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NCAA Division I Student-Athletes' Perceptions of How the Coach-Athlete Relationship Influences Student-Athlete Resilience

Sara Marie Erdner

University of Tennessee

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Rebecca A. Zakrajsek, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Lars Dzikus, Leslee A. Fisher, Virginia W. Kupritz

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
NCAA Division I Student-Athletes’ Perceptions of How the Coach-Athlete Relationship Influences Student-Athlete Resilience

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Sara Marie Erdner
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Carmen Simone. You epitomize all things that shouldn’t go together but somehow fit perfectly. You are breakfast for dinner and dessert for breakfast. You are the perfect joke in the midst of sorrow. You are deep fried Oreos. You are rain on a hot, sunny day. You are French fries in a Wendy’s Frosty. You are the kind of friendship where you can sit together in silence or be half a world apart, but you still never feel bored, lonely, or alone. You are the knowledge that sometimes, things have to come to an end—like graduating from college forever—and, while still sad, you also feel happy and thankful to think about what you just experienced. You are chocolate covered potato chips. You are organized spontaneity. You feel the fear and do it anyways. You are unconditional love in a conditional world. You are the essence of the both/and mindset. You are God our Father and Mother. You are love in a world of hate. You are equality and inclusion. Thank you for hearing me in my garden and for striving to do the same with the rest of humanity.

To Joseph Oliver Erdner, my Pop. May you rest in peace: August 20, 1935 – March 9, 2018

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“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.” – Theodore Roosevelt

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Abstract

Resilience in sport has been defined as “the role of mental processes and behavior in promoting personal assets and protecting an individual from the potential negative effect of stressors” (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012, p. 675). Fletcher and Sarkar’s (2012) found that various psychological factors were indicative of athlete resilience such as achievement motivation, social support, focus, confidence, and positive personality. To date, sport psychology researchers have dominantly examined resilience as an individual construct (e.g., Galli & Vealey, 2008; Fletcher & Sarkar; Wagstaff, Sarkar, Davidson, & Fletcher, 2016). However, it is also important to consider how athlete resilience might develop and operate in relationships with important others (e.g., coach). Narrative inquiry (Smith & Sparkes, 2009) was used in this study to explore the stories of seven NCAA Division I student-athletes’ lived experiences of how the coach-athlete relationship influenced their ability to be resilient through major stress. Semi-structured interviews were conducted that asked participants about their respective coach-athlete relationship, how power and sociocultural factors influenced this relationship, and in turn, influenced student-athlete resilience. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis was used for data analysis, which revealed the following themes: (a) Student-athlete core resilience, (b) The W.O.A.T., (c) The G.O.A.T., (d) W.O.A.T. coach behaviors, (e) G.O.A.T. coach behaviors, (f) The W.O.A.T., the G.O.A.T., and student-athlete resilience, (g) The effect of coach major stress on student-athlete resilience, and (h) The relational shift: From bad to better, good to great. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be used as a powerful method from which coaches can emotionally connect with the participants’ stories in order to better understand how they might operate within the coach-athlete relationship to influence student-athlete resilience.
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SECTION 1: Brief Introduction

Personal Narrative and Mission

While I liked the technical aspect of each sport I played, I loved sport because of the relationships I cultivated with my teammates and coaches. In this sense, I viewed sport as a social arena. I felt it was the best of both worlds: I was able to do what I loved (e.g., play sport) and also connect with others who were similar to me. In this sense, sport was more than a platform for technical play – it was a battleground from which to play for and protect my people. Thus, I wanted to positively contribute to the team and am grateful for how my team contributed to me in a multitude of ways. One such way was by influencing my resilience.

I have always been intrigued by the concept of resilience; yet, I have noticed a void that needed to be filled in regard to how it has been conceptualized in the sport psychology literature. Reminiscing on my athletic career, I understood resilience as something that could be influenced through my relationship with others. While I do not discredit my inherent abilities to positively adapt through major stress, I knew from an early age that my ability to be resilient also ebbed and flowed dependent upon the quality of relationships or connection I had with others. That is, if I was surrounded by supportive others, I felt I was better able to mobilize my resilience. If I was surrounded by others who brought me down, I felt my resilience was weakened. In terms of coaching, it was clear to me that when coaches yelled and screamed it did not edify my abilities to be resilient but rather created more stress. In contrast, when coaches supported and cared for me it alleviated some of the stress. Joining my personal experience with the current status of resilience research in sport, I believe I have an obligation to investigate how resilience develops and functions within sport relationships.

Connecting my mission with the current study, I also believe that resilience might develop and operate differently within each sport relationship. For instance, while I would
argue that a verbally aggressive coach negatively influences my resilience, I also consider that other athletes might argue that verbally aggressive coaches positively influence their resilience. In this sense, I situate myself in the social constructivist paradigm, which specifically contends that how participants perceive the development resilience within relationships is subjective and largely influenced by their respective environments. Thus, to gather their unique experiences, I have chosen narrative inquiry as my methodological approach in order to better understand how resilience develops and operates within each respective coach-athlete relationship.
SECTION 2: Manuscript

Introduction

Researchers have demonstrated resilience to be positively associated with an individual’s mastery orientation and perceived competence (Vitali, Bortoli, Bertinato, Robazza, & Schena, 2015), tangible and informational social support from the coach (Lu, Lee, Chang, Chou, Hsu, Lin, & Gill, 2016), and sport achievement and psychological well-being (Nazhad & Besharat, 2010). Some researchers even argue that resilience is a prerequisite for optimal sport performance (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills, Butt, Maynard, & Harwood, 2012; Van Yperen, 2009). In this sense, sport psychology researchers largely have examined resilience as an individual construct. Yet, in general, an individual’s resilience also has the ability to function and develop within relationships (Jordan, 2010). While relationships in sport, specifically the coach-athlete relationship, have received ample attention in the literature (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; LaVoi, 2007) resilience as a relational construct has not yet been explored. Relational-cultural theorists (Miller, 1976)—a second wave feminist thought that has been taken up by those in psychology (Jordan, 2000) and counseling (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons, & Salazar, 2008; Duffey & Somody, 2011)—furthers our understanding of how to relationally build resilience in sport. A fruitful relationship that has been deemed as one of the most influential relationships in sport is the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2000; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). As a sport psychology researcher, I am interested in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) student-athletes’ experiences with the coach-athlete relationship and how this relationship influences their ability to be resilient through major stress.
Resilience in Sport

Galli and Gonzalez (2015) stated that individuals who are able to achieve optimal performance in the midst of extreme adversity are respected, and, at times, awarded for their resilience. In this sense, sport psychology researchers and practitioners have been intrigued by what constitutes resilience and how it functions in sport. In general, an individual’s resilience is composed of two main components: the type of situational adversity s/he faces and his/her positive adaptation to it (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015). Thus, sport psychology researchers have explored both components.

In terms of adversity characteristics in sport, Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, and Fletcher (2009) interviewed 12 sport performers ranging in ages from 19-56 years, asking them to identify factors indicative of sport adversity. Participant responses were categorized into five performance (e.g., preparation, injury, expectations, self-presentation, and rivalry) and five organizational factors (e.g., factors intrinsic to the sport, roles in the sport organization, sport relationships and interpersonal demands, athletic career and performance development issues, and organizational structure and climate of the sport). Tammenin, Holt, and Neely (2013) interviewed five elite athletes between the ages of 18-23 years about their experiences of sport adversity. Participants identified a range of adverse situations such as performance slumps, coach conflicts, bullying, eating disorders, injuries, and sexual abuse, which further contributed to feelings of isolation and withdrawal, emotional disruption, and questioning identity as an athlete (Tamminen, Holt, & Neely, 2013).

Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) extended what is known about adversity in sport by offering the first definition of psychological resilience in sport, which marked an important shift in how adversity is conceptualized in sport. They defined psychological resilience in sport as “the role
of mental processes and behavior in promoting personal assets and protecting an individual from the potential negative effect of stressors” (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012, p. 675). Per this definition, Fletcher and Sarkar introduced the neutral term “stressor” in place of “adversity,” given that adversity insinuates negative circumstances. Rather, their research demonstrated that resilience can be exercised amidst circumstances that are deemed as positive (e.g., transitioning to a higher level of play in sport). Thus, in line with Fletcher and Sarkar’s (2012) findings, the term “stressor” will be used for this study.

After Fletcher and Sarkar’s (2012) study, Sarkar, Fletcher, and Brown (2015) followed up by interviewing 10 Olympic gold medalists about stressful experiences in sport. Their results revealed an array of stressors such as not being re-selected to compete, sporting failure, political unrest, serious injury, and the death of a family member (Sarkar, Fletcher, & Brown, 2015). Due to the wide range of stressors reported in previous literature, researchers have argued that it is not “if an athlete will encounter [stressors] in sport, but instead how will they respond when [stressors] occur?” (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015, p. 243). One such response regards the second main component of resilience, positive adaptation.

Schinke et al. (2012) have referred to positive adaptation in sport as “the athlete’s ability and capacity to act and react competently to stressors perceived as significant in a sport context by restoring an internal sense of emotional and psychological balance” (p. 281). Schinke et al. (2012) also identified Lazarus’ (2000) adaptation encounter as a fruitful way to understand the adaptation response. The adaptation encounter is composed of four factors such as the appraisal of stressors, coping strategies, self-regulation attempts, and a consolidated adaptation. For example, individuals’ positive adaption response to a stressful event begins with how they appraise the stressor and its significance (i.e., appraisal of stressors). Once
appraised, individuals use various coping strategies (e.g., breathing techniques) as self-regulation attempts to either suppress or heighten emotions, alter environmental conditions, or reevaluate the importance of the stressor. Next, individuals undergo a consolidated adaptation process, which is representative of restoring balance in their life that, in turn, results in gained insight and growth toward learning how to positively adapt in the future. Given that sport is a ripe environment from which stressors are inevitable, researchers have sought to understand how resilience, or the process of positive adaptation to stress, operates in sport.

Using Richardson’s (2002) and colleagues (Richardson et al., 1990) resiliency model as a guiding framework, Galli and Vealey (2008) interviewed current and former college and professional athletes who were identified by their coach or peers as demonstrating resilience during a difficult circumstance encountered while participating in sport. Their results offered the first conceptual model of the athlete resilience process; they found that the resilience process was composed of five general dimensions: breadth and duration (i.e., general dimensions of time and space), agitation (i.e., coping strategies to overcome unpleasant emotions and mental struggles), personal resources (i.e., personality traits such as determinations, competitiveness, commitment, maturity, and persistence), sociocultural influences (i.e., supportive others; racial and structural factors), and positive outcomes (i.e., growth through learning).

Galli and Vealey’s (2008) conceptual model of sport resilience posits that athletes first experience major stress, which is generated by a stage of agitation composed of unpleasant emotions, cognitive and behavioral coping strategies, and mental struggles. Bolstering the agitation phase, athletes identified personal resources and sociocultural factors as operating to either facilitate or hinder the resilience process. Interestingly, all athletes mentioned that they
benefitted and, thus, positively adapted from the stressor in so much as the stressor and the consequence of agitation added to their personal resources (e.g., strengthening personality traits) and sociocultural factors (e.g., better awareness of their social support and athlete identity). In this sense, all five general dimensions of sport resilience worked together to form the process of athlete resilience (Galli & Vealey, 2008).

Inspired by the work of Galli and Vealey (2008), Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) extended knowledge of resilience in sport by offering various psychological factors indicative of athlete resilience such as achievement motivation (e.g., passion for sport, social recognition, goal attainment), social support (e.g., family, coaches, teammates, support staff), focus (e.g., not distracted by others, process rather than outcome focused), confidence (e.g., high levels of self-awareness, preparation, experience), and positive personality (e.g., openness, innovative, emotional stability, optimistic).

Relational Resilience

Thus far, sport psychology researchers have examined what factors contribute to athlete resilience and how resilient athletes function within sport. However, according to relational-cultural theory (RCT; Miller, 1976), “individuals’ lives are made in relational contexts” (Walker, 2002, p. 2) that are constructed through interactions with culture. Further, RCT theorists claim that all psychological growth occurs in relationships. In contrast, when individuals move out of connection and into isolation, psychological distress occurs. In this sense, RCT theorists view resilience as a relational construct that can be developed as individuals “move back into connection following disconnection” via the "capacity to reach out for help" (Jordan, 2010, p. 31).
RCT theorists also define growth-fostering relationships (GFRs)—high-quality interpersonal connections—as a way to build relational resilience via the three building blocks of mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and authenticity. As individuals engage in GFRs, both relational partners begin to experience increases in (a) energy, (b) knowledge and transparency about one’s own experience, the other person, and the relationship, (c) creativity and productivity, (d) sense of worth, and (e) a desire for more connection and differentiation (Miller & Stiver, 1997). However, these five core outcomes of GFRs are endangered by the threat of disconnection, which largely is impacted by “the multiple social identities operating in that particular relationship and in the relational surround at any given moment” (Walker, 2002, p. 2). In this sense, RCT researchers understand that an individual’s sociocultural background (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, race, socio-economic class) may be subject to the negative effects of culturally-generated sexism, homophobia, racism, religious insensitivity, and classism. Likewise, RCT theorists acknowledges that such negative effects are often times cultivated and perpetuated by those in power and may contribute to psychological suffering and hinder relational resilience (Jordan, 2010).

In regard to power, Foucault (1979) situates power as a relational construct given that those considered power figures (e.g., coaches) are allotted more discourse as a resource from which to exercise their power. Such discourse used by power figures are identified via the three modes of human objectification: dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification, which are “invented and put to work in different types of societies as an instrument…or as a weapon” (Foucault, 2010, p. 6). *Dividing practices* is a particular society’s way of objectifying those individuals who should be isolated from that society (e.g., injured athletes are often times isolated from the team). Similar to dividing practice but containing a
different style of discourse, *scientific classification* is characterized by the discourses used to define and structure acceptable disciplines, which, in turn, determines who can partake in such human practices (e.g., able-bodied athletes, non-injured athletes, are the standard for what constitutes acceptable subjects for sport). Foucault (2010) also identified *subjectification* as a way in which humans turn themselves into an objectified subject. As the less powerful individual in the relationship (e.g., student-athletes) interact with power figures (e.g., coaches), they are more likely to submit to the power figures rules and regulations in order to be classified as worthy to partake in sport.

Considering sociocultural factors, previous research identified African American athletes who experienced the racist beliefs of their coaches reported heightened feelings of loneliness and alienation amidst such racism (Olsen, 1968). In spite of these results, Coakley (2015) argued that American sport enthusiasts largely believe the Great Sport Myth (GSM; Coakley, 2015), which contends that sport is inherently good and automatically assigns goodness to those who play or consume it. In this sense, individuals who adhere to the GSM do not believe that sport should be critically analyzed from a cultural lens since their cultural understanding of sport already is as it should be (Coakley, 2015). Thus, the GSM, a prominent stance of American culture, fails to address the potential negative effects of culturally-generated sexism, homophobia, racism, religious insensitivity, and classism not only within sport as a whole but also as it might operate within the coach-athlete relationship to influence student-athlete resilience (Coakley, 2015).

**Statement of the Problem**

Overall, sport psychology researchers have predominantly examined resilience as an individual construct and have yet to consider how sport resilience might develop and operate in
relationship. Considering RCT (Miller, 1976), this relationship is influenced by unique sport sociocultural factors and power dynamics working together to create the climate of the relationship (Jordan, 2010). Similarly, Foucault (2010) contends that power is already embedded in every relationship. In this sense, coaches are inherently allocated more relational power since they have historically been positioned as “power-ridden” authority figures (Potrac & Jones, 2009, p. 223) who also are deemed as “a crucial determinant” in nurturing or hindering athlete psychological well-being and performance (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003, p. 884). To illustrate, Denison (2007) highlighted commonly accepted coaching practices (e.g., assigning training regimes, space, timetables) as “prescribed techniques [that are used] to mold [athletes] into the vision of a productive competitor” (p. 378); this, in turn, has likely contributed to the objectification of athletes and the production of athletes that blindly follow the coach’s orders (e.g., Foucault, 1979). Unfortunately, no research to date has explored how power within the coach-athlete relationship operates to influence student-athlete resilience. Given that sport is an educational environment where power figures, particularly the coach at the collegiate level holds prominent influence regarding athlete well-being and performance (Hellstedt, 1987; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). Thus, the coach-athlete relationship, as it is influenced by its respective sociocultural factors and power dynamics, will be the avenue from which student-athlete resilience will be examined in the current study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively examine National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I (DI) student-athletes’ experiences with the coach-athlete relationship and how this relationship influences their ability to be resilient through major stress. More specifically, NCAA DI student-athletes were interviewed about their experiences
with the (a) coach-athlete relationship as it was influenced by power and sociocultural factors during student-athlete major stress, and (b) how this resulting relationship influenced student-athlete resilience.

