful… So, I think making a program and making something as great as what you have and um, I guess leaving such an impact on your life, like, looking back on your life and being like, that was great I needed that. I grew from that in a positive way on top of being trained to the best of your abilities.

This coincides with Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory and fostering intrinsic motivation in athletes who participate in sport simply for the joy of participating. This finding is unique from previous studies, and suggests that coaches have the ability to

foster qualities of meaning such as optimism and perseverance that athletes may use to better cope with the pressure and expectations of elite sport (Watson & Nesti, 2005).

Category b: Team cohesion and culture. Three of the 10 women's rugby sevens players in the current study also noted that coach caring influenced athletic performance in terms of team cohesion and culture. Women's rugby sevens players highlighted togetherness and the expectation for the coach to set the culture of the team. Research suggests that team cohesion increases individual satisfaction within the team and that more cohesive teams are more successful (Carron & Chelladuri, 1982; Hacker & Williams, 1981; Martens & Peterson, 1971). Averie noted that her current team enjoys - and is better - when they are allowed to joke around and have fun rather than being serious during practice:

> The team I currently play for now, one of the things my coach does that I really like is he is fully on board with all of the silly stuff my team does**…** So, like, we have some really random calls, or we'll have jokes during practice and he'll like, join in and laugh and he's always like, wearing our team logo on his kit and to me that shows that he cares because he's putting in little effort not only be a coach but be someone we can talk too or joke too during practice. Because nothing is worse than a practice that you have to be completely serious the entire time. To me that shows that… he understands our culture and he's joined it rather than trying to change it into whatever he wants.

Averie went on to say that this type of team cohesion and culture helps everyone give more effort. As she punched the point home, she stated, "I feel like they've cared about me, they

created an environment where, it's like, a better team environment and everyone works harder."

Domain VI: Additional Influences

The sixth and final domain was created to address additional influences that arose from the elite women's rugby sevens players' interviews. There are three categories that made up this domain: (a) power dynamics; (b) unethical behavior; and (c) gender differences.

Category a: Power dynamics. Six of the 10 women's rugby sevens players in the current study brought up how a coach may treat captains or starters differently. They also described how politics or cliques can influence how they perceived coach caring.

For example, Stacey was a high school coach as well as a women's rugby sevens player. In the interview, she related her experience as a high school rugby coach to her conception of the additional influences on coach caring, including spending more time with her high school rugby captains:

> Even when I coached, I did have a [different] relationship with my high school team captains because they did all the extra stuff. They came to my house and they would organize the car and get everything ready and go to the Costco with me to get everything for the game and they'd be at all the fundraisers, but it came across as they were my 'favorites' and like, no. they do so much on and off, they help me. And I think that when you don't see everything that they do it does come across as they're just good at rugby and you like them more than me and that's not the case, but it does seem that way from the outside looking in.

Averie also discussed cliques within her current team and experiencing a lack of coach caring because of it:

> Like, you have your clique of the people that's all the starters, then your clique of everyone else and it's just, it's almost like before the season started the coaches talked to these people and was like you're going to start every game or it's the same people that get rotated in this group of team and one or two people get to enter the little thing to play with them but at the end of the season it's the same group and they're almost like snobby about it.

Although the relationship between coaches and captains or starters may look like a coach has favorites and gives them special attention, this may not always be the case according to rugby players in the current study. In fact, perhaps in some cases, these privileged positions may have allowed coaches and athletes opportunities to foster an enhanced relationship through more communication (Fisher et al. 2017a, 2017b). However, it is important to afford *all* athletes and coaches the opportunity to build individual relationships.

Category b: Unethical behavior. Coaches are responsible for creating the culture of the team and they also serve as role models for athletes. When coaches display or engage in unethical behavior such as sexual abuse and unequal treatment of athletes as well as encourage athletes to engage in unhealthy behaviors, they are no longer acting ethically (Haney, Long, & Howell-Jones, 1998). Half of the women rugby players in the current study noted behaviors they have experienced that they perceived as unethical.