**Research Questions**

The current study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- **RQ1**: What are NCAA DI student-athletes’ perceptions of how the coach-athlete relationship influences student-athlete resilience?
- **RQ2**: What are NCAA DI student-athletes’ experiences with power within the coach-athlete relationship and how it is used to influence student-athlete resilience?
- **RQ3**: What are NCAA DI student-athletes’ experiences with sociocultural factors within the coach-athlete relationship and how they are used to influence student-athlete resilience?

**Methodology**

I chose a narrative inquiry design for this investigation due to its ontological and epistemological stance aligning well with social constructivism (Bruner, 1996; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) and the research questions. Narrative inquiry is an important and useful qualitative way of both theorizing and conducting research in the field of sport and exercise psychology (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Specifically, social constructivists claim epistemologically that we understand ourselves and the world as subjective; thus, our reality (ontology) is shaped by how we perceive, know, and interpret it (epistemology; Spector-Mersel, 2010). Within the narrative inquiry framework, we know what we know through stories; further, according to Smith and Sparkes (2010), narrative inquiry is shaped by six assumptions:

1. Narrative inquiry is shaped by interpretivism.
2. Humans are storytelling beings. We construct stories based upon our respective cultures to help us make sense of them.

3. Narrative is a means to knowing not only ourselves but also others and the world around us.

4. Humans live ‘storied’ lives in so much as “we live in, through, and out stories” (p. 80).

5. Humans make meaning and use narratives as cultural resources to do so.

6. Stories are subjective and influenced by internal and external sociocultural factors (see pp. 80-81).

From this storied framework, narrative inquiry allows the researcher to develop relationships with the participants, which contributes to the co-construction of the participants’ multifaceted stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative interview provides an opportunity to create a dynamic and interactive environment where the researcher “enters into and explores the story with the participant such that they co-construct it together” through the back and forth dialogue between the researcher and the participant (Beuthin, 2014, p. 13). As the participants allowed me (the researcher) to enter into their stories, I actively stayed engaged during our interactions in order to shape my probing questions around the stories they offered. For instance, at various points in the interview, I would share, in the moment, with participants the overall theme I identified from their respective stories throughout the interview. This opened up productive dialogue from which the participants organically clarified how they would best label the overarching theme for that particular story. Specifically, one of the participants continually used the term “forgiveness” throughout the interview. Thus, I stated, “forgiveness seems to be a theme throughout your story. Tell me more about forgiveness.” The
participant provided further clarification by stating that “forgiveness” could be better understood as “reassurance,” which then, through continued dialogue, evolved into the participant labeling the theme “acknowledge and validate.” This mindful engagement provided a safe environment where co-construction between myself and participants occurred (Riessman, 2008).

**The Researcher**

As the primary researcher, I recognized that the co-construction of this research project was influenced by my personal values and characteristics throughout the entirety of the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). For instance, how my reality was historically constructed by family members, friends, and colleagues could not be left at the door as I interacted with each participant, which influenced the co-construction process (Bignold & Su, 2013). Additionally, I potentially influenced the participants’ responses by my gender, clothing, accent, speech pattern, body language, and voice intonations for indications toward acceptable responses (Mishler, 1986). Lastly, the co-construction continued into the data analysis and the manuscript writing phase as I began to thematically make sense of the participants’ similarities and differences among their stories (Riessman, 2005). Considering how I might influence the entirety of the study, it is necessary to provide my positionality to this particular research study in order to best understand how I might have influenced its co-construction.

I am a Caucasian, cisgender, heterosexual, female who grew up in a middle-class, heterosexual, non-divorced family in Huntsville, Alabama where my mother raised my brother and I as Southern Baptist Christians. Currently, I no longer attend church or identify as a Southern Baptist Christian. For me, my spirituality is found in the relational connections I
encounter. I value authentic relationships in all contexts. That is, when I felt I was interacting with individuals that were being genuine with me, I was encouraged to be my genuine self as well. As both of us functioned authentically within the relationship, I felt our relationship was strengthened and operated to positively influence my well-being. In contrast, when I experienced inauthentic relationships, I felt that I was not able to be my genuine self largely due to the fact that I felt the other relational partner was not being authentic. This type of relationship, for me, was only superficial, at best, which did not operate to positively influence my well-being. Considering sport, I have experienced authentic and inauthentic relationships; upon reflection, I realized the inauthentic relationships negatively influenced me in so much as they created additional stress. In contrast, I noticed that the authentic relationships helped me to mobilize my resilience that, consequently, alleviated my stress.

Participants. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to gather a total of seven current (n = 1) or former (n = 6) NCAA DI student-athletes participated in this study. To gather participant sociocultural factors, Hays’ (1996) ADDRESSING acronym was used to solicit the following demographics: Age: 21 to 25 years (M = 23.6 years); Developmental disabilities: no physical, cognitive, sensory, or psychiatric disabilities were reported; Religion and spiritual orientation: Christian (n = 2), Muslim (n = 1), Agnostic (n = 1), None (n = 3); Ethnic and racial identity: Caucasian (n = 5), Middle Eastern (n = 1), Hispanic (n = 1); Socio-economic class: low-class (n = 2), middle-class (n = 3), upper-to middle-class (n = 2); Sexual orientation: Heterosexual (n = 5), homosexual (n = 1), Bisexual (n = 1); Indigenous heritage: native to American (n = 5), non-native to America (n = 2); National origin: born in the United States (n = 5), Iraq (n = 1), and Mexico (n = 1); and Gender: Female (n = 3), Male (n = 4). Additional demographics included participants’ total years in their respective sport (5 to 20
years; $M = 13.7$ years), total years on the NCAA DI team (3 to 5 years; $M = 4.1$ years), and scholarship status (2 no, 3 partial, and 2 full scholarship) with each participant representing a different sport: women’s basketball, swimming, diving, wrestling, baseball, cross country/track and field, and rowing.

**Procedures**

**Interview schedule.** A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix A), which promotes the story of the participant, was used for this study (Riessman, 2008) and was informed by relational-cultural theory (RCT; Miller, 1976), literature pertaining to resilience in sport (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Galli & Vealey, 2008), and literature related to power dynamics in general (Foucault, 2010) and within the context of sport (Cassidy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008; Potrac & Jones, 2009). After providing general demographics, I prompted participants to talk about the (a) time they dealt with their respective major stress and (b) the kind of relationship they had with their coach during this time. Following these questions, I asked participants questions informed by RCT, such as how the kind of relationship they had with their coach during their major stress influenced their abilities to (a) reach out to their coach for help while experiencing the major stress, and (b) be resilient through the major stress. I then framed follow-up questions around how power and sociocultural factors within the relationship influenced the coach-athlete relationship, and, in turn, student-athlete resilience. Interviews were concluded by asking participants to discuss what they ideally needed from the coach during their major stress. Although the interview questions were created in order to provide direction for the interview, the participants largely controlled the flow of the interviews. For instance, I began the interview by reminding the participants of the purpose of the interview—that our time together was simply a platform from which their voice could be heard to whatever
capacity they felt comfortable sharing. I also discussed my overall mission for this study: To investigate how resilience develops and functions within sport relationships because I feel I have an obligation to better define what a safe NCAA DI sport environment resembles for student-athletes so they can have a better sporting experience. My vulnerability from the onset of the interview process provided a more productive power dynamic where participants seemed to feel more comfortable to sharing in-depth, rich stories about their experiences (Riessman, 2008) and largely is what, I believe, contributed to the anticipated 90-minute interview lasting twice as long.

**Bracketing interview.** Upon receiving institutional IRB approval, (see Appendix B), and prior to conducting the main study interviews, I participated in an audiotaped bracketing interview in order to identify assumptions and biases related to the interview questions (Tufford, 2012). This procedure aligned well with a general interpretivist approach, which narrative inquiry supports given that it provides an opportunity to see how my perceptions of the world might interact with the participants. A “critical friend” (Eley, 2012)—a trained qualitative researcher who is a member of my academic network but has little theoretical or research knowledge regarding RCT—interviewed me to help me better understand what assumptions I hold for each question asked on the interview schedule. After completing the bracketing interview, the interview was thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic content analysis—the same data analysis process used for the main study interviews. The themes that arose from my bracketing interview were the influence of (a) social norms, (b) past trauma, (c) discourse of religion, and (d) post-traumatic growth.

To elaborate, concerning social norms, I hold the assumption that sport is a platform where crying is not considered an acceptable response to any sport situation; yet, for me,
crying, at times, is a form of coping. Thus, if I were to cry during my major stress, I felt “weak” in the coaches’ eyes. I internalized this perceived “weakness,” which negatively influenced how I perceived my abilities to overcome major stress. I also assume that individuals who have experienced past traumas are better able to positively adapt to major stress given that they have been provided more opportunities to develop their resilience.

Considering the discourse of religion, I believe religion has a way of providing individuals with a greater purpose to focus upon during their major stress, but I also contend that it has the ability to shame. For example, I vividly remember being told by my church community, “It could be worse,” encouraging me not to focus on my stress but rather God because that is what a good Christian would do. Thus, I tried to be a good Christian and focus on God rather than my stressor; yet, my stress was never alleviated. What I needed was to be acknowledged, validated, and supported by the very individuals who directed me to give it over to God. Given that I grew up in the Bible Belt of the South - Huntsville, Alabama - my coaches often adopted these same shaming messages. While they never directly told me to “rely on God,” they did often brush off my major stress by telling me to deal with it in church because “the big man upstairs handles that kind of stuff.”

Lastly, I hold the assumption that all stress has the ability to lead to post-traumatic growth if individuals choose to view their respective situation as an opportunity for growth rather than an inconvenient obstacle. While I more so experienced coaches who added stress, I did feel that I had an inherent inclination toward being resilient. I vividly remember being extremely frustrated at my coach for ignoring us after we lost by two points in overtime. I went to the locker room crying, but I came out with a sense of pride in knowing that even though my coach was trying to tear me down, it was only going to make me stronger. Yet, when reflecting,
I am aware that I wasted my time being frustrated at the coach rather than being able to focus on my major stress or on how resilience I was in the face of my stressor.

Once I began the data collection and analysis process, I juxtaposed my bracketing interview with the participants’ transcripts. By continually engaging with the themes from my bracketing interview throughout the entirety of the investigation, it helped me to see where I might have imposed my biases. To facilitate this continual reflection, I used a researcher’s journal from which to keep note of how my biases might have interacted with the participants’ stories.

**Researcher journal.** Mason (2002) has emphasized the importance of reflexive research by highlighting the researcher’s responsibility to “constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their ‘data’” (p. 6). In this sense, the researcher’s journal (see Appendix C) allowed me to keep constant check of any personal biases that arose as the interview data was collected, analyzed and written. Additionally, as I engaged with various scholarly articles, podcasts, or conversations that connected with this research study, I noted it in the researcher’s journal.

**Pilot interview.** Pilot interviews are conducted as a way to build the trustworthiness of the study (Kim, 2011) and try out the interview schedule in order to learn what questions might be confusing, need rewording, are useless, or need to be added (Sampson, 2004). In addition to testing the flow and sequencing of the questions, the pilot interview also helped to determine if the questions were culturally appropriate (Kim, 2010). The pilot interview was conducted with a former NCAA DI student-athlete who (a) self-identified as positively adapting through major stress while participating in sport, and (b) was more than five years removed from graduating as to not impose upon a potential participant for the main study interviews. The pilot interview
participant was a 26 years old former (6 years removed) NCAA DI cross country student-athlete who had no developmental disabilities, was not religious, identified as Caucasian, middle-class, heterosexual, native to America, born in the United States, and female. The pilot interview was recorded and analyzed in order for me to make appropriate changes to the interview guide before beginning participant interviews. For example, after conducting the pilot interview, I decided to prompt the participants to not only write down their own sociocultural factors but also what they knew of their coaches’ sociocultural factors on a piece of paper in order for them to have a reference list from which to answer the remaining questions. This change was made per the feedback of the pilot interviewee who mentioned that writing down the sociocultural factors would help her remember them as she was prompted to reference them in in later interview questions. This provided a better flow for the interview.

**Main study interviews.** To gather participants for this study, I first contacted voluntary informants who had self-identified as meeting the criteria for this study through informal conversations related to my work as an academic counselor and expressed participation interest. These informal conversations, after learning that I was a Ph.D. student, often times evolved into asking about my research, which provided the opportunity to discuss the parameters of the study. After disseminating such parameters, the individual would naturally begin to share how her/his story aligned well with the study’s criteria and organically expressed interest in wanting to participant once the data collection phase began. Criteria for participation included being a current or former NCAA DI student-athlete who experienced a major stress and demonstrated positive adaptation while being a student-athlete. Student-athlete major stress and positive adaptation were defined using Galli and Vealey’s (2008) conceptual model of sport resilience. Major stress was indicative of a circumstance that is
identified by participants as having caused agitation, marked by feelings of unpleasant emotions (e.g., sad, angry, frustrated, embarrassed, hurt, confused, and neglected), cognitive and behavioral coping strategies, and mental struggles or questioning (Galli & Vealey, 2008). Furthermore, participants self-identified as having positively adapted through the major stress during sport participation, marked by any one of the following: (a) perceived to become stronger or better after the circumstance, (b) learned valuable lessons from their experience, (c) gained a new outlook on their sport or life, (d) increased awareness of importance of social support, or (e) motivated to support others through adversity (Galli & Vealey, 2008).

Eight participants who met the criteria were initially contacted via email ($n = 4$) or other electronic media sites (e.g., Instagram; $n = 4$) where I notified them that the data collection process had begun and inquired if they were still interested in participating in the study (see Appendix D). Out of the eight participants initially contact, seven expressed interest and were available to participate. The eighth participant expressed interest but did not have the availability to participate. Snowball sampling, a type of purposeful sampling, (Patton, 2002) was used to identify other potential participants, which allowed me to ask for assistance from each participant to identify other participants who might meet the selection criteria. I began this process by asking participants to ask other NCAA DI student-athletes that they deemed matched the study criteria to either (a) contact me directly or (b) provide me with their contact information after receiving permission from the potential participant to do so. I contacted three additional participants via email with no response received. Once participants were identified and agreed to participate in the study, the informed consent (see Appendix E) and interview schedule were distributed via email. Consent to participate in the study was obtained prior to the start of the interview.
Interviews were conducted one-on-one via Skype \((n = 4)\) or in-person \((n = 3)\) depending upon what was most convenient and comfortable for the participant. In the case of remote interviewing, virtual interviews (e.g., Skype) were used as the main mode of data collection given that this platform was most similar to in-person interviews. That is, virtual interviewing provided access to both verbal and nonverbal cues of the participant (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014). Before the start of the interview, the participants were given an opportunity to choose a pseudonym for themselves to promote confidentiality. Interviews lasted approximately 2.5 to 3 hours \((M_{time} = 2:36, SD = 17:07)\), were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

**Member checking.** Once interviews were transcribed verbatim, I emailed the completed transcripts to each participant. However, it should be noted that Smith and McGannon (2017) called into question the rigor of this procedure on a multitude of levels. First and foremost, they agreed with the general statement of Thomas (2017) who claimed that there is “no evidence that routine member checks enhance the credibility or trustworthiness of qualitative research” (p. 37). To elaborate, Smith and McGannon (2017) questioned participant engagement with the member checking process, the inherent power dynamics between the researcher and participant, and possibility that researcher and participant might encounter interpretations of the findings that contradict each other (Sparkes & Smith, 2010). They argued further that member checking does not alleviate any of the aforementioned problems in order to enhance trustworthiness.