For example, Charlotte discussed a coach who had a relationship with a player:

> I think when coaches blur the lines and sleep with players and especially on a women's team for other girls that are attracted to that coach. It can make things really ugly. Then, I think that they run the risk of players thinking they are biased because they are sleeping with the coach and stuff like that.

Karly also described witnessing a similar experience: "A guy dated multiple girls on the team so then those people would not like each other so it was just not… you know, to make the team work well that can't happen." Furthermore, Stacey talked about the drinking culture in rugby and how it can become unhealthy:

> [Coaches] kind of like egged on bad behavior, egged on people with drinking problems that probably shouldn't be drinking but like supported drinking anyway… It wasn't, it just wasn't a good environment kind of for anyone to even respect the game. It made the whole game look bad because you have this stereotype of what a rugby player is and it kind of just hurts everyone around them and they didn't care if you were healthy.

Binge drinking or drinking in large qualities is associated with post-game traditions of rugby (; Hodges, 1989; Lawson & Evans, 1992; Young, 1988). According to Prentice, Stannard, and Barnes (2013), drinking in large quantities may affect performance and post-game recovery. Therefore, it appears that rugby players in the current study perceived that unethical behaviors like drinking - either engaged in or encouraged by coaches −can affect team cohesion and player well-being. I believe like Fisher and colleagues (Bejar, Larsen, Fynes, & Gearity, 2017a) that there needs to be more coach education and higher expectations of coaches to uphold ethical standards.

Category c: Gender differences. Three of the 10 women's rugby sevens players highlighted some important themes having to do with gender, and, in particular, difference in experiencing male versus female coaches and also in working with female athletes. For example, when looking for a new coach, Karly discussed the need of their potential coach to have previous experience coaching women:

> It was really important to us and the other people who wanted to start this program to find someone that was um, had a lot of experience. They knew what they were doing. They had experience with specifically working with girls.

Related to her own perceptions, Sky mentioned that she may perceive coach caring differently because she is a woman:

> I found with women, especially with me, we tend to do the whole 'ugh, everyone hates me' so you know I try to keep away from assuming that everyone is out to get me and it's actually a lot of my perception that is kind of taking it.

This category was interesting because it arose in participant interviews even when they were not asked directly about gender differences. Previous research has shown that coaches also perceived gender differences to be important in coach caring (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Fisher et al., 2017b).

Summary

To summarize, in this chapter, I have summarized the six domains and 18 categories that were constructed by a five-person research team using CQR (Hill, 2012) to represent the perceptions of 10 women rugby sevens' players regarding their definitions of coach caring. The domains included and were fleshed out by the categories for each

domain as well as core ideas from participant interviews. I have also woven in appropriate literature to connect findings from the current study to previous research.

In the next chapter, I describe the how the major findings in the current study and previous literature can be applied to coaches, athletes, and sport psychology professionals. I also present limitations of the current study and highlight possible future research directions.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to examine elite women's rugby sevens athletes' perceptions of coach caring. The hope of the study was to better understand how athletes know that their coaches do or do not care for them, in addition to how caring affects performance. In this final chapter, I review major findings drawing from previous research, discuss limitations and practical implications, and also provide directions for future research.

Major Findings

There were two major findings that are consistent with previous research. The first major finding was that athletes in the current study described coach caring in many of the same ways that coaches in previous studies did (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Fisher et al., 2017a; Fisher et al., 2017b; Fisher et al., 2019). For example, athletes defined coach caring as holistic care - as taking the whole person into account rather than just the athlete. Personal as well as player development were also highlighted by athletes as components of coach caring. Furthermore, women's rugby sevens athletes perceived care when their coaches gave attention to and took an interest in their goals. This finding is consistent with Noddings' (1984) characteristics of care. In addition, rugby players in the current study also described coach caring behaviors as relationship-building and athlete-centered coaching; part of relationship-building included the meeting of basic psychological needs of athletes (see SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) and are consistent with previous findings (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Fisher et al., 2017a; Fisher et al., 2017b; Fisher et al., 2019).

The second major finding consistent with previous studies was that athletes perceived a relationship between coach caring and their athletic performance (Fisher et al.,

2019). For example, the more an athlete felt cared for by their coach, the harder they wanted to work and the more motivated they were to develop their skills. In addition, athletes felt as though their confidence increased when they felt that a coach cared for them.

This finding was demonstrated in the coach caring-athlete performance heuristic proposed by Fisher and colleagues (Fisher et al., 2019). Their heuristic suggests that when a coach demonstrates care and athletes perceive that care, athletes are more likely to give more effort and also develop holistically (personal and skill development). The heuristic also suggests that athletes who give more effort after perceiving care may see an increase in their athletic performance. In their heuristic, they suggest that after these stages are reached, the coach may feel more successful and the cycle of demonstrating care may begin all over again. Although this heuristic has not been officially tested, athletes in the current study described similar findings to those aspects of the heuristic under their control - feeling cared for by a coach, giving more effort and developing holistically, and then performing better.

There were two unique findings from results obtained in the current study. For example, the first unique finding was that women rugby sevens' players described how safety was a major issue that caring coaches addressed and that non-caring coaches did not. Safety of athletes may not have been a major concern for coaches who participated in previous studies (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Fisher et al., 2017a; Fisher et al., 2017b; Fisher et al., 2019) because none of those studies highlighted rugby, which is a full contact sport. Another unique finding was how the meaning that is created between the coach and

women's rugby sevens athletes can positively affect performance. Watson and Nesti (2005) found that when athletes feel like they have meaning while playing a sport, they are better able to cope with the stressors of elite sport. However, results from the current study emphasize the opportunity that coaches have to create this meaning by showing coach caring and sharing passion with rugby players and showing players the love of the sport.

Limitations

The findings of the current study add to our knowledge base related to coach caring based on previous work by Fisher and colleagues (Fisher et al., 2017a; Fisher et al., 2017b; Fisher et al., 2019). However, there are some limitations. Firstly, athletes from only four of the nine Olympic Development Academies recognized by USA Rugby were represented due to participant responses to recruitment. Therefore, it is not known if the results can be applied to all elite women's rugby players. Another limitation of the present study is that since all women's rugby sevens players are female, the results may not be applicable to elite men's rugby athletes. However, only women were included in this study because there is a significant lack of representation of women's rugby within sport psychology research.

Practical Implications for Sport Psychology Professionals and Others

Several implications for coaches, athletes, USA Rugby administration, and sport psychology professionals can be made from the results of the current study. For example, women's rugby sevens players felt that coaches need to take responsibility for developing and educating athletes holistically while focusing on the relational aspect of coach caring. In addition, it is important for coaches to remain open to communication between

themselves and their players and discuss each's expectations starting at the beginning of the season. Coaches should also focus on creating an environment in which athletes can develop their rugby skills as well as learn skills that can be applicable to life outside of rugby.

Another important factor to consider is that at the elite level, women choose to play sevens rugby for various reasons, but do not receive compensation or financial security of any kind. Therefore, coaches should take into consideration that athletes have obligations outside of rugby and that they may be sacrificing their careers or their own personal health and safety to play. To that end, coaches at this level of women's sevens rugby must be educated in safety and injury protocol. Rugby is a full contact sport that can result in major and serious injuries. It is imperative that coaches make it their responsibility to understand how to teach rugby skills safely and to follow injury protocol exactly. To be sure, athletes in the current study were calling for a higher standard for coaches at the elite women's rugby sevens level.

Athletes could also continue to voice their opinions to their coaches and ask for feedback or share their perspectives on the field. Women's rugby players should feel that their voices are heard and that they are empowered to take control of their sport experience.

As a side note, women's rugby sevens players in this study found it difficult to describe what level of rugby they participated in. For example, when asked about their level of experience, the women's sevens rugby players gave various answers including semi-professional, select side, and elite even though they play for an elite level team.

Therefore, there needs to be more definitive definitions of the levels of women's sevens rugby and a clearer path from college to the United States Olympic Center Residency Program. The USA Rugby organization should also provide education for coaches to develop athlete-centered coaching philosophies. There also needs to be more effort to ensure that player safety and athlete well-being are being a priority.