While the rigor of member checking has been called into question, it was used for this study in order to create continued dialogue between the researcher and participant (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This process aligned well with narrative inquiry as it provided a platform from
which to produce richer relationships with the participants as the study progressed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participants were provided the opportunity to examine their transcribed interviews to ensure that the transcript was an accurate representation of what they stated in their interview (Patton, 2002). Participants also were given the opportunity to provide feedback as it pertained to (a) additional information they would like to provide, and (b) clarification regarding the intended meaning of a particular portion of the transcription (Riessman, 2008). As the researcher, I also solicited participant feedback by asking specific clarification questions regarding the participants’ experiences so I would not put my own interpretation onto their stories. Four of the seven participants were asked to provide feedback and three did. For example, Zane mentioned his coach’s particular leadership style multiple times throughout the interview. In my follow-up email to him, I asked if he would be willing to elaborate upon how he would describe his coach’s leadership style. I asked Laurel to clarify what she meant when she repeatedly mentioned her “coach’s personality,” and I asked Steve to elaborate upon what he meant when he said the coach “didn’t make him feel good about himself.” What did he mean exactly by that and how it influenced his resilience? The clarified portions received via email (see Appendix F) created a fruitful dialogue that enhanced the richness of the transcripts and were inserted into the respective areas on each participant’s transcript in order to provide better understanding of the participant’s words once data analysis started.

After I addressed participant feedback, participants were emailed the finalized copy of the thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013). During this time, all participants were, again, provided the opportunity to give feedback to solicit further discussion pertaining to the study (Riessman,
No feedback regarding the thematic analysis or composite narrative was obtained after sending the finalized copy of the thematic analysis.

**Peer debriefer and critical friend.** I also practiced reflexivity by having regular conversations with a peer debriefer (my doctoral advisor) and a critical friend (Eley, 2012). My doctoral advisor provided a necessary dimension, which challenged my thought process— influenced by my personal and academic interests—throughout the entire research process. Specifically, my doctoral advisor and myself met on a weekly basis to discuss the evolving nature of the themes. She helped keep me in check with how these findings either aligned or strayed from my biases. In addition, I used a critical friend who is a member of my academic network but has little theoretical or research knowledge regarding RCT. This individual largely challenged me to consider the theoretical underpinnings of the findings as they evolved into the final thematic map for the study. Through these various avenues of reflexivity (e.g., researcher journal, peer debriefer, critical friend), I was provided an opportunity to see how my worldview as the primary researcher ebbed and flowed in interaction with the data being gathered and analyzed (Potter, 1996). For instance, my bracketing interview revealed religion as a main theme that influenced my conceptualization of resilience as a relational construct. I was surprised that the seven participants of the current study did not credit religion or their spirituality as influential to the coach-athlete relationship or their resilience. In addition, I formed an audit trail (Cutcliffe, 2003; Finlay, 2002), which delineated the research process as it evolved. This involved various memos that held record of the content generated in various meetings with the peer debriefer and critical friend, the thought process as data was collected, and how themes were created and evolved across the analysis process (see Appendix G).
**Data Analysis**

I used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic content analysis, which served as a good fit for this research because its purpose is to: (a) inquire about the participants’ experiences and understandings regarding a particular phenomenon; (b) use interviews for data collection purposes; (c) can be used with a small or large data sets; and (d) employ an inductive research approach (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six phases of thematic analysis, which should not be viewed as linear but rather promotes a process that is more fluid in nature. Phase one entailed *familiarizing yourself with the data*, which is marked by transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and recording preliminary findings. The second phase regarded the *generation of initial codes*, which involved systematically coding interesting features about the data across each transcript and collecting data pertinent to each code. The critical friend accompanied me in this phase as well as the remaining four phases. The third phase referred to *searching for themes*, which included collecting codes across cases that are characteristic of potential themes. The fourth phase included a *review of the generated themes*, which determined if themes work in relation to the extracted codes and the entire data set. During this phase, the critical friend verified if the original codes were robustly represented in the generated themes. Likewise, the peer debriefer (e.g., doctoral advisor) challenged my thought process as codes and themes were generated. After these two stages were complete, a thematic map was generated for each theme. The fifth phase involved *defining and naming the themes*, which refined the specifics of each theme and the overall analysis narrative (see Appendix H). The last phase referred to the *production of the report*, which is the final opportunity for analysis. This step included the selection process of
provocative participant examples, connecting the themes back to the research question and pertinent literature, and producing a scholarly report for publication.

**Findings**

In this section, the findings of this study are conveyed as a composite first person composite narrative—inspired by the work of Larsen (2016)—which is a compelling way to present the research findings as it allows readers to better situate themselves, on a personal level, within the thematic story (Todres, 2008). In this sense, stories of the participants are not simply recited (Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh, & Marlow, 2011); rather, their stories are interpreted in order to bring significance to the data (Kramp, 2004). Thus, I have chosen to convey the participants’ stories in the form of an open letter to coaches to provide a powerful method for the reader to emotionally connect with the participants’ stories in order to better understand how coaches might operate within the coach-athlete relationship to influence student-athlete resilience. Each section of the open letter uses participants’ direct quotes, which are interwoven together by phrases added by me to create a single, co-constructed narrative. Participants’ direct quotes are presented in italics with participants’ pseudonyms noted at the end of each quote.

The open letter to coaches begins with a prologue, which quickly situates readers to the context of the participants’ stories. Next, each main section of the open letter serves as the major themes. Eight major themes I identified from the participants’ narratives: (a) **Student-athlete core resilience** (b) **The W.O.A.T.**, (c) **The G.O.A.T.**, (d) **W.O.A.T. coach behaviors**, (e) **G.O.A.T. coach behaviors**, (f) **The W.O.A.T., the G.O.A.T., and student-athlete resilience**, (g) **The effects of coach major stress on student-athlete resilience**, and (h) **The relational shift:**
From bad to better, good to great. The themes were named verbatim from the participants’ words or inspired by the overarching theme of their respective stories.

Though this section is presented as a composite first-person narrative in the form of an open letter written by one NCAA DI student-athlete, negative influences of the coach-athlete relationship on student-athlete resilience were primarily experienced by Cade, Jane, Prince, Steve, and Zane. In contrast, positive influences of the coach-athlete relationship on student-athlete resilience were primarily experienced by Alex and Laurel. Out of the seven participants, three reported a shift in the coach-athlete relationship from either bad to better (Cade and Steve) or from good to great (Laurel). It is also important to note that the shift in the coach-athlete relationship occurred toward the end of their collegiate sport careers (e.g., Junior and Senior year). Due to the intense and specific nature of the participants’ major stressors, I have changed some identifying information (e.g., specifics of the major stress, gendered language) to protect participant confidentiality.

Prologue

I was interviewed today about how the relationship I had with my coaches influenced my ability to be resilient through major stress. Being able to share my story in the interview—while kind of frustrating to re-experience—made me think about all the adversity I went through and how many things I overcame (Prince). I battled an autoimmune disease, sitting in a hospital bed thinking [I] was going to die (Zane). I experienced a torn ACL…that was career ending (Jane & Prince). I faced the sickness …and then later death of a [loved one] (Jane). I overcame the toll …of [my] parent’s separation (Steve). I endured chronic injuries that eventually manifested as a torn hip labrum (Laurel). I survived seeing blood everywhere after I experienced a traumatic head injury (Alex). I struggled with the fear of coming out as gay
(Cade) and the discomfort of being bi-sexual …because it made some of [my] teammates uncomfortable (Jane). I felt the terror when my teammate called [me] crying one night after they had been raped (Cade). While some might call these circumstances toxic, others might label them as mega or even deathly; thus, I will use the term Toxic Mega [death] (Zane) to refer to all the major stress experienced.

In honor of finally being without resentment towards [you,] my coaches (Jane) and to make sure [you] know the impact [you] made on [me] (Laurel), the following is a letter addressing all the things I wish I would have told [you] while I was experiencing Toxic Mega [death]. Before I begin, though, please know that this shit is hard. I don’t want to talk about it (Prince) now, and I [certainly] didn’t want to talk about it then…which wasn’t necessarily fair [to you] because … [you] had no idea …that my life changed …but [you] also weren’t asking me about it. I guess this is my last shot at hoping to finally be heard.

**Student-Athlete Core Resilience**

Dear coaches, please understand that, to get to this point, I have mastered pushing through obstacles and maneuvering my way around them (Prince). I am a resilient person at my core (Jane), because I am positive, focused, motivated, confident, and surrounded by a great group of others who provided me with support external to you.

**Positive.** For me, I always thought, “Why not look at things in a positive way?” (Prince). I remember being so weak and sick but I had a good attitude going through all of that (Zane). Even when [you thought] I couldn’t come back, I turned it into a positive in that I made it [my] mission to prove [you] wrong (Zane). You see, I’m optimistic to a fault (Laurel). I just kind of go with the flow and I am happy (Cade).
Focused. I was focused on being the best I could be (Steve) and working my butt off to get back (Alex). That was one of the biggest reasons why I had a good attitude going through all of that, [because] the vision that I had. I was so sick, but the whole time I was like this is going to be really cool, just wait. (Zane). To accomplish that, I would cross out the things that I couldn’t do [because of Toxic Mega death] and focus on the things that I could do. I would write them down and try to …keep my mind busy with the things I could accomplish (Prince).

Motivated. I also motivated myself …I had to be 100% intrinsically motivated otherwise there was no way of making it (Prince). I did a lot of self-coaching …self-discipline [to keep myself] motivated during [Toxic Mega death] (Steve). That is because my resiliency had a drive behind it …a passion, a heart-base (Zane).

Confident. Don’t get me wrong, I know that you saw me when I was scared and 18 coming into a new environment but you also saw me when I was confident and 21 (Cade). I’m super confident (Steve) …very confident in [my] skills (Laurel) to overcome. I have already been maneuvering [around obstacles] my whole life, so I am confident I can keep working my way around [them] (Prince).

Social support. You may or may not know that I found solace with my teammates …academic studies, with a couple professors that I really connected with that made my experience really meaningful (Jane). For example, I solely relied on my [partner], because this person wanted what was best for me. I also had to rely on my [old club coach] every three months [over the summer], who brought me lights of hope and strength that would get me through the year because [you] brought such disparity during the season (Steve). I couldn’t have survived Toxic Mega [death] without my parents. They both were the reason it was even possible [for me to] fight this battle. But, it was still weighing on me, because [my] parents not
only had to help me battle Toxic Mega [death] but also had to battle [you]. That was not their battle that they had to fight, but they were [still] on the forefront of it (Zane). Or, the time the athletic administrators came up to me and said that [they] were so proud of [me]. They read [my coming out] story and said how awesome [they] thought it was [that I had the courage to share my authentic self…, and if there was anything I ever needed from [them], to let [them] know. You see, I didn’t include [you as an external support] in [my overall resilience] story, because [everyone but you] was there through the entire process (Cade). So, while you might have doubted my resilience, what [you] saw wasn’t so much [lack of resilience] during [Toxic Mega death] …but added stress because of [your] lack of concern for my stressor (Jane).

The W.O.A.T.

I’m sure you’ve heard the expression the G.O.A.T. for the Greatest of All Time …well, I would like to use the term W.O.A.T. for [you], the Worst of All Time. It was just like a power-ego thing where [you were] kind of just doing it for [yourself]. You made it all about performing just for the sole purpose of making [you] look good, and when it came to actually caring about anyone…[you] were soul-less with an old-school mentality that promoted a one-sided, (Steve) hierarchical (Laurel) relationship. In this sense, [you were] like a coaching robot …We came in day-in, day-out. We did our workouts, checked-in, checked-out, and it was just like this cyclical thing [where you were] our coach, and we were [your] athletes …a transactional relationship (Cade), which was rampant with chronic disregard where [you and I] were not connecting; yet, we weren’t willing to mend to where we could connect. We were just going to say pleasantries, focus on the technicalities …and that’s it. This contributed to a vast number of weird vibes in our relationship because we communicated a lot nonverbally, which was really fucking dangerous because it was totally perception and [made our
relationship] ambiguous (Jane). As the W.O.A.T., you were constantly saying, “You can’t do this,” which then forced me to say, “Watch me. I told you so” (Zane).

You know, I am still perplexed by our disconnection because I saw so much similarity between us in the beginning. We both came from a small-town background, had a black cat growing up. We had this similar sense of humor with sarcasm, both Southern ...we just clicked (Jane). But, as the W.O.A.T., you let our similarities stop at just that, these socially constructed labels, which made [me] feel disconnected and resentful towards [you] ...because, while [you] understood me, [you] didn’t at the same time (Jane). I guess a lot of that disconnect happened because, for instance, people [thought you were] gay as well, but [we] didn’t know, because [you] never told [us] (Cade). If [you were] willing to talk to me about [yourself]. If I would have known that I was similar to [you]—that [you] understand me and I understand [you]—that would have allowed me to want to put more of my energy into making the team better, making myself better. It would have allowed me to trust [you] a lot more, because I could have identified with [you] a lot more (Cade).

The G.O.A.T.

I needed you to be the G.O.A.T., the Greatest of All Time, no matter how similar or different we were. For example, on the surface, [we might be] very different [as people] ...but it’s more about whether our values are similar. That is, while [we might not] have been very similar in a lot of ways ...[I] could have learned a lot about resilience from [you] because of [your] continual encouragement ...support ...understanding ...affirmations ...and unfailing belief in me ...then I could have given that [resilience] to others (Laurel). In this sense, the G.O.A.T. is like a coaching buddy (Cade), which is representative of a reciprocal relationship driven by a holistic coaching philosophy (Laurel), being more interested in [us] as people and
less as athletes...then, naturally, that would have bled over into the athletics side of it (Cade).

In order to get to know us as people, the G.O.A.T. wouldn’t just ask “Did anybody have tests this week? ...How did y’all do?” and leave it at that after people would say “Oh, I got an A.” No, you should have gone back and asked, “Hey, what was your test? ... Why are you taking math? Is it a class that you like? Is it a class that you have to take for your major? ...How much studying did you put into that? ...How did you manage to study so much for this test while still balancing all of the other things you did this week?” (Cade).

I remember some of my NCAA DI friends stating that they were initially nervous about talking to their coach during their freshman orientation meeting. They mentioned that [their coach] was very spiritual and that it played a huge part in [their coach’s] life. They felt that the issue was that they were only slightly spiritual and were worried that [their coach] wanted to talk with [them] about that, because [they] were on completely different levels. Thankfully, my friends were relieved that [their coach] didn’t even bring it up. It was as if the coach knew it wasn’t as much a part of [their lives] or something [that they] wanted to share, so that was never a part of [their] relationship. In contrast, my friends knew that was a big part of the relationship [their coach] had with [other teammates] because that was something they had in common. The moral of the story is that their particular coach never used [their] discrepancies [between their values] in that areas to not build up a compatibility in other areas (Laurel).

Unfortunately, [you] didn’t find the depth of [our] relationship because you didn’t ask [those questions] (Jane) or try to build up compatibility in other areas that we had in common. Finding the depth of our relationship would have let me know that I could trust [you, as the coach] ... by having [my] best interest in mind ...to understand [that we know] each other ... [that we] always have each other’s best interests at heart even if we disagree on things ... just
trying to make each other better (Steve). In this sense, I needed you to say, “You are talented and one day this will work out” (Laurel) when I was experiencing Toxic Mega [death]. In a nutshell, I needed you to be the G.O.A.T. who bred trust through a reciprocal, trusting relationship, not the W.O.A.T. who created shame through a hierarchical, superficial relationship.

**W.O.A.T. Coach Behaviors**

So, how did you accomplish this hierarchical relationship that created a culture of shame? As the W.O.A.T., you shamed me during Toxic Mega [death] by hiding and suppressing yourself from us, emphasizing a win-at-all-costs mentality, comparing my contribution to others, overtraining, making my role on the team ambiguous as well as disregarding, silencing, degrading, discriminating, dominating, and/or assaulting me.