Lastly, the results of the current study implicate that sport psychology professionals advocate for athletes' well-being and safety. It can also be a sport psychology professional's responsibility to provide education to coaches on how to foster and meet athletes' needs, and potentially work with athletic trainers to make sure safety is a primary concern. Results from the current study emphasize the critical need for coaches to follow injury protocol and teach safety. However, sport psychology professionals are also in a position to advocate for athlete safety and well-being with and through coaches.

Future Directions for Research

As stated above, women rugby players were purposefully chosen to participate in this study while male rugby players were not. In future research it will also be important to highlight perceptions of coach caring within elite men's rugby teams. Similarly, only rugby sevens athletes participated in the current study because rugby sevens is the fastest growing games in the United States since the 2016 Olympics; however, including rugby fifteens in future research is imperative. In the current study, there was also no mention of how spirituality could play a role in perceptions of coach caring; this would be an interesting addition to future research; recently completed research suggests that both athletes' and coaches' spirituality may add a different dimension to athletes' definitions of

coach caring and the expectations spiritual/religious athletes have of their coaches (see Schools, Fisher, Moore, & Morris, in process).

In addition, studies could be designed to explore whether rugby players' perceptions of coach caring are influenced by the positions they play and/or the varying positions that coaches coach in (e.g., backs coaches versus forward coaches or kicking coaches). Findings may also be different between perceptions of caring head coaches versus assistant coaches; this is because, depending on position, athletes may not have much of a relationship with one coach and a stronger relationship with the other.

Lastly, USA Rugby requires all coaches to have at least the lowest level of coaching certification to coach (USA Rugby Coaches, 2018). However, does the first level of coach certification allow *all* coaches to understand the needs of players in terms of relationship-building, basic psychological needs, and holistic development? Conducting research on the USA Rugby requirements of coaching certifications may be needed in order to be certain that athlete well-being and safety are a high priority for *all* coaches.

Final Thoughts

It is my opinion that the information provided by this study could be a first critical step in ensuring athlete empowerment and athlete-centered coaching within women's rugby. Athlete well-being and positive experience in sport is so crucial and can be affected greatly by a coach. Although in its infancy, coach caring is a powerful research topic that can provide a multitude of information to coaches, athletes, sport organizations, and sport psychology professionals. I am happy to have been able to be a part of research within an area that is not frequently researched and represent a sport that has given me so much

throughout my years of participation. It is my hope that this is only the beginning of the research to be done on women's rugby to prove that rugby is more than just an injury-heavy sport.

REFERENCES

Carron, A. V., & Chelladurai, P. (1982). *Cohesiveness, coach-athlete compatibility, participation orientation, and their relationship to relative performance and satisfaction.* Paper presented at the Annual Conference of North American Society for the Psychology of the North American Society for the Psychology of Sport and Physical Activity, College Park, MD.

Clarke, A., Anson, J., & Pyne, D. (2014). Physiologically based GPS speed zones for evaluating running demand in Women's Rugby Sevens. *Journal of Sports Sciences, 33*(11), 1101-1108.

Crewther B., Heke T., & Keogh J. (2013). The effects of a resistance program on strength, body composition and baseline hormones in male athletes training for rugby union 7's. *The Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness, 53*(1), 34–41.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, *11*, 227-268.

Denison, J. (2007). Social theory for sport coaches: A Foucaldian reading of one athlete's poor performance. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 2*(4)*,* 369-383

Duthie, G., Pyne, D., & Hooper, S. (2003). Applied physiology and game analysis of rugby union. *Sports Medicine, 33*(13), 973-991.

Elloumi M., Makni, E., Moalla, W., Bouaziz, T., Tabka, Z., Lac, G., & Chamari, K. (2012). Monitoring training load and fatigue in rugby sevens players. *The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, 3*(3)*,* 175-184.

Fisher, L. A., Bejar, M. P., Larsen, L. K., Fynes, J. M., Gearity, B. T. (2017a). Caring in U.S. National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I sport: The perspectives of 18 female and male head coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *12*(1), 75-91

Fisher, L. A., Shigeno, T. C., Bejar, M. P., Larsen, L. K., & Gearity, B. (2017b). Caring practices among U.S. National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I female and male assistant coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 13*(4), 471-484.