**Hide and suppress.** I do not know why you always felt that you had to hide things and suppress things ... it is not that [you were] lying ... but it was just that [you] weren't sharing information. Here’s the thing, I like knowing my coach ... because I will give so much more for a person that I have a good bond with (Cade). If I would have been able to fully see you by knowing who you were, then I would have felt encouraged to be my authentic self as well. But, I realize that is a vulnerable thing to do, share yourself. For instance, from rumors I have heard [you were] gay, but I am not 100% sure. Had it been a two-way street where [you] knew I was gay and I knew [you were] gay or at least [you would have been] willing to talk to me about it, I think that would have allowed me to trust [you] a lot more ... I could have identified with [you] a lot more .... That would have turned into [my] resiliency, because if somebody says something negative to me about my sexual orientation, I could talk to [you] about it and [you] could [have worked] me through it, or, if I had a bad day at school or something, just knowing
that I am similar to my coach ...[you] understand me and I understand [you]. That [would then] have allowed me to want to put more of my energy into making the team better, making myself better (Cade).

What bothered me, especially after I came out, was that [you did] not share [your] personal life really. Like, at all. I remember some of my NCAA DI friends talking about how their coaches shared and let [the athletes] know more about [them as the coaches] (Laurel). I remember them saying that when they saw the position that [their coaches] were in growing up, [they were] very inspired because [one coach] went from being a farm kid to being a [NCAA DI] college coach. When they were able to see [their coaches] progressed through that, it showed [them] that if [the coach] did it and had a lot of challenges and things then ...[they] could do it. [Their coach] just used a lot of past experiences as evidence for things that [the team] was going through. [The coach] would always connect with [them] in that way, which was great because [they] mentioned that they loved knowing stuff about [their coach] (Laurel).

Win-at-all-costs. The message you were sending was all about performance. I remember this one time, on my recruiting visit [you] made a comment about how much I was eating ...made fun of me for eating a whole meal. I remember you explicitly saying, “Wow! I didn’t expect you to finish that. I am a little surprised that you would eat that much.” At the time, I didn’t really understand [how rampant] the eating disorder culture was in [the sport, in general], but [you were] already judging me for my performance ...rather than for who I was as a person (Laurel).

I remember another time [you] put us all in a room and said, “Hey! Take these.” [You] didn’t tell anyone what they were, so I didn’t take them. I was the only one who didn’t take the
pill ...I stood firm, which was actually the one instance [that] year that I didn't follow the pack (Steve). I knew in that moment that, [you] did not want what was best for [us], but that [you] wanted whatever was best for [you] and for [your] status (Steve).

**Comparison of contribution.** Your win-at-all-costs mentality also caused me to constantly evaluate my worth based upon what [you could] get out of me (Zane). You see, at the time of [Toxic Mega death], I might not have been able to contribute a lot, but I could still contribute a penny. [Those not experiencing Toxic Mega death], ...they could contribute quarters, maybe dollars. Others might contribute dimes ...Everyone could have put a little bit in, because to get a championship we [all need to contribute] to fill up the whole [money] jar, because each student-athlete’s contribution is as important as the next. Unfortunately, [you] never understood that (Prince). All you ever did was judge me based upon my performance in comparison to other players. So, if a penny was all I had to give during Toxic Mega death, you were comparing my penny to others’ quarters. I had to guard against internalizing your comparisons, because I always knew that if I compared [my performance] to my teammates, I would [have been] miserable ...I would [have] never been happy (Steve).

**Overtrained.** Closely enmeshed with your win-at-all-cost and comparison mindset was your old school mentality of just, you just have to do volume, which easily added to my stress. I remember looking at myself in the mirror a couple of days before Christmas ...I lost 20 pounds my first 4 months in college. I couldn’t eat enough to keep up. Then, during Christmas ...when there’s no rule of how many hours we can work out ...Everyone knew it was over. [We were] mentally and physically exhausted (Steve). The thing is, when you were a hard-ass ...all about training volume ...I knew I wouldn’t survive [Toxic Mega death], because I was mentally exhausted (Laurel).
Role ambiguity. You know, during the recruitment process, we had a better connection. I didn’t necessarily expect that same level of interaction to keep up once I got on campus, because I knew it was less of one-on-one, more of, “Okay, you are here now. Let’s fit you into the team.” But, what I didn’t expect was when I got there for which [you] had communicated to me in the recruiting process wasn’t what turned out to be once I got there. [You] had initially told me [you] wanted me to …fill in particular roles in various ways …but, what I got was [you] solely putting me in [one particular] position, which I naturally am not as good of a fit for …secondly, [you] had already recruited a player [for this one particular position] …so I was playing the backup-backup position when I anticipated only playing a backup position …that created disconnect.Entering my sophomore year, [you] expressed not necessarily disappointment but disappointment without saying it, in that my effort wasn’t where [you] expected it to be, and that offended me …I tried to fill my role as [you] wanted me to but [you] didn’t really clearly communicate what that role was, so once those stressors hit, we had already established this separation because of a lack of communication really (Jane).

Disregarded. But, even when I tried to create role clarity for myself, you shut me down. For instance, I told you that I would like to step into more of those leadership roles (Zane). Even after being admitted into the hospital for the seventh time and realizing that I was not going to physically play anymore, I was still trying to be the hardest working [athlete] here, but you, the coach, were like, “Nah, I don’t think it is going to happen.” I mean, that was absurd to me. Why do [you] not see that if I do this, and come back as a leader and kick ass, that is good for [you]? Because, I was the only [athlete] left on the team that was on the National Champion team. I know what it takes (Zane). I think one way you could have provided more role clarity would have been by creating a shared vision. Just to be like “Hey,
this is our vision as a team ...to win a national championship. [Here's] my vision as an individual. How do I fit into that? How do I as a person contribute? It'll help move the team towards a national championship. How can I most benefit that vision?” In that sense, that would be what my personal vision is for where I fit in with the team, where this year ends up going. [You] couldn’t even put [yourself] in my shoes (Zane).

I also remember this one time, when one of my teammates told me that you had to ask the entire team over and over again, “What’s the name of the disease?” [You] didn’t know… The whole team was like “You don’t know the name of the disease?” It was so clear to them that it was such a low interest to [you] of what my disease was. I was in the hospital seven times and, at one point, I thought I was going to die. I was right around the corner [from the University] in the hospital. You could have called on your drive back home ...had the assistant coaches come ...I never saw any of them. I received [one] text, that was it (Zane).

The thing is, [you] had no regard for [my] health, mental or physical, and only focused on what [you] got out of [me]. When it comes to getting the most out of players, [you] treated [us] like pieces of a chess game - useful until [we] aren’t. Once [we] were no longer useful to winning games, [you] shunned, and completely ignored [us]. It was not uncommon for an injured player to go through a week of practice without being spoken to by [you] (Zane). How unfortunate. Everyone felt like no matter if [we] were the worst or the best on the team ...if [we] didn’t live up to [your] standards, [we were] shunned (Steve).

As the W.O.A.T., whenever [you] would be on [your] power moves, I was always so confused as to how I could be giving my all, putting forth physical effort, putting forth mental effort ...getting good grades. I was involved in [various clubs] and I knew athletic department members. I was doing what I thought a good student-athlete should be doing... And [you] still
weren’t celebratory of that? Like, not saying that [you] had to roll out the red carpet every time I entered the room, but [you] just didn’t acknowledge that in a positive way (Cade).

**Silenced.** I vividly remember this one time when you brought in a motivational speaker to speak to the team. You talked the athlete up for weeks. This *white, American* [athlete] came in and told [her] story about how [she] came from a really, really poor family …[She] had a really rough upbringing. But, [she] ended up making it …playing [sport] in college and …doing really good, but [she] never really [played professionally]. For me, I remember listening to the athlete’s story and initially thinking that I can relate but none of the stuff [the athlete] did ever measured up to a quarter of what I went through. So, I walked up to [you, the coach] afterwards and said, “Have you ever heard my story? Let me speak in front of my teammates. Let me say something. You brought this [athlete in] and administration paid [her] money to motivate [everyone] but you have [me] on your team, and I am willing to speak and tell you.” All you said was, “No, I know your story.” Here’s the thing, [you have] never heard my story. But you kept insisting, “I know your story…” You know, “that was not cool” (Prince). That is how you always used your power moves …just shutting down a situation, not letting [your] athletes have a voice or speak about something (Cade).

**Degraded.** I can also remember feeling degraded in front of the entire team. For example, this one time *everyone kind of knew how people were doing in school and that was when I was taking one of my hardest classes. I didn’t pass it, so I had to retake it so my G.P.A. that semester …was pretty low.* You said, in front of everyone, “You know some of us …have a [a very low G.P.A.] this semester and some people aren’t even going to make it to Conference this year.” You were just wrecking on me for a bunch of stuff, so for five minutes everyone had to hear [you] just humiliate…just basically saying anything that [you] could to degrade me
(Steve). Or, the times I heard [you]...talking so much trash, so openly against me ...grumbling, letting everyone know that [you] thought there was no way I could do this (Zane).

Then there was this other time during training that I tried to tell you, “We can’t see what numbers we are hitting,” because it was dark outside and the backlight to the machine wasn’t working. [You] lit into [me], right there ...Everybody heard! [You] started screaming at me and said, “Don’t you dare back talk me!” ...it was so bad ...[I] was visibly upset as [I] went back inside for the day.

I also recall one time at practice you ran us so hard that in-between each set [we] would take a knee. We were not sitting down. We were kneeling down. Me and I think five other players were kneeling down and [you] said, pointing from person-to-person, “One, two, three, four, five, six...Six fucking pussies in this room. We need to get rid of them.” I was like, “Don’t call anyone fucking pussies ...You better watch it. We are working our fucking asses off. If anything, you should be fucking rewarding us, because we had to take a knee down. We were working our fucking asses off, so we needed to take a knee down to catch our fucking breath” (Prince).

**Discriminated.** I vividly remember this one time when you asked me what [I] thought about the Nike hijab campaign. I tried to look at things in a positive way ...to say that it was great and inclusive. But, you were like, “Oh, come on, you know we are not trying to be inclusive here. I mean, you are one of us, [an American]!” I remember saying to you, “Really?! You really want me to be real? ...you know what, no one is trying to be inclusive. Not Nike. Not the government. Not you, the coach. Everyone is just trying to look good on the screen. Everyone is just trying to look good. So are you. So is the [University]. So is everybody else. It is all about money for [Nike]...They saw a great opportunity ...They saw...
what people were going through. They saw what we were up against. They saw we were oppressed. No one was sheltering [us], so Nike was like, “Let’s do this.” It was a public thing. After voicing my true opinion, you then turned to one of my teammates and said, “Hey! Are you going to buy your girlfriend one of those Muslim helmets?”

That’s when I said, “Hey! Hey! Hey!….repeat what you just…said!” You tried to play it off by saying you called it a “turban, scarf, hijab, whatever you call it.” I was like, “No, no, no. That’s not what you said.” Then another [teammate] said, “Oh! He said it was a Muslim helmet.” I was like, “That’s what you…said. That’s when [you were] like, “Nah! You are just a troublemaker!” I was like, “Fine, you think I want to make trouble here. Let’s just turn the page. Let’s start a new page.” That’s when [you] said, “No! I am going to say whatever…I want to say. This is America! …I have freedom of speech!” I was like, “Really, so this is America?!…You might have freedom of speech, but you work for an institution that has their own amendments. According to the University, you cannot discriminate against your own athletes otherwise your ass will be fired.” Here’s the thing, [you] knew [the] rules and regulations [of the University], but when I was telling [you] what [your] rights were, as somebody who ranking wise was below [you], [you got] freaking terrified and were so angry. I was like, “You know what …Fine! If this is America, I am an American citizen, too! I am going to go and let [your] bosses know about this.”

What you didn’t know, prior to your discriminatory comment, my mom and sister, who wear [the hijab], were [walking home] and a [person] pulled over, spit on them, and yelled, “Go back to your fucking country.” So, when you said that comment [about the Muslim helmet] …because my mom and sister went through that kind of thing …it fucking killed me.
You know, I always respected [you]. I looked at [you] as a coach until I really saw what [you] were for and who [you] were” (Prince).

**Dominated.** Here is the thing, because [you] were the coach and wanted to assert [yourself], it didn’t matter how I wanted the conversation to go or how the tone should be, because [you] were going to dominate the tone anyway (Zane). For instance, if [I were to] make an error in practice or [a game] then [you] would come at [me] hot, so [I] had to go at [you] hot so you’d go quiet. If [I went at you] soft, then [you] would come at [me] hot ...[you’d] get loud. Like this one time I messed up, [you] would go, “God, [Zane]!” Then I would have to go, “I know!” A quick, little jump of like, “I know I get it!” and then [you] would go, “Oh okay, fine, fine,” and simmer down. On the flip side, if [you] went, “Dang it, [Zane]!” and [I] had [my] head down and mumbled to [myself], then [you] would erupt and blow up.

The moral of the story: don’t show any weakness ... If [I] showed weakness ...if [I] mumbled to [myself] ...if [I wasn’t] being assertive with what you were saying, then that really pissed [you] off. The result of that is that whenever [I was] dealing with [you], [I had] to be super assertive in whatever [I was] saying ...[I] didn’t want to show any weakness because if [I] did then it turned into this whole, you losing [your] temper ...freaking out on [us], which always made me feel like maybe I did something wrong...it was like a Band-Aid over it ...and me being hot-headed is not who I am as a person but I guess it was the best way to handle those situations. It was just this really weird dynamic where if [you] get pissed at me, I knew I had to go fire with fire so [you] would chill out. I was just trying to adapt ...to survive out there, because the way I would have liked to go about things just as a person... If I had any say or power in the situation, it would have gone much different (Zane).
Assaulted. There were also some days...[you] would just lose [your] stuff and throw stuff at us ...physically ...like take the bag [of practice gear] and physically throw it...[you] chased people around the [practice field] and tried to punch them ...spit at people, real stuff (Steve). Or this one time, since some of the players were scholarship kids, [they couldn’t] just be kicked off the team ...[you] literally hurt other [players] in order to make them quit the team ...like physically hurt [them]...mob them by forcing the athlete to [match up] with [you] during practice. As a [player], [we] couldn’t say no. [We] had to go with it. [You were] the coach, but [you] literally beat [our] ass until [we] quit (Prince). Unfortunately, [we] became accustomed to that over time ...because when you put [us] in an unhealthy environment long enough, over time [we] thought it was normal (Steve).

G.O.A.T. Coach Behaviors

What I needed from you while I was going through Toxic Mega [death] was to help me focus on the process, provide me with autonomy as well as acknowledge and validate my core resilience during my major stress.

Process-oriented: Some of my friends had a more process-oriented coach during their Toxic Mega death. I remember one of my NCAA DI friends sharing a story about the time the head doctor stated, “You won’t ever run again,” but [my friend’s coach] never saw that as an obstacle. [The coach would say], “Something will come of this, whether that is your performance on the team or in some way this will help you grow” ... promising that there was always hope or positivity regardless of the situation. Even though [the doctors] said six months to return to [sport], [the coach had] no expectation that it had to happen then ...no timeframe or time limit on expectations of when the stress or the difficulty would pass ...no sense of urgency, which helped to be more comfortable in the recovery process (Laurel). In my
case, because I could not contribute to the team by wins and records (Prince), I needed you to help me find hope in my circumstance ...to be less performance-focused ...less critical of me. As the W.O.A.T., you would say, “You need to be back by the spring.” But when my friend told the coach “I want to be back this spring,” [the coach said], “Well, we will see when we get there. You have to take it one step at a time and be okay with the fact that it might not happen now, but it will eventually happen” (Laurel). When my friend was finally able to return to sport, the coach would just say “Do your thing” rather than, “Remember, stay tight ...be calm or keep your chest up ...reach higher” (Alex). There was trust.

**Athlete autonomy.** Some of my friends talked about having a voice in regard to their training. For example, I knew that I performed well doing 20 miles a week when most people needed to do 60 to be good (Laurel). I remember some of my NCAA DI friends stating that their coach provided them the opportunity to write [their] own training, which [they thought] was a terrible idea [at first], because [they] didn’t really know what [they were] doing. But, [their coach] had coached [them] enough to teach [them] how to write it so [they were] able to do it (Laurel). It gave [them] more responsibility ...because [they were] given a chance to say what [they] wanted ...so, if [they were] going to take 20 ...or 40 minutes to warm up, [the coach] agreed with [them] ...[They] knew that [the coach] trusted [them] ...by the coach asking them, “What time do you want to go to the [field]?” rather than just telling them, “We are going to the [field] at 10 or 8.”...which allowed them to learn a lot about [themselves] through that process (Alex).

I also envied my other NCAA DI friends whose coaches kept [them] integrated in the team when they were experiencing Toxic Mega [death]. I recall them telling me that [their coaches] took [them] to a couple competitions ...brought [them] on the bus ...as an assistant.
coach kind of thing so that [they were] able to feel like [they were] a part of the team still, which was awesome. [The coach] would even bring [them] in and get [their] opinion on training for other people, just asking [their] opinion, which gave [them] an opportunity on the team ... but also never pushed [them] to do something that made [them] out of [their] comfort zone (Laurel).

**Acknowledged and validated.** I also knew of some other NCAA DI friends who had coaches that not only acknowledged but validated [their] experience and helped [them] work through [their] sexuality. Their coaches also helped them understand why [they weren’t] getting more playing time ... Those pieces of validation from [their coaches] throughout [their] time just really made [them] feel more certain in who [they were] and what [they were] doing..., which certainly made [them] feel [they were] capable of working through things because... [they were] validated in what [they were] doing as an athlete and as a human (Jane).

**The W.O.A.T., the G.O.A.T., and Student-Athlete Resilience**

The W.O.A.T. and student-athlete resilience. Unfortunately, [you] created this wall ... where [you and the] coaching staff were all [together] and here is this wall and the athletes, you know, they are over there [on the other side of the wall]. There was never like a conjoined relationship (Cade). Each time you hid and suppressed yourself from us, had a win-at-all-costs mentality, compared me to others, overtrained, didn’t provide role clarity as well as silenced, degraded, disregarded, discriminated, dominated, and/or assaulted me another brick was added to the wall between us, which made our relationship more of an “Us vs Them” type thing (Cade), [your] prediction versus my prediction (Zane). Over time, I began to realize that this
is you (Steve), which made me feel shitty. It made me feel like ...really, really depressed (Prince).

Because of your W.O.A.T. behaviors, I was forced to get to a place where I accepted the disconnect between you and me...to put energy into [our relationship] didn’t feel worth it when I was putting so much energy into dealing with my sexuality, coping with the loss [a loved one], coping with an injury, coping with the loss of an athletic career, transitioning into a life where I am no longer an athlete, but just a student, moving... that took up enough energy for me (Jane). I had no energy to fight [Toxic Mega death] and enough to fight [you], too (Zane). [You] made me feel like I was unworthy. I didn’t belong on the team (Prince), which just made it harder to deal with [Toxic Mega death] (Steve). I realized that [our] relationship ...with all this ambiguity, lack of connection, lack of communication, forced [me] to not do anything at all ...to just sit with [the Toxic Mega death I was] dealing with (Jane).

So, after all of the cumulated negative interactions between the two of us over the years, that was the moment I said I’m done ... I walked into [your] office on a Wednesday morning ...and said, “I’m done” (Steve) ...because [you] took up too much energy (Jane) so I had to take [you] out of the equation (Zane). I remember so many people, even you, giving me a hard time about leaving, but I needed to make a point in saying that I don’t tolerate this. I had to do that because I knew if I looked back and I just stuck it out, it would have been the easy thing to do ...just stick it out, because I did for four years. For four years, you would always say, “I own you.” Hear me loud and clear, You don’t own me (Steve)!

The G.O.A.T. and student-athlete resilience. If you would have been the G.O.A.T., I believe I could have accomplished so much more after experiencing Toxic Mega [death]: been the captain of the team, and then I would have ...played a little bit [professionally] ...I would
have had that [professional] experience and learned from some other coaches ...Now, I am getting into coaching, so I think the end of the story would have been transitioning out of being a player into a coach with all that I have learned about how to help players be resilient (Zane).

So, how could you have more positively influenced my resilience? Consider this analogy: As a student-athlete, I’m on a road and I am maneuvering from obstacles that have always been thrown at me ...I work my way around them, but then the road meets a bridge and somebody else controls that bridge and cuts it off and says, “You know what, you are never going to pass that bridge.” Who controls the bridge? The coaches (Prince). What I needed from you during Toxic Mega [death] was to help me attend that bridge (Zane). For example, if [I] wanted to play [professionally], I needed you to say, “Alright, this is your goal. How are we going to get there? Let me walk you through it, talk it out, and figure out how you are going to make this happen!” [You should have helped me] set up goals and ...figure out what I could do to help [me] get there. Not just look at my with a blank stare and say, “Okay....” (Zane).

This would have allowed me to feel more connected to [you] ...because, for instance, when I was going through Toxic Mega [death] I needed you to identify more with me, to feel emotions like [excitement or sadness] ...[with me], which would have made me feel more connected [to you]. (Jane). Our relationship could have been built by using [my] sociocultural factors ...[my] background and [my] stories ...using those components to know [me] well enough prior [to Toxic Mega death]...in order to know what [I] needed from [you] during the stress (Cade). That would have made me feel very validated in my role [on the team] and [made me feel] like I was contributing still. It would have made me feel more confident ...very reassured in my skills and strengths, which would have really helped with [deeper] self-awareness (Laurel).
If [you would have] handled it with me in that way, I [would have] had only positive memories of [Toxic Mega death] ...it would not have been tainted if [you would] have framed it as, “This is a growth opportunity and whatever comes of this will help you later.” You see, Toxic Mega death wouldn’t have been so bad [if you] would have been more supportive throughout it. Ultimately, if I could have identified with [you] a lot more ...and you had acknowledged and validated [me and Toxic Mega death] ...then that would have turned into my resiliency (Cade).

The Effects of Coach Major Stress on Student-Athlete Resilience

I think one of the reasons why our relationship faltered was because your [partner] was going through [that illness]. The way you handled your stress, I think it really stemmed down to [you possibly] ...not talking to [your] own father for ten or twenty years ...[your] father being an alcoholic. I think that’s where a lot [your] anger stemmed from and [you] basically just took that out on [us]...just a lot of internal stuff going on...” (Steve). There [were also] other indications ...like [you had] a pretty serious drinking problem ...when [you were] going through college, it was sort of a self-medication to handle [your stress] (Zane). I realize now that you were dealing with your own Toxic Mega [death], so I just started to pray for [you] ...because, even despite everything [you’d] done to me, I knew that [you needed] help, [too] ...I knew [you had] a lot of internal stuff going on, because it was never me that did anything to [you]. It was just how [you were] kind of perceiving the world, and what [you] wanted from the world ...I think [my Toxic Mega death] was kind of triggering a lot of that, and how [you] felt the victim through a lot of [your] life. [You were] kind of turning mad and because [you were] turning mad, it kind of trickled down with the rest of the coaching staff [who were]
already mad ...like a crazy mad scientist who ran the show ...and then trickled down to us (Steve).

The Relational Shift: From Bad to Better, Good to Great

Here’s the thing, your major stress did not have to impact me in a negative way. I remember some of my NCAA DI friends talking about [their coaches], when [they] first got to the University] ...[their coaches] were going through some really hard things with their families, personal life...recently divorced. But, [the coaches] never showed that (Laurel). Unfortunately, you let your own stress affect me, which added to the ambiguity of everything (Jane). You lacked acknowledgement and validation of my core resilience during my major stress, which impacted my resilience [by making me] look elsewhere...When you didn’t give me those validations and acknowledgements, distance [in the relationship] was created (Jane). [You were] so closed off and unwilling to share [your] story, so our relationship stayed stagnant and never changed for the better.

While you might not believe that our relationship could have changed for the better, I will share a few stories about the relational shift that some of my NCAA DI friends experienced with their coaches to demonstrate that such a shift can happen. For example, I remember some of my friends stating that the relational shift from bad to better happened after they started asking [their coaches] questions. Sitting up front in the van with their coaches on the way to their next event, [they] asked [their coaches] about what concerts [their coaches] went to when [they] younger, and who [their coaches] listened to now. What kind of artists [their coaches] liked ...just something so simple that [they] could ask [their coaches] that spoke more about who [they were] as a [people]. They said that their coaches were really upbeat and happy and open after that interaction. They were able to see a side of [their
coaches], a step away from the coaching side and more of like, “Oh, this is a person! This isn’t a coaching robot” (Cade).

Later in that same van ride, the entire team started complaining because dinner wasn’t for another 3 or 4 hours ...so, [they] made a joke, sitting up in the front seat [with their coaches] ...[they] were passing a Waffle House ...and was like, “Hey, coach! [We] could really go for a waffle right now.” They felt that asking [their coaches] those questions [earlier in the van ride] triggered a side of their coaches they had never seen. [Their coaches] turned in and went and got [them] waffles! [They were] shocked. Because before their interaction, getting to know their coaches more as people, [their coaches] would have been like, “Haha! Very funny. We have a [game],” because [their coaches] knew [they] shouldn’t do this because coaches aren’t supposed to buy their athletes junk food with the per diem money allotted to the team. But, [their coaches] turned in anyways! My friends said they were amazed standing there like, Wow! [Their coaches] listened to [them] when [they] said [they] wanted waffles. [Their coaches] acknowledged it and went and got [them] waffles. [They were] willing to be silly enough with [the student-athletes] to let it happen. The moral of the story is not about waffles, though. It is about their coaches, in that moment, understanding that [them] getting dessert for dinner is more important than [their coaches] not taking the opportunity to bond with [them].

I also vividly remember another instance when some of my NCAA DI friends told me about how their coaches acknowledged the impact [they made] as much if not more ...than anyone that [the coaches] had ever coached. That [they] had such an influence on [their coaches] even though [they] felt like [they] didn’t at the time...Yet, they also [mentioned that they] didn’t realize the extent of influence [they] had on [their coaches] ...that, while they
experienced and loved their G.O.A.T. coach, they also wished [they] would have known the extent of influence [they] had on [their coaches] sooner because [they] thought it would have just validated [them] a little bit better during the entirety of their careers.... made them more confident and feel [they were] doing a good job rather than worrying if [they] didn’t think [they were] (Laurel).

Or another example: Some of my other NCAA DI friends experienced the relational shift during Christmas training when they went back to the training facility after they had quit the team. After talking with [their coaches during that visit], their coaches finally shared how [they were] going through a transition phase during the time when they student-athletes were competing, and that [the coaches] were finally starting to [overcome their own major stress]. That [the coaches were] starting to change as people. [They] actually opened up to [the student-athletes] and talked about and acknowledged that. Then, the coaches admitted that when [they] first came in [as the coaches], they didn’t know what [they were] doing. My friends said that they knew deep down that [their coaches] knew what they had done [to them during Toxic Mega death] was so wrong. Now, [they are] talking probably every couple of weeks. Things became friendlier when [their collegiate career] was over because [the coaches] had totally changed. For instance, [the coaches’] workouts that [they were] doing was half of what [the student-athletes] did all four years they competed under [their coaches] (Steve).

In another instance, some of my NCAA DI friends shared about the time they experienced the relational shift [when the coaches] got to see the vulnerable side of [them], after their teammate had been raped. Their coaches were able to see the student-athletes put everything out there [emotionally], which is what they believe finally began [the coaches’] trust [in them] as [humans] and gave [the coaches] an internal ability to act more
compassionately towards [them] for the rest of the year. They hated that it took [their teammate] getting raped in order for [them] to bond with their coaches, but that is when [their] relationship with the [coaches] turned into a really good relationship. They stated that throughout that whole process [the coaches were] asking [them] if [they] had eaten. If [they] had food, [The coaches] would check in on [them], frequently. [They] got [them] appointments with [the Counselor]. They stated that just knowing that [their coaches], who oversees [the student-athletes playing time], the [people] who plans [their] workouts, who basically dictates [their lives] at [University], acknowledged and validated everything that had happened….I think that made [the coaches] more sensitive to everything that [the student-athlete were] going through (Cade).

Unfortunately, they all mentioned that this relational shift didn’t happen until [the end of their collegiate careers], which is where everything kind of changed [for the better] with [their] relationship….. [the coaches] finally acknowledged some part of [them] in terms of who [they were], and how [the coaches] viewed [them]. But, for…two and a half years, [they] would [have been] the first people to say that [their coaches were] crazy … [their coaches were] heartless and didn’t care about [their] athletes. [Their coaches] just wanted to train and [compete] …one [recruiting] class in, one class out. [They were] not trying to build a family or anything. But, when their coaches changed, [their] relationship [became] more about working for each other and knowing that at the end of the day [sport] doesn’t matter …What matters is the people that you met along the way. The impact that you had on them. The relationships you made. Because, now that [they] have graduated, [they] don’t have [sport], but [they] still have those people that [they] can text or call or meet up with (Cade).
So, collectively, what we, as student-athletes, need from you, our coaches, is to care more about developing the relationship from the start—whether you are a W.O.A.T. or a G.O.A.T. coach. You see, it took me awhile to realize [the importance of developing our relationship] because when you’re a freshman and you start school, you just want to buy into everything, which is what I did. I was so naïve my freshman year, because I just wanted to fit in ...be liked and perform ...I fell flat on my face because of that (Steve). While I understand that I do have a proactive part to play in our relationship, it is important for you and the rest of the coaches to remember that it always comes down to [you], the coach, and the culture [that you] build from the start (Laurel).

I believe that if you [would have been more] vulnerable with [us] from the start….to say [as the coach], “Hey, I grew up with no money ...I have the same pair of jeans,” maybe like two or three athletes on the team would be like, “Hey, that was my childhood, too!” ...that is exactly what I went through and to be able to identify with [you] in that aspect. When that happens, [we will] work harder for [you]. So, if you hear nothing else, hear this: In order for [your] team to give [our] all for [you], to maximize our pain and our training ...we have to know who we are training for. We have to be able to trust [you] as a person in order to buy into the mission that [you are] asking us to buy into (Cade).

Discussion

I presented the results of this study as a composite first-person narrative in the form of an open letter to coaches about seven NCAA DI student-athletes who experienced major stress while participating in sport. I sought to primarily provide coaches with a powerful method from which to better understand how the coach-athlete relationship influences student-athlete resilience. Secondarily, the findings of this study will also help sport psychology researchers
and consultants along with coach educators better inform future research and coaching curriculum development. In this discussion, I will expand upon and relate findings from the participants’ narratives to previous research.

**Student-Athlete Core Resilience**

NCAA DI student-athletes in the current study believed they were resilient at their “core” because they already possessed a positive personality, were highly focused, motivated, confident, and perceived to be surrounded by positive social supports (e.g., parents, teammates). This aligns well with Fletcher and Sarkar’s (2012) research pertaining to psychological resilience in Olympic champions, which identified athlete resilience to be composed of a positive personality, focus, motivation, confidence, and perceived social support. When athletes possessed these five psychological factors, they were better protected from the potential negative effects of the major stress (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012). As was evident in the current study, participants reported these same five psychological factors to be present within themselves, and attributed these as the primary factors contributing to their resilience.

In this sense, student-athletes did not attribute their resilience to their relationship with their NCAA DI coaches; rather, student-athletes felt that coaches either enhanced or diminished their stress which, in turn, influenced their resilience. Five out of the seven participants in this study identified their coaches as adding stress because of their lack of concern for student-athlete stressors. Jane eloquently articulated this point: it was not *so much [a lack of resilience] during [Toxic Mega death]...but added stress because of [the coaches’] lack of concern for my stressor*. Therefore, coaches were not identified as being a primary source from which student-athletes built resilience. Rather, coaches’ who created disconnection in the
coach-athlete relationship (through negative behaviors), added psychological stress during student-athlete major stress and prevented student-athletes from channeling their energy toward bouncing back from major stress. On the other hand, coaches who created connection in the coach-athlete relationship (through positive behaviors) during athlete major stress allowed participants to channel their energy toward bouncing back from major stress. Relational-cultural theory (Miller, 1976) provides a framework from which to better understand this phenomenon.