Fisher, L. A., Larsen, L. K., Bejar, M. P., & Shigeno, T. C. (2019). A model of the relationship between caring coaching and athlete performance at the U.S. National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I level. *International Journal of Sports Science in Coaching, 14*(2), 126-137.

Gabbett, T. J. (2002). Physiological characteristics of junior and senior rugby league players. *British Journal of Sports Medicine, 36*(5), 334-339.

Gano-Overway, L. A., Magyar, T. M., Kim, M., Newton, M., Fry, M. D., & Guivernau, M. R. (2009). Influence of caring youth sport contexts on efficacy-related beliefs and social behaviors. *Developmental Psychology*, *45(*2), 329-340.

Gearity, B. T., & Denison, J. (2012). Educator-coach as stranger. *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies, 12*(4), 352-356.

Gearity, B. T., & Murray, M. A. (2010). Athletes' experiences of the psychological effects of poor coaching. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 12*(3)*, 213-221.*

Gibson, N., Boyd, A., & Murray, A. (2016). Countermovement jump is not affected during final competition preparation periods in elite rugby sevens players. *The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, 30*, 777-783.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, C. (2011). The birth of pleasure: A new map of love. New York, NY: Random House.

Griffin, J. A., McLellan, C. P., Presland, J., Rathbone, E., & Keogh, J. WL (2017). Quantifying the movement patterns of international women's rugby sevens preparation training camp sessions. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 12*(5), 677-684.

Hacker, C. M., & Williams, J. M. (1981). *Psychology of motor behavior and sport – 1981: Abstracts.* Monterey, CA: NASPSPA.

Haney, C., Long, B., & Howell-Jones, G. (1998). Coaching as a profession: Ethical concerns. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 10*(2), 240-250.

Higham D. G., Pyne D. B., Anson J. M., Hopkins, W. G., & Eddy, A. (2016). Comparison of activity profiles and physiological demands between international rugby sevens matches and training. *The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research, 30,* 1287–1294.

Hill, C. E. (2012). Consensual qualitative research: A practical resource for investigating social science phenomenon. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 196-205.

Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. N. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist, 25*(4)*,* 517-572.

Hodges, I. (1989). Make mine a large one: An anthropological study of the rules and symbols of drinking rituals intended to reconstruct social relations between men in southern New Zealand, University of Otego.

Iacono, V. L., Symonds, P., & Brown, D. H. K. (2016). Skype as a tool for qualitative research interviews. *Sociological Research Online*, *21*(2), 1-15.

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

Jowett, S. (2005). On enhancing and repairing the coach-athlete relationship. In S. Jowett and M. Jones (Eds.), *Psychology of sport coaching*. (pp. 14–26). Leicester, UK: The British Psychological Society, Sport and Exercise Psychology Division.

Kirby, S. L., Greaves, L., & Hankivsky, O. (2002). Women under the dome of silence: Sexual harassment and abuse of female athletes. *Canadian Woman Studies, 21*(3). 132-138.

Knust, S. K. & Fisher, L. A. (2015). NCAA division I female head coaches' experiences of exemplary care within coaching. *International Sport Coaching Journal, 2,* 94-107.

Larson, A. & Silverman, S. J. (2005). Rationales and practices used by caring physical education teachers. *Sport, Education and Society, 10*(2), 175-193.

Lawson, J. S. & Evans, A. R. (1992). Prodigious alcohol consumption by Australian rugby league footballers. *Drug and Alcohol Review, 11*, 193-195.

Lopez, V., Galano, G., Black, C., Gupta, A., James, D., Kelleher, K., & Allen, A. (2012). Profile of an American amateur rugby union sevens series. *The American Journal of Sports Medicine, 40*(1), 179-184.

Ma, R., Lopez, V., Weinstein, M. G., Chen, J. L., Black, C. M., Gupta, A. T.,… Allen, A. A. (2016). Injury profile of American women's rugby-7s. *The Journal of the American College of Sports Medicine*, *48*(10) 1957-1966.

Martens. R., & Peterson, J. A. (1971). Group cohesiveness as determinant of success and member satisfaction in team performance. *International Review of Sport Sociology, 6*(1)*,* 49-61.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

NCAA (2018). NCAA Division I. Retrieved from http://www.ncaa.org/about?division=d1

Newton, M., Fry, M., Watson, D., Gano-Overway, L., Kim, M., Magyar, M., & Guivernau, M. (2007). Psychometric properties of the caring climate scale in a physical activity setting. *Revista de Psicologia del Deporte*, *16*(1), 67– 84.

Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge to care in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education.* Berkely, CA: University of California Press

Oxford University Press (2018). Definition of care. Retrieved from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/care

Oxford University Press (2018). Definition of rugby. Retrieved from https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/rugby

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pratt, D. (1992). Conceptions of teaching. *Adult Education Quarterly, 42*, 203-223.

Prentice, C., Stannard, S. R., Barnes, M. J. (2013). The effects of binge drinking behavior on recovery and performance after a rugby match. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport, 17*(2), 244-248.

Preston, C., & Kerr, G. (2013). Elite athletes' experiences of athlete-centered coaching. *Journal Of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 35*(SS), S109.

Pelletier, L. G., Fortier, M., Vallerand, R. J., Tuson, K. M., Briere, N. M., & Blais, M. R. (1995). Toward a new measure of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation in sports: The sport motivation scale (SMS). *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 17*(1), 35–53.

Raedeke, T. D., & Smith, A. L. (2001). Development and preliminary validation of an athlete burnout measure. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 23*(4), 281–306.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2002). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 54-67.

Schools, J. A., Fisher, L. A., Moore, M. J., & Morris S. V. (in process). It's more than just a game: NCAA division II athletes' perceptions of coach caring.

USA Rugby Coaches (2018) *Certification.* Retrieved from https://www.usarugby.org/coaching-requirements/

USA Sevens Rugby (2018). *Divisions*. Retrieved from https://www.usasevens.com/las-vegas/divisions-2/

Vescovi, J. D. & Goodale, T. (2015). Physical demands of women's rugby sevens matches: Female athletes in motion (FaiM) study. *International Journal of Sport Medicine, 36*(11)*,* 887-892.

Warden, D., Cheyne, B., Christie, D., Fitzpatrick, H., & Reid, K. (2003). Assessing children's perceptions of prosocial and antisocial peer behavior. *Educational Psychology, 23*(5), 547–567.

Watson, N. J. & Nesti, M. (2005). The role of spirituality in sport psychology consulting: An analysis and integrative review of literature. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 17*(3), 228-239.

World Rugby (2015, March 12). *Rugby sevens' future is golden*. Retrieved from http://www.worldrugby.org/sevens-series/news/125674.

World Rugby (2018). Principles of the game. In *Laws of the game rugby union*. Retrieved from https://laws.worldrugby.org/?charter=2

Young, K. (1988). Performance, control, and public image of behavior in a deviant subculture: The case of rugby. *Deviant Behavior, 9,* 275-293.