**Relational-Cultural Theory**

Relational-cultural theorists (RCT; Miller, 1976) claim that all psychological growth occurs in relationships. In contrast, when individuals move out of connection and into isolation, psychological distress can occur. To more fully understand the detriments of disconnection as well as the benefits of connection, in the following sections I highlight the central relational paradox and growth-fostering relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1997) as fruitful constructs from which to better understand W.O.A.T. versus G.O.A.T. coaching and its influence on student-athlete resilience.

**Relational-cultural theory and W.O.A.T. coaching.** Underneath the umbrella of relational-cultural theory (Miller, 1976), Miller and Stiver (1997) offered the central relational paradox (CRP) to more fully understand the detriments of disconnection. For example, when less powerful individuals in the relationship (e.g., student-athletes) are unable to represent their feelings—either due to not feeling comfortable in the environment or receiving an ambiguous response from their authority figure (e.g., coaches)—they will begin to isolate parts of themselves off from the relationship. As individuals increase relational separation, they experience diminished passion, empowerment, clarity, worth, and desire for connection (Miller,
Jordan (2013) argued that a lack of connection with others is what hinders the development of relational resilience. In the current study, NCAA DI student-athletes supported the tenets of CRP when they reported various ways they tried to survive their major stress with a W.O.A.T. coach, which created more disconnection in the relationship. For example, Zane acknowledged CRP when he shared how his coach would get hot at him, so Zane would have to get hot back. Unfortunately, Zane mentioned that him being hot-headed is not who he was as a person—his authentic self—but that it was the best way to handle those situations; what he needed to do in order to adapt and survive the coach-athlete relationship. Unfortunately, the more Zane was unable to authentically represent his feelings in the coach-athlete relationship, the closer he got to making the decision to take [his coach] out of the equation—creating further disconnection in the coach-athlete relationship.

In line with Zane’s experience, five of the seven participants reported that when they tried to survive their major stress with a W.O.A.T. coach they felt their coach took up too much energy (Jane). That they did not have enough energy to fight [Toxic Mega death] and enough to fight [their coach], too (Zane). In this sense, student-athlete energy was mobilized in trying to find the right formula (Steve) to deal with their W.O.A.T. coach rather than channel their energy into their major stress. Similar to the diminished passion, empowerment, clarity, worth, and desire for connection that individuals feel as they experience increased relational separation (Miller, 1988), student-athletes in the current study reported they experienced increased feelings of (a) isolation, (b) unworthiness, (c) depression, and (d) resentfulness the more relational separation they experienced with their coaches. This relational separation then influenced participants’ ability to channel their energy toward bouncing back from their major stress. In this sense, NCAA DI coaches should understand that adopting a W.O.A.T. coaching
style will not only negatively influence the coach-athlete relationship but also student-athlete resilience.

**Relational-cultural theory and G.O.A.T. coaching.** In contrast, relational-cultural theory also helps to better understand the benefits of G.O.A.T. coaching. That is, Miller and Stiver (1997) have offered *growth-fostering relationships* (GFRs)—high-quality relationships—as a way from which to promote psychological growth. Specifically, GFRs challenge power battles that are inherent in most Western relationships (e.g., hierarchical, superficial coach-athlete relationship) and promotes a culture of trust characterized by reciprocating empathy, empowerment, and authenticity. *Empathy* is achieved when individuals (e.g., student-athletes) are able to see, know, and feel the responsiveness (e.g., acknowledgment and validation) of other individuals whom they are in relationship with (e.g., coaches). *Empowerment* is attained when individuals are encouraged to feel the fear (e.g., major stress) and find support to deal with it (Jordan, 2010). *Authenticity* is characterized by a sense of safety needed in order to enjoy sufficient levels of relational vulnerability. This safety is jeopardized when “power over” dynamics, inherent in hierarchical coach-athlete relationships, contribute to the stratification of differences within a particular culture (e.g., sport).

In the current study, student-athletes supported the tenets of GFRs and extend the relevance of GFRs into the realm of NCAA DI sport. Specifically, student-athletes reported G.O.A.T. coaches as those who created a culture of trust by promoting a process-oriented mindset, providing student-athletes with autonomy, and acknowledging and validating student-athlete core resilience during major stress. When G.O.A.T. coaches engaged in these behaviors, participants reported an increase in student-athlete (a) certainty, (b) sense of worth, (c), happiness, (d) confidence, and (e) reassurance in being able to overcome their major stress.
Laurel articulated this point well when she stated that her growth-fostering relationship with the coach made her feel more confident ...very reassured in [her] skills and strengths, which really helped with [deeper] self-awareness during her major stress. Likewise, Alex mentioned how grateful he was to have a coach that would just say, “Do your thing” rather than, “Remember, stay tight ...be calm or keep your chest up ...reach higher.” He felt that there was always a greater sense of trust between him and the coach regardless of any obstacles that he faced. In this sense, NCAA DI coaches should understand that adopting a G.O.A.T. coaching style can promote student-athlete psychological growth and their resilience through major stress. In the following sections, I further elaborate upon the W.O.A.T. and the G.O.A.T. as well as offers two mechanisms (e.g., power and sociocultural factors) that served as the driving force behind each coaching style. The first coaching style discussed is the W.O.A.T.

**Coaching Styles**

**The W.O.A.T.** The majority of participants identified coaches who adopted the first type of coaching style as *W.O.A.T. coaches*, the Worst of All Time. Participants identified W.O.A.T. coaches as using a hierarchical form of power that promoted a competitive, transactional, one-way relationship (e.g., us versus them) largely characterized as superficial and ambiguous. This hierarchical, superficial relationship was created when coaches were hiding or suppressing themselves from the student-athletes, had a winning-at-all-cost mentality, compared student-athletes’ contributions to others, overtrained, failed to provide role clarity as well as silenced, degraded, discriminated, disregarded, dominated, and/or assaulted student-athletes. When W.O.A.T. coaches engaged in these behaviors, student-athletes characterized the hierarchical, superficial coach-athlete relationship as a mechanism that fostered a culture of shame, which produced disconnection between student-athletes and coaches. To better
understand the detriments of such behaviors on student-athlete resilience, I outline and connect research pertaining to controlling coach behaviors (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2009; Garity & Murray, 2011; Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982), sociocultural influences on athlete resilience (Galli & Vealey, 2008), and coach major stress (Frey, 2007; Olusoga, Butt, Maynard, & Hays, 2010) below.

**Controlling W.O.A.T. coaching.** Coaches who adopt controlling behaviors are identified as Pygmalion-prone coaches (Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982). Pygmalion-prone coaches exhibit control by using more external methods to direct and control athlete performance and behaviors. Such external methods are characterized by threatening punishment, using guilt-inducing methods for behavioral control, and not including athletes in the decision-making process. Further, Pygmalion-prone coaches attribute all power to themselves as the central source of authority (e.g., “it’s my way or the highway”) as well as solely promote a performance-oriented climate (Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982). Stirling and Kerr’s (2008) work provides more detail into what constitutes such controlling, often times classified as abusive, behaviors in sport. Their research identified such behaviors as physical (e.g., hitting, throwing things), verbal (e.g., belittling, degrading, humiliating), and denial of attention (e.g., being ignored by coaches), which negatively influenced athlete well-being (Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Aligning with Stirling and Kerr’s (2008) work, Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, and Thøgersen-Ntoumani’s (2009) research further demonstrated that when coaches adopted such controlling behaviors, athletes not only reported experiencing a variety of negative consequences that affected their well-being (e.g., depression, low self-esteem, social withdrawal) but also reported decreased perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
Gearity and Murray (2011) found that such poor coaching behaviors promoted (a) athlete self-doubt, (b) distracted athletes from task-relevant cues, and (c) demotivated athletes by discouraging and diminishing athlete enthusiasm. Gearity and Murray’s (2011) study identified that such behaviors damaged athlete mental performance (Gearity & Murray, 2011). While most of the research to date explored athletes’ perceptions of abuse within the coach-athlete relationship, Stirling (2013) advanced our understanding of emotionally abusive coaching practices from the perspective of the coach. Coaches reported using harmful coaching practices (e.g., yelling, kicking) due to the normalization of such behaviors in sport. Upon reflection of their behaviors, coaches reported a shift in their behavior from harmful to more beneficial. Their reason for this shift was due to the adverse effects (e.g., destroying athlete character) they saw their harmful behaviors having on the athletes (Stirling, 2013).

The current study supports the findings outlined above. That is, NCAA DI student-athletes reported that when coaches engaged in controlling W.O.A.T. coach behaviors they experienced psychological distress due to increased disconnection with the coach. That is, as student-athletes and coaches experienced greater disconnection, participants felt prevented from channeling their energy toward bouncing back from their major stress, which created more stress for student-athletes. Zane articulated this point well when he stated that he didn’t have enough energy to fight [his stressor] and enough to fight [the coach], too. Likewise, Jane stated that to put energy into [a coach-athlete relationship that was not supporting her] didn’t feel worth it when [she] was putting so much energy into dealing with [her] sexuality, coping with the loss of [a loved one], coping with an injury, coping with the loss of an athletic career, transitioning into a life where [she was] no longer an athlete, but just a student, moving... that took up enough energy for [her]. Thus, five of the seven participants reported that when
coaches used controlling behaviors student-athletes felt compelled to take [coaches] out of the equation because they caused additional stress and took up too much energy (Zane).

Wiese-Bjornstal, Smith, Shaffer, and Morrey’s (1998) integrated model of response to sport injury helps to articulate the stress-performance relationship that is evident in the current study. That is, the model claims that four factors influence how individuals respond to stressors. Such factors are identified as personality, history of past stressors, coping resources, and interventions. Dependent upon these four factors will determine how individuals cognitively appraise the stressor, which will influence the overall outcome of the stressor. In relation to this current study, NCAA DI student-athlete identified coaches as a potential coping resource that could either enhance or diminish student-athlete stress response to their major stress, consequently influencing their resilience. Specifically, participants identified W.O.A.T. coaches as a coping resource that hindered student-athlete cognitive appraisal of their major stress via distracting student-athletes from focusing their energy on their major stress. Thus, considering the abovementioned stress-performance model (Wiese-Bjornstal et al., 1998), W.O.A.T. coaches hindered student-athlete stress response to their major stress.

**Sociocultural factors and W.O.A.T. coaching.** In the current study, W.O.A.T. coaches were identified as creating a superficial and ambiguous relationship. That is, student-athletes reported they felt the most distant from their coach when their coach did not understand them as a holistic person. Jane’s narrative highlighted this stance when it was stated that she saw so much similarity between her and the coach. They both came from a small-town background, had a black cat growing up … had this similar sense of humor with sarcasm, both Southern … they just clicked. Yet, Jane also characterized her relationship with the coach as one rampant with disconnection, which was largely due to feeling misunderstood by her coach. Jane
attributed their relational misunderstanding to the fact that her coach did not interact with her in a way that promoted an understanding of her values, beliefs, and experiences that are intimately connected to her sociocultural background.

Galli and Vealey’s (2008) research highlighted the importance of sociocultural factors as an underlying mechanism that affected the athlete resilience process. For example, Galli and Vealey’s (2008) findings revealed that athletes’ cultural beliefs significantly influenced their resilience. Specifically, participants reported that their cultural beliefs (e.g., “growing up as African American … the idea that success and overcoming adversity is part of the culture”) influenced the lens from which they filtered their stress and abilities to positively adapt (Galli & Vealey, 2008, p. 326). In line with Jane’s narrative, five of the seven participants reported that when W.O.A.T. coaches did not take the time to understand the underlying values and beliefs of their lived experiences they felt more disconnected from their coach, which negatively influenced their resilience.

**W.O.A.T. coach major stress.** In the current study, participants reported that coaches who experienced their own major stress acted as another factor that influenced the coach-athlete relationship, and, in turn, student-athlete resilience. Specifically, participants identified that when coaches responded negatively to their own stress, it hindered athletes’ ability to mobilize their “core” resilience. For example, Steve mentioned that when coaches experienced their own major stress and did not respond well, they were more likely to turn mad, which trickled down to the rest of the coaching staff [who were] already mad, trickling down to the student-athletes, and, in turn, influencing their resilience.

These findings align well with previous research that explored coaches’ responses to stress. Specifically, when coaches’ mood, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors were negatively
influenced by stressors, they felt they inadvertently had an adverse effect on their athletes (Frey, 2007; Olusoga, Butt, Maynard, & Hays, 2010). Likewise, athletes reported that coach stress promoted detrimental outcomes for athlete confidence (McCann, 1997). As was evident in the current study, participants reported these same findings and extend its relevance into the realm of NCAA DI student-athlete resilience. That is, when coaches do not respond well to their own major stress, it negatively influenced student-athlete resilience.

The **G.O.A.T.** Two of the seven participants identified coaches who adopted the second type of coaching style as *G.O.A.T. coaches*, the Greatest of All Time. It should be noted that this type of coaching style was also discussed as the ideal coach-athlete relationship by the five remaining participants. G.O.A.T coaches were identified as using a more reciprocal form of power that promoted a conjoined, holistic, two-way coach-athlete relationship, largely enriched by trust. This reciprocal, trusting relationship was nurtured when coaches encouraged student-athletes to have a process-oriented mindset, provided student-athletes with autonomy, and acknowledged and validated student-athlete core resilience during their major stress. When G.O.A.T. coaches engaged in these behaviors, student-athletes characterized their sporting environment as a culture of trust, which produced a stronger coach-athlete relationship, and, in turn, positively influenced their ability to channel their energy toward bouncing back. To better understand the benefits of such behaviors on student-athlete resilience, in the following sections, I outline and connect research pertaining to reciprocal power within the coach-athlete relationship (Becker, 2009; Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2008; White & Bennie, 2015) as well as the importance of sociocultural factors in creating a sense of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).
**Reciprocal G.O.A.T. coaching.** Coaches who use a more reciprocal form of power have been identified as non-Pygmalion-prone coaches (Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982). Non-Pygmalion-prone coaches create a reciprocal environment by adopting a more autonomy-supportive leadership style, which seeks to empower athletes. This empowerment is accomplished when coaches include athletes in the decision-making process, provide information-based feedback, and afford opportunities from which athletes may make choices. Further, non-Pygmalion-prone coaches seek to share the limelight with athletes as well as promote a mastery-oriented or task-involving climate (Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982). Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, and Briere (2001) provided evidence that suggested autonomy-supportive behaviors (e.g., non-Pygmalion-prone coaching) created conditions that allowed athletes to experience heightened volition, choice, and self-endorsement, which led to positive outcomes such as persistence, effort, performance, energy, self-esteem, and well-being.

White and Bennie’s (2015) research findings further highlighted the non-Pygmalion-prone coaching style in the context of sport resilience. Their research pertaining to youth gymnast and coach perceptions of resilience demonstrated that athletes desired relationships that reciprocated trust and support when the athlete was experiencing major stress (White & Bennie, 2015). Gymnasts characterized coaches as reciprocating trust and support via their approachable and trustworthy demeanor, which was accomplished when the coaches created a climate that made athletes feel “comfortable to ask their coach questions and confide in them when they faced problems inside and outside the gym. This reassured gymnasts that their coach would provide emotional support during difficult times” (White & Bennie, 2015, p. 386).

Similar findings were evident in the current study. That is, NCAA DI student-athletes reported G.O.A.T. coach behaviors to strengthen their resilience. For example, Laurel
articulated this point well when she stated that her coach would even bring [her] in and get [her] opinion on training for other people, just asking [her] opinion, which gave [her] an opportunity [to be included] on the team ... and then her stressor wasn’t so bad [because the coach] was more supportive throughout it. Thus, when coaches engaged in G.O.A.T. coaching behaviors, it seemed to nurture more reciprocal power within the coach-athlete relationship, which student-athletes reported as having a positive influence on their resilience.

**Sociocultural factors and G.O.A.T. coaching.** In the current study, participants identified G.O.A.T. coaches as individuals who took the time to get to know student-athletes as a holistic person rather than simply as a performance-producing machine. For instance, Laurel stated that while on the surface, as people, [her and her coach were] very different [as people] ...it was more about the coach taking the time to understand the underlying values and beliefs of Laurel’s life. Specifically, Laurel mentioned how [her coach] was very spiritual, which worried her at first because she did not identify as spiritual and thought this dissimilarity would negatively influence their relationship. Laurel was relieved that her coach never used [their] discrepancies in one area to not build up a compatibility in other ways.

These results align well and extend Baumeister and Leary (1995)’s research, which has contended that regardless of the cultural context from which the coach and athlete resided, the development and maintenance of a culturally competent coach-athlete relationship—understanding and appreciating other people’s cultural groups as well as seeking to effectively work with them (Sue, 1998)—is an important aspect in satisfying one of the most fundamental human needs: belongingness. In the current study, student-athletes who reported a more culturally competent coach-athlete relationship appeared to have a greater sense of belongingness which positively influenced the coach-athlete relationship and, in turn, student-
athlete resilience. In Laurel’s case, for instance, her coach sought to effectively work with her regardless of their dissimilarities. Her coach took the time to try and understand and appreciate Laurel for who she was as a person rather than judging her based upon how similar she was to her coach. Thus, in the current study, participants identified G.O.A.T. coaches as engaging in more culturally competent behaviors, which resulted in student-athletes feeling more connected with the coach (i.e., increased sense of belonging) that, in turn, strengthened student-athlete resilience.

**G.O.A.T. coach major stress.** Considering G.O.A.T. coach major stress, two of the seven student-athletes reported that they experienced a greater sense of resilience when they were able to see their coach positively adapt to major stress. For example, Laurel mentioned that student-athletes can learn a lot about resilience from [their coaches] in how the coach not only deals with their own major stress but also continues to try and connect with student-athletes during the coaches’ major stress. She identified the coaches’ abilities to provide continual encouragement ...support ...understanding ...affirmations …and unfailing belief in them not only when student-athletes were experiencing major stress but also when coaches were experiencing their own major stress helped them to leverage their own core resilience. In this sense, NCAA DI coaches should not only consider how their major stress might affect themselves but also how it might influence the coach-athlete relationship and, in turn, student-athlete resilience.

These findings support Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy, which states that expectations of personal efficacy are derived from four areas of cognitive appraisal: performance accomplishments (e.g., past successes), vicarious experiences (e.g., seeing similar others succeed), verbal persuasion (e.g., affirmations of coping skills), and physiological states
(e.g., emotional arousal). Aligning the current study with Bandura’s (1977) work, student-athletes identified coaches as an important vicarious source that verbally and nonverbally affirmed student-athlete core resilience in order for them to overcome their major stress. That is, student-athletes reported that coaches properly modeled the type of behaviors that was needed to overcome major stress (vicarious experience). Additionally, participants also reported that coaches verbally affirmed student-athlete core resilience (verbal persuasion), which contributed to student-athletes feeling increased (a) certainty, (b) sense of worth, (c), happiness, (d) confidence, and (e) reassurance in being able to overcome their major stress (physiological states). Considering White and Bennie’s (2015) research regarding youth gymnasts’ resilience and the coach-athlete relationship also supports the tenets of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). Their research stated that “when coaches demonstrated a positive attitude towards challenges rather than becoming stressed and frustrated, gymnasts learned to adopt a similar approach” (White & Bennie, 2015, p. 386).

The Relational Shift: From Bad to Better, Good to Great.

From bad to better. Two of the seven participants who had W.O.A.T. coaches mentioned a relational shift from bad to better. For instance, Cade articulated this point well when she shared her Waffle House story. She asked, “You know coach, I could really go for a waffle right now.” She did not anticipate her coach to say “yes” to her request. She anticipated her coach to say “no” because her coach always felt that [the coach] shouldn’t do this because coaches aren’t supposed to buy their athletes junk food. Cade believed that her coach listened to [her] … acknowledged it and went and got [them] waffles … when [they] said [they] wanted waffles because she asked [her coach] those questions [earlier in the van ride]. For instance, Cade asked her coach what concerts [her coach] went to when [her coach was] younger, and
who [her coach] listened to now. What kind of artists [did her coach] like? Just something so simple that [Cade could] ask [her coach] that spoke more about who [her coach was] as a person.

Cade credited those questions as the mechanism that began the shift to a better coach-athlete relationship. Once Cade and her coach were able to see each other as humans first, Cade felt that her coach was finally willing to be silly enough with [them] to let [going to Waffle House just] happen. That was the moment when there was a shift in the coach taking the opportunity to bond with [the team]. Unfortunately, Cade mentioned that this shift did not happen until [her] senior year, which is where everything kind of changed [from bad to better] with [their] relationship.

Similarly, Steve mentioned the he visited his college training facilities during Christmas break after quitting the team. He felt a relational shift from bad to better when his coaches finally shared how [they were] going through a transition phase during the time when the student-athletes were competing, and that [the coaches] were finally starting to [overcome their own major stress]. That was when [coaches were] starting to change as people. [They] actually opened up to [the student-athletes] and talked about and acknowledged that. Then, the coaches admitted that when [they] first came in [as the coaches], they didn’t know what [they were] doing. Steve’s narrative situates coach vulnerability—being able to share vulnerable parts of themselves—as the mechanism that sparked the relational shift from bad to better. Yet, in Steve’s scenario, similar to Cade’s, this relational shift did not happen until after his collegiate sport career had concluded.

From good to great. While G.O.A.T. coaches were highly esteemed in this study as the ideal coach-athlete relationship that positively influenced student-athlete resilience, one
participant offered ways that the coach-athlete relationship could have improved from good to great. For instance, Laurel stated that she wished *she would have known the extent of influence [she] had on [her coach]* sooner after her coach acknowledged the *impact [she made] as much if not more ...than anyone that [her coach] had ever coached*. Laurel stated that her coach opening up about her impact on the coach and the team *just validated [her] a little bit better*. Yet, if she would have known of this impact sooner, she felt that it would have made her feel *more confident* during the entirety of her career, in general as well as during her major stress. She would have felt like she was *doing a good job rather than worrying if [she] didn’t think [she] was*. In this sense, this study also challenges G.O.A.T. coaches to seek relational improvements with student-athletes, because, overall, each participant expressed a need for deeper connection with their coaches, both W.O.A.T. and G.O.A.T. To accomplish this, they identified vulnerability as the two necessary components that sparked the relational shift from either bad to better (i.e., W.O.A.T.) or good to great (i.e., G.O.A.T.). These findings not only support and extend RCT into the realm of NCAA DI sport but also support the work of Brown (2012) as it pertains to the power of vulnerability within relationships.

Brown (2012) dispelled the myth that vulnerability insinuates weakness and danger given that it is commonly associated with negative emotions such as fear, shame, grief, sadness, and disappointment. Her research brings awareness to the positive emotions associated with vulnerability such as love, joy, courage, creativity, and belonging (Brown, 2012). Brown cautioned individuals against trying to avoid the negative emotions caused by vulnerability, because, in doing so, the positive emotions are numbed as well. Thus, she ferociously encourages humans to *feel*, to be emotional. Vulnerability is feeling, and, according the accounts of the current study’s participants, emotion is necessary for nurturing that relational
shift from bad to better or good to great, which will positively influence student-athlete resilience. These findings further support the notion that vulnerability is needed in order to nurture a sense of belongingness (e.g., Brown, 2012) and also extends its claims into the realm of NCAA DI sport by promoting vulnerability as a necessary component within the coach-athlete relationship as it relates to student-athlete resilience.

Considering relational-cultural theory (RCT; Miller, 1976), disconnection in relationships are inevitable. Thus, relational cultural theorists contend that the separating factor between growth-fostering versus unhealthy relationships is the art of being able to come back into connection after disconnection. For instance, when disconnection occurs, if less powerful individuals in the relationship (e.g., athletes) are able to receive an empathic response from the more powerful individuals in the relationship (e.g., coaches), experiences of disconnection can lead to strengthened relationships and promote a heightened sense of relational competence (Jordan, 1999). As the participants’ stories reflected, receiving an empathic response (e.g., engaging vulnerability) from their respective coach was the key component that contributed to the relational shift. Yet, this shift did not happen until the end of the coach-athlete relationship.

Research within sport contends that empathic accuracy—coaches’ abilities to discern moment-to-moment perceptions of the psychological state of athletes—is associated with increased levels of satisfaction within the coach-athlete relationship (Lorimer & Jowett, 2009). Researchers further demonstrated that increased levels of satisfaction within the coach-athlete relationship positively influenced athlete self-concept (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004), harmonious passion in sport (Lafrienière, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Loriner, 2008), and team cohesion (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004). In this sense, the results of the current study encourage coaches to engage vulnerability within the coach-athlete relationship earlier in the student-athletes’
collegiate careers. This will allow coaches an opportunity to positively influence the coach-athlete relationship sooner and, in turn, student-athlete resilience.

Yet, one of the mechanism that student-athletes reported hindered the active engagement of vulnerability within the coach-athlete relationship was the concept of power. Specifically, participants credited how coaches used their position of power as a dominant way in which the coach-athlete relationship was either nurtured or hindered, which ultimately influenced their resilience. For instance, Zane mentioned that he had *this really weird dynamic* with his coach *where if the coach got pissed at [him], he knew he had to go fire with fire so [the coach] would chill out*. He *was just trying to adapt ...to survive out there, because the way [he] would have liked to go about things [in the relationship and] just as a person... If [he] had any power in the situation, it would have gone much different*. In line with Zane’s narrative, five of the seven participants mentioned this notion of relational power where coaches exercise their power by way of how they interact with the student-athletes. Denison (2007), a former cross-country coach, highlighted this point well when he provided his account of how his coaching practices influenced his athlete’s well-being and ultimate performance.

For example, Denison (2007) acknowledged that it was him “who decided what counted as legitimate for [his athlete] to do in training” as well as assigning the space from which his athlete would complete the training (p. 374). Additionally, and like any “good” coach, he assigned training timetables from which to control the rhythms, order, and regulations for that week’s training. All the while, Denison (2007) began to understand the words of Foucault (1979) in so much as “time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power to render a subject docile” (p. 123).
From this stance, Denison (2007) assumed more responsibility for the failure of his athlete. He contended that it was through his coaching practices—that are commonly accepted as productive ways from which to enact the coach-athlete relationship—that rendered his athlete docile and in turn hindered the athlete’s performance. In the current study, five of the seven participants reported that when coaches adopted W.O.A.T. coach behaviors it shifted even more power to the already inherent power position, the coach. When coaches took too much of the power for themselves, student-athletes felt increased separation between them and their coaches. As disconnection within the coach-athlete relationship increased, student-athlete experienced heightened feelings of (a) isolation, (b) unworthiness, (c) depression, and (d) resentfulness, which negatively influenced their resilience.

**Practical Implications**

Across time, sport has been and still is used as a vehicle from which to promote independence (Coakley, 2009). Yet, results from the current study suggests that the concept that individuals are separate from others is a fragmented and unhealthy view of what it means to be human (McBride, 2017). That is, individuals’ identities are a reflection of the relationships that we hold with others, which is why shame—created by W.O.A.T. coaches—causes distress. Humans are designed to need connection in order to survive, which is why Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that belongingness—the need to form interpersonal connections—is a fundamental human need (Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). Thus, I argue for a philosophical shift to a more relationship-centered approach to coaching, which challenges this ideal that independence is the ultimate end goal. That is, the results from the current study highlight the importance of bringing the coach to the forefront with the athletes, working in tandem to achieve the mutual
benefits of a reciprocal, culturally competent coach-athlete relationship that will enhance the 
coach-athlete relationship and, in turn, positively influence student-athlete resilience. In this 
sense, the current study advocates for coaches to tap into the values and beliefs that underlie 
student-athlete sociocultural factors in order to create a more reciprocal, trusting coach-athlete 
relationship that focus more on student-athletes as holistic humans rather than treating them as 
mere performance-producing machines.

Secondly, sport psychology consultants (SPCs) and coach educators should consider 
including the aforementioned findings as they update and create curriculum that helps coaches, 
athletes, and administrators understand the coach’s role as it pertains to student-athlete 
resilience. That is, such curriculum should highlight the importance of first creating a 
reciprocal, culturally competent coach-athlete relationship from the beginning of the student-
athletes’ NCAA DI sport careers in order to help student-athletes better mobilize their core 
resilience when they experience major stress. This can be accomplished by emphasizing the 
G.O.A.T. coach behaviors—promoting a process-oriented mindset, providing autonomy, and 
acknowledging and validating student-athlete core resilience during their major stress—sooner 
rather than later. As SPCs and coach educators work with coaches, athletes, and 
administrators, it should be noted that a hierarchical, superficial coach-athlete relationship 
jeopardizes student-athlete resilience by creating a culture of shame. In this sense, the results 
from the current study do not simply promote adding G.O.A.T. coach behaviors to the coaches’ 
toolboxes but also encourages coaches to intentionally eradicate any W.O.A.T. coach behaviors 
that might be taking up precious space within the coaching toolbox where G.O.A.T. coach 
behaviors could reside. Thus, the results from the current study encourage coaches to engage in
an honest reflection about their behaviors with student-athletes while student-athletes are experiencing major stress. This will help to create a culture of trust, the anecdote to shame.

The following are guiding questions that could be used by SPCs as well as coach educators to start a discussion with coaches regarding the type of culture they might create:

Given an honest reflection, in what ways have you or have you not

- provided student-athletes with voice?
- clarified student-athletes’ role during and/or after they experienced their major stress?
- acknowledged and validated student-athletes’ feelings, values and beliefs?
- vulnerably shared personal and professional stories about yourself?
- encouraged student-athletes to vulnerably share their authentic selves?
- explored student-athletes’ values and beliefs that are associated with their sociocultural factors?

These questions seek to create the type of self-reflection that could spark the relational shift from bad to better or good to great. It is hoped that by asking these questions better coach awareness will be created as well as stimulate productive dialogue that can help SPCs and coach educators better understand the type of climate the coach might create (e.g., culture of shame versus trust). Given the coaches honest answers to the abovementioned questions, SPCs and coach educators can help to not only promote and offer the G.O.A.T. coaching style as a way to counteract the shame culture created by W.O.A.T. coaches but also encourage W.O.A.T. coaches to actively eradicate their W.O.A.T coaching behaviors.

Another consideration for SPCs and coach educators is the role of self-care of coaches. That is, the results of the current study identified coach own major stress as a source that could
negatively influence student-athlete resilience. In this sense, SPCs and coach educators should encourage coaches to consider their own self-care and promote its importance as it regards the health of the coach-athlete relationship and, consequently, student-athlete resilience. Overall, when coaches seek to create better relationships with student-athletes—making the relational shift from either bad to better or good to great—the coach-athlete relationship will be better arranged where both parties in the relationship can experience the mutual benefits of relational connection that, in turn, positively influences both student-athlete and coach psychological growth.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Despite the contributions of the current study, it is not without limitations. First and foremost, it should be noted that the participants largely represented the Southeastern and Northwestern regions of the United States. Thus, the lived experienced of the current study’s participants might be influenced by the various cultural behaviors characteristic of those particular regions. Additionally, five of the seven participants reported a negative coach-athlete relationship. Future research should consider exploring exemplar coach-athlete relationships in order to gain a better picture of how positive coach-athlete relationships might influence sport resilience. Due to time constraints, some interviews took place using Skype rather than face-to-face. Conducting interviews in this manner limits the scope of interaction with the participant. Future research should consider conducting all interviews face-to-face. However, if this route is not feasible due to travel constraints, Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour (2014) identified
virtual interviewing (e.g., Skype) as the second-best option since it provides access to both verbal and nonverbal cues of the participant as opposed to phone interviews.