APPENDIX

Appendix A
Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Years playing	Level of Experience	Injuries/ Body issues	How did you start playing?	Goals	Age	Developmental Disabilities	Disabilities acquired later in life	Religious/Spiritual Identity	Racial Identity	Ethnic Identity	Socioeconomic status growing up	Sexual Orientation	Indigenous Heritage	National Origin	Gender Identity
Averie	6	Elite	Knee Injury	Soccer player entire life. Started rugby in college when asked to play	Become a starter on a WPL (Women's Premier League) Team	24	None	Narcolepsy	Catholic	Caucasian and Hispanic	European	Middle Class	Bisexual	Upper Middle Class	United States	Female
Stacey	7	Elite and College D1	None	Started in HS when asked to play by a new friend	None	24	Dyslexia	None	not practicing	Asian	Japanese	Middle Class	Bisexual	1/4 Native American	United States	Female
Grace	6	Select Side/Elite	Rehabing a Labrel Tear	Rowed and joined the rugby team in college when asked to play; Dad played for 30+ years	Attend 1 more 7s Nationals and Make it past conference playoffs in 15s	26	None	Anxiety	Non-denominational	Caucasian	Polish and French	Upper Middle Class to Lower Middle Class as she grew up	Gay	None	United States	Female
Sanya	6	Elite	2 Reconstructed ACLs	Played volleyball entire life. Started Rugby in college when asked to play	Continue playing competitive club level for as long as she can	23	None	None	Christian	Caucasian	Russia	Lower Middle Class	Straight	None	United States	Female
Stephanie	5	Elite	None	Was a college cheerleader then switched to CrossFit and then was asked to play rugby	Wants to play competitively but keep the love of the sport	25	None	None	Christian	Caucasian	Italian/Scottish	Middle Class	Mostly Straight	None	United States	Female
Sky	7	Semi-pro	None	Dad played so started in HS	Play for a national team or a club contract and sustain her [illegible]	28	None	None	Agnostic/Atheist but still spiritual	Caucasian	Irish/British	Upper Middle Class	Mostly Straight	None	United States	Female
Poppy	8	Elite	Dislocated, broke, and tore elbow	Played soccer entire life. A friend told her to try rugby in 9th grade	[illegible] national team and then eventually coach [illegible]	22	None	None	Catholic but not practicing	Caucasian	Polish and French	Middle Class	Mostly Straight	None	United States	Female
Charlotte	8	Elite	Broke foot and tore lisfranc ligament	Played soccer through HS and tried it in College	Play international sevens and make it into the players pool or [illegible]	26	None	None	Christian	Caucasian	Polish, Czech, and Irish	Middle Class	Gay	None	United States	Female
Karly	8	Elite	Labrum surgery	Started in college. Cousin and other family members played	Develop high level of play	30	None	None	Catholic but not practicing	Caucasian	German and Italian	Upper Middle Class	Gay	None	United States	Female
Bri	9	Elite	Broken Back	Played collegiate soccer and joined a club team after college	Go back to nationals	35	None	None	Catholic	Asian	Korean/Irish	Upper Middle Class	Did not want to identify but married a woman	None	Born in Korea but raised in the United States	Female

Appendix B
Interview Guide
Athletes' Perceptions of Coach Caring
Fisher, Moore, Morris, & Schools, 2018 (3 separate studies)

Introduction: Thank you for meeting with me today! Before we get started, I need to read to you a consent form and then have you verbally agree to participate in this study (read consent form, get consent).

Okay, let's get started with some background questions. Can you tell me about:
Total years playing [your sport] _____
Level of experience? _____
Any injuries or body issues that make it difficult to play? _____
How did you get into [your sport]? _____
Professional goal _____
Demographic/Background Information Questions (ADDRESSING)
Age (and generation; most likely millennial but we'll figure this out after)_____
Developmental disabilities (e.g., learning difficulties) _____
Disability acquired later in life_____
Religious and spiritual identity_____
Ethnic and Racial identity (e.g., Italian, German, etc.; African American, Asian, Caucasian, etc.)_____
Socioeconomic status growing up_____
Sexual orientation (e.g., gay, straight, queer, bi, etc.) _____
Indigenous heritage (e.g., Native American, First Nations peoples, etc.) _____
National origin (e.g., U.S., the country you were born in) _____
Gender identity (e.g., male, female, no-binary, trans, etc.) _____
Anything else you think is important for me to know about your background? _____

Okay, now we're moving to the meat of the interview where will focus on coach caring.

Questions

1. Tell me about a time that your coach cared about you
2. How long have you known these coaches?
3. Tell me about your relationship with your coach
4. What does coach "caring" mean to you, as an athlete? How would you define it?
5. Where did you learn about what "good" and "bad" coach caring is? (previous coaches? parents?)
6. What does lack of care mean to you? What does it look like?
7. How does your current coach demonstrate that s/he cares for you? What does s/he do? (e.g., behaviors, philosophy)
8. How would you describe really "good" coach caring? How do you know when your coach "really" cares about you?
9. How does your current coach "really" demonstrate caring for you?

10. Are there times when you know that a coach doesn't care about you? How would you describe "bad" coach caring or lack of caring?
11. Are there times when your current coach demonstrates that s/he doesn't care about you? Have you had a coach with a lack of care? What does s/he do? (e.g., behaviors, philosophy)
12. In your opinion, how do other athletes on your team know that they are "cared" for by their coach? Is it the same for everyone or different? Why/how?
13. What does it mean to be a "good" or "successful" coach in [your sport]? Is being a "good" or a "successful" coach the same as being a "caring" coach? In what ways? When do these things mesh/integrate well and when do they conflict?
14. What is the relationship between being cared for by a coach and your athletic performance?
15. Is there another word for "care" that you would use that better describes this part of coaching?
16. Is there anything else you think we need to discuss related to coaches who care or don't care about athletes?

Thank you so much for participating! I will send you a copy of your transcript as well as the themes our research team comes up with after we talk with a lot of athletes in a lot of sports.

(adapted from Fisher et al., 2017)

Appendix C
Consent Form – Athlete (18 years or older)
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Elite-Level Athletes' Perceptions of Their Coaches' Caring

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study that explores the experiences of elite-level athletes and their perceptions of their coaches' caring. This study is the thesis project of Sierra Morris and her advisor, Dr. Leslee A. Fisher, at the University of Tennessee. While coaches are assumed to be caring at all levels of sport participation, more research is needed on the actual perceptions of elite-level athletes.

INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Your participation will be in the form of an interview that will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. The process will consist of a semi-structured, audio-recorded interview. During the interview, Sierra will ask you about your perceptions of how your coach defines and implements caring or non-caring. Should you agree to participate in the interview, Sierra will contact you to schedule either a one-on-one Skype or in-person distance interview covering this topic.

RISKS

There is no risk to participation greater than that of everyday life. All answers to questions and information shared will be kept confidential. At any point, if you are uncomfortable you may choose to skip a question or leave the interview at any time at no penalty to you.

BENEFITS

Benefits of your participation in this project include: the potential for your responses to drive further research, aiding Sierra's development as a scholar, and potentially impacting the programs and development of elite-level sport as a system. You may also find enjoyment in the process of sharing your experiences with someone outside of your sport participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information discussed in the interview will be kept confidential. Only the researchers will have access to your information and data will be stored in a secure password protected computer owned by Sierra Morris, the co-principle investigator. There will be no specific identifiers left in the data upon its collection. The back-up recording will be airdropped from the iPhone to the password-protected computer and will be deleted from the iPhone. Informed consent forms will be kept on the secure password-protected computer and Dr. Fisher will keep hard copies of consent forms in her office in a locked drawer.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before the data collection is completed or after the conclusion of the interview, your data will only be destroyed upon request.

_____ Participant's initials

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have questions about the interview, or you experience adverse effects as a result of your participation you may contact the following researchers:

Sierra Morris (Co-Principal Investigator): *smorri55@vols.utk.edu*

Leslee A. Fisher, PhD (Co-Principal Investigator): *lfisher2@utk.edu* – (865) 974-9973

IRB Compliance Office – (865) 974-7697

CONSENT
I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Phone:_____ Email:_____
Participant's name (please print): _____
Participant's signature _____ Date _____
Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Research Team Member's Pledge of Confidentiality

PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Elite-Level Athletes' Perceptions of Their Coaches' Caring (Women's Rugby)

Sierra Morris, Jordan Schools, Matt Moore, Zaria Christy and Leslee A. Fisher

As a member of this project's research team, I understand that I will be reading transcriptions of confidential interviews. The information in these transcripts has been revealed by research women's rugby sevens players who participated in this project on good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information in these transcriptions with anyone except the primary researcher of this project, his/her master's thesis chair, or other members of this research team. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.

_____ _____

Research Team Member Date

VITA

Sierra Morris was born in Norwich, New York, to the parents of Tom and Lynn Morris. She is the middle daughter of three children: Taylor and Elijah. She attended Sherburne-Earlville Elementary, Middle, and High School. After graduation, she attended Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY where she studied psychology and global studies. At Marist, she did an internship at West Point Military Academy in the Center for Enhanced Performance where she was introduced to Sport Psychology. Upon receiving her Bachelor's degree in May 2012, Sierra attended The University of Tennessee for her Master of Science degree in Sport Psychology and Motor Behavior. She held a graduate research assistantship in the Center for International Education and graduated in May 2019.