Additionally, some individuals would argue that qualitative research cannot be generalized and, thus, acts as a limitation. Smith (2018) argues in opposition to this claim by highlighting one type of generalization that qualitative researchers can make: *transferability*. Transferability is defined as “occurring whenever a person or group in one setting considers adopting something from another that the research has identified” (p. 140). The extent to which the findings of this study might benefit other relationships in the sport and university setting is promising. For instance, the findings of this study offer helpful insights for other relationships that operate within educational settings similar to that of the NCAA DI coach-athlete relationship like the Professor-student and the academic Counselor-athlete relationship.

Overall, sport psychology researchers should continue to explore athletes’ perceptions of the role of the coach-athlete relationship during athlete major stress not only within NCAA sport but within other sport contexts. That is, would the coach’s role look different during athlete major stress if the athlete is competing at the youth versus Olympic level? Additionally, while research has been conducted on coach stress and its perceived effects on athletes (Frey, 2008; McCann, 1997; Olusoga et al., 2010), more research is needed to understand the full extent to which coach stress influences not only athlete well-being and performance, in general, but student-athlete resilience, specifically. In what ways does this directly influence the coach-athlete relationship, and, in turn, other aspects of athlete well-being, performance, and resilience? Future researchers should also consider examining the relational differences among the various coaching positions in relation to student-athlete resilience. For instance, what kind of relational differences are present within the head versus assistant coach-athlete relationship?
How might these relational variances, if any, influence student-athlete resilience differently? This will help to better understand the specifics of each coach’s role in relation to student-athlete resilience in order to better support student-athletes when they are experiencing major stress. Future research also would benefit from an understanding of coaches’ perceptions about how the coach-athlete relationship influences athlete resilience. Specifically, how do coaches come to understand what they know about resilience? How does this influence how they interact with student-athletes when they are experiencing major stress? Lastly, future research within sport psychology would benefit from an exploration of relational resilience within the SPC-athlete relationship. Overall, more narrative inquiry research needs to be done in this area in order to continue our understanding of how resilience develops and operates as a relational construct.

**Conclusion**

Overall, this study provides novel insights regarding NCAA DI student-athletes’ lived experiences of how the coach-athlete relationship influenced student-athlete resilience. Namely, student-athletes clearly stated that, while they attributed the primary source of their resilience to themselves, coaches were identified as an important resource to student-athlete resilience. These findings aligned well with previous research pertaining to resilience in sport (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012; Galli & Vealey, 2008). In addition, participants stressed the importance of the G.O.A.T. coaching style because they wanted to vulnerably engage with their coaches, which produced a better coach-athlete relationship that positively influenced student-athlete resilience. Together, the findings of the current study encourage coaches to take an honest reflection of their coaching behaviors. This will provide a productive standpoint from which coaches can then make a relational shift from either bad to better or from good to great.
In doing so, NCAA DI coaches will create better connections with their student-athletes which will support student-athlete resilience.
SECTION 3: Extended Literature Review

Through my comprehensive exam process, I conducted an extensive literature review. The following pages within this section discuss sociocultural factors and power in the coach-athlete connection, especially pertaining to experiences of athlete resilience. Following, I provide research as it pertains to resilience in sport (Galli & Vealey, 2008; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012), relational-cultural theory (Miller, 1978); relational resilience (Jordan, 2010) and the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007), and relational-cultural theory (Miller, 1978). Lastly, literature pertaining to organizational resilience (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003) via various leadership traits and theories is offered.

Interdependence of Sport, Culture, and Society

Coakley (2009) defined society as “a collection of people living in a defined geographic territory and united by a political system and a shared sense of self-identification that distinguishes them from other people” (p. 5). Further, he defined culture as “the ways of life people create as they participate in a group or society” (Coakley, 2009, p. 5). Considering sport, Lüschen (1967) asserted that sport acts as an “expression of the socio-cultural system in which it occurs” (p. 130). Thus, it is imperative to first understand the political discourse of a particular society (e.g., North America) in order to understand how sport might be used as a disciplinary vehicle to promote the American value system.

Within most Western countries, especially the United States, the socio-cultural system is founded upon the need for achievement (McClelland, 1961). It was the achievement-oriented foundation that then influenced the Protestant Reformation and modern industrialism dominated by capitalism or “the management or direction or organization or manipulation of a …nation’s ‘resources’…for the ‘common good’” and often characterized by private property, wage labor, competitive markets, and price system (Rand, 1967, p. 12). The interdependence
of these three constructs is evident within American sport in so much as those who achieve success are rewarded with increased capital and considered to be highly favored.

One sport that promotes this notion is American football. Riesman and Denney (1954) claimed football to be a great example of the American system given that the discourse surrounding football emphasizes a centrality upon the individual athlete. Football players who achieve more success consequently earn higher wages and claim to be blessed by God (Lüschen, 1967). In terms of Foucault, power figures (e.g., general managers, coaches) use American football as a disciplinary vehicle to reinforce the prevailing discourse of achievement, Christianity, and capitalism, which consequently creates scientifically classified docile bodies used to reinforce proper societal discipline. For instance, when football players receive a pay increase or perfectly execute a play that results in a touchdown, they are likely to give credit to God for their achievement status. In this sense, those who do not properly adhere to American football standards—not contributing to team achievement—are subject to dividing practices (e.g., salary cut or dropped from team). Such dividing practices have the tendency to cause tension and hostility within the athlete and team. Such tension as created by performance slumps has the ability to hinder athlete resilience (e.g., Tamminen, Holt, & Neely, 2013); thus, it is necessary to examine the hegemonic American norms in order to understand how such discourse from power figures, particularly the coach, create dividing practice within American sport and hinder athlete resilience.

**Socio-Cultural Norms in American Sport**

Hegemony can be defined as “the ability of dominant social groups to use their power and influence to promote and shape attitudes, values, beliefs, and world views that serve to maintain their privileged position in society” (Cassidy, Jones, Potrac, 2008, p. 95). Those
categorized as privileged in North America are Caucasian, male, heterosexual, upper-class, Christian individuals (Coakley, 2009). Thus, African-American, female, homosexual, middle- to lower-class, non-Christian individuals are considered to be a threat to cultural ideology (Coakley, 2009). The following subsections further articulate these socio-cultural norms which ultimately produce discourse that fosters sexism, homophobia, racism, religious insensitivity, and classism.

**Sexism.** Within American society, and across other cultures, masculine characteristics are regularly connected with power positions. For example, in their 37-year analysis, Acosta and Carpenter (2014) reported the steep decline of women coaches in intercollegiate athletics. Their results demonstrated the impact of Title IX in so much as this federal law might have achieved equity for female athletes but failed female coaches. This is evident in so much as female participation in collegiate sport is at an all-time high while the number of female coaches who coach female teams is at an all-time low. For example, before Title IX, more than 90% of female athletes had female coaches (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). This largely was due to the fact that Physical Education (P.E.) teachers were the ones who originally coached female athletes. These P.E. teachers were dominantly female and expected to volunteer their time to the influx of female athletes who wanted to participate in sport (Amon, 2015). Over time, as women exited the P.E. teacher/coach role, female candidates were not chosen to fill the position (Stengl & Kane, 1991).

One explanation for this result might be due to the binary standard of American society. That is, in binary standards, females have been characterized as fragile, sensitive, and dependent upon men—characteristics not assigned to sport. In contrast, sport has been and still is used as a vehicle to promote the hegemonic norm of male dominance characterized as being
independent, decisive, aggressive, tough, strong, and powerful (Coakley, 2009). In this sense, female athletes are more often marginalized by coaching discourse that supports masculinity, which likely contributes to female athletes experiencing increased tension caused by such discourse. In light of such tension, female athletes are likely to experience greater deficits in resilience, as opposed to their male athlete counterparts who are not as likely to experience adversity due to their privileged gender role. Yet, the inequality of female to male coaches is not the only avenue in which sexism is evident. The hegemonic norm of masculinity is constantly reinforced in the various discourses used by those in power.

Kane (1996) regarded “sport as a site for gender struggle” in so much as traditional notions of “what it meant to be female was in direct opposition to what it meant to be an athlete” (p. 99). While dramatic changes have been made since the emergence of Title IX in 1972—over two million females participate in sports as compared to only 300,000 before Title IX—power figures (e.g., the media, coaches) still produce discourse that reinforce masculinity (Kane, 1996). To date, the media has used sport as one of its main domains from which to promote male supremacy via grossly limiting female media coverage; if females are granted media coverage they largely are “portrayed off the court, out of uniform, and in highly passive and sexualized poses” (Kane, 1996, p. 102). While the media has played an influential role in promoting hegemonic discourse, other power figures also contribute to such discrimination.

Cooky and McDonald (2005) examined the narratives of 11 to 14-year-old girls’ sporting experiences. Through their interviews, the participants mentioned a variety of ways in which their parents and coaches reinforced the hegemonic norm of masculinity. For example, one participant (Emily) claimed that her coach, who was also her father, was known for saying,
“don’t play like a girl, play like a guy” (Cooky & McDonald, 2005, p. 167). Similarly, another participant (Anna) challenged her father when he told her brother that he, “throws like a girl.” Her father’s response to Anna’s challenge was to rephrase his statement by stating, “OK, fine, he throws like a pansy” (Cooky & McDonald, 2005, p. 167). In both cases, the fathers/coaches made it apparent that males are the standard for sport “to which all others [(i.e., girls, pansies)] should aspire” (Cooky & McDonald, 2005, p. 168). While the tone of such discourse—whether from the media or other authority figures—is driven by hegemonic masculinity, the concept of homophobia is also closely intertwined into such dividing practices.

**Homophobia.** Homophobia closely aligns with heterosexism, which idolizes masculine traits over feminine traits (Griffin, 1995). Thus, men who embody feminine traits do not adhere to the societal norm (scientific classification) and are chastised in American society (dividing practices), promoting the concept of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity has been defined as “the normalizing processes which support heterosexuality as the elemental form of human association as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist” (Warner, 1993, p. 21). Thus, individuals who identify with sexual identities that deviate from the norm (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual) are considered to be “wrong” and “not natural”—closely aligned with Christian standards of morality (Cassidy, Jones, Potrac, 2008, p. 104). Heterosexuals, thus, are often those who marginalize, criticize, and in some situations physically assault homosexuals (Coakley, 2009). For example, heterosexuals have been noted for negatively portraying “lesbian athletes...[as] sexual predators who prey on their teammates in order to recruit them to their lifestyle” (Cassidy, Jones, Potrac, 2008, p. 105).
Additionally, the value of heteronormativity is apparent in the aforementioned research of Cooky and McDonald (2005). Their examination of 11 to 14-year-old female athlete sporting experiences revealed testimonials which stated, “as guys get older, they like don’t want to be around girls (while playing sport) or anything like that. They’re always focused on girls rather than the game” (Cooky & McDonald, 2005, p. 167). Likewise, gay male athletes are shamed for their sexual preferences. For example, Cassidy, Jones, and Potrac (2008) provided a good illustration of such shame in the following quotation from a gay major-league baseball player:

I could have been a good major-league player if I was not so emotionally screwed up when I was playing. I was very hard on myself, and I think it all translates back to that feeling of, ‘I’m not worthy’, I’m bad because I’m a gay man on the Dodger Stadium field. I don’t belong out here. This is wrong. I hate myself. (p. 106)

In this same vein, male dancers are likely to be called “fags” or “fairies” while female football players might be called “dykes” or “butch” (Schempp & Oliver, 2000, p. 147). When power figures condone this type of discourse, which translates into disciplines adopting this discourse as normal, those individuals who do not discipline themselves in such a way as to be worthy representatives of the hegemonic norm are oppressed. Those who are oppressed are done so through threats of silence, fear, and protection, which can be avoided if coaches resist the tendency to remain silent, ignoring the oppressive actions, and challenge such marginalizing behaviors.

After interviewing lesbian female coaches, Krane and Barber (2005) magnified the participant’s daily struggle to mask their sexuality by remaining silent, being fearful, and protecting themselves (Krane & Barber, 2005). For example, in regard to silence, one coach
mentioned it was common knowledge, “Don’t ask, don’t tell, don’t bring it up, and we won’t have to deal with it” (p. 72). They also were fearful to disclose their sexuality because it would contribute to the “inability to recruit athletes into their program, loss of their job, or inability to change jobs” (Krane & Barber, 2005, p. 73). Likewise, participants’ silence and fear contributed to their feelings of self-protection amidst such hostility. One coach stated,

It’s like I try to work harder, do more, show this and that, to say, ‘look, you’re darned well going to react to who I am and what I do to the point that you are not going to be able to be concerned with my sexual orientation (Krane & Barber, 2005, p. 73)

The aforementioned research makes it apparent that sport discourse largely promotes hegemonic masculinity as well as a heteronormative ideology. It is this kind of adversity caused by male supremacy and homophobic oppression that places individuals at risk of experiencing hindered resilience. Thus, it is imperative that coaches are aware of and proactive in challenging such oppressive discourse in order to avoid unnecessary adversity that is often afforded to female and gay athletes. Yet, while these two main socio-cultural aspects impact sport on a daily basis, the concept of race has been another taboo topic, which permeates the culture of sport. The following section outlines such issues surrounding race and sport.

Racism. Many people commonly misuse the terms race and ethnicity, which has contributed to the misunderstanding of what constitutes racism. Race is defined as “a population of people who are believed to be naturally or biologically distinct from other populations” (Coakley, 2009, p. 282). In contrast, ethnicity is defined as “a particular cultural heritage that is used to identify a category of people,” which is not based upon physical characteristics but rather “cultural traditions and history” (Coakley, 2009, p. 282). It is “the appearance [(i.e., race)] and actions [(i.e., ethnicity)] of white Europeans” that constitute the
North American norm and any “deviations from normal [are] strange, primitive, or immoral” (Coakley, 2009, p. 283). From this lens, Caucasians are considered to be the standard in US society. Thus, non-White individuals are considered below standard and, thus, marginalized. This is evident in the following narratives.

Simpson (1996) magnified the voice of Native American athletes who acknowledged the dangers to their cultural traditions as they participated in American sport. For example, one participant stated, “If you go too far into [white] society, there’s a fear of losing your Indian-ness. There’s a spiritual factor that comes into play. To become part of white society you give up half your soul” (Simpson, 1996, p. 274). Beaton (1993) gave voice to the sporting experiences of Mexican Americans. His interview with a Major League Baseball scout identified Mexican-Americans as only being adequate as pitchers because they have “bad foot speed,” which he further justified as a “genetic type thing. They have a different body type [from other races]” (p. 11). While the aforementioned research has demonstrated how sport can be culturally insensitivity, it is necessary to have an understanding of what drives such behavior. Based upon the value of capitalism in the United States, Latin American baseball players have been contracted at cheaper costs than American-bred baseball players. That is, “it costs less to sign five Latin American players than one player from the United States;” thus, in the true spirit of American values, “one of every four players on major league teams are Latinos and nearly 40 percent of all minor league baseball players were Latin Americans in 2006” (Coakley, 2009, p. 304).

Not only has inequality been apparent within the various discourses and statistics of race and ethnicity, various power figures also have perpetuated such issues. The media has long been known for limiting the media coverage of non-White individuals, similar to the
discrimination experienced by women in sport. For example, Bretón (2000) acknowledged that Latin American and Caribbean athletes’ “stories remain untold on ESPN and the sports pages of newspapers” (p. 15). Likewise—and to illustrate the intersectionality of various socio-cultural aspects (e.g., gender and race)—Lumpkin and Williams (1991) identified this concern by acknowledging the inadequate amount of attention paid to not only females but African-American females. Out of 3,723 featured articles in Sports Illustrated from 1954 to 1987, African-American women were only featured 16 times (Lumpkin & Williams, 1991). In this sense, non-White individuals are at a heightened risk for experiencing adversity in sport by not being included in the everyday dominant discourse regarding sport. While gender, sexuality, and race are important socio-cultural aspects, an individual’s religious affiliation also is rampant with discourse that scientifically classifies disciplines and docile bodies.

**Religious insensitivity.** Religion is defined as “a socially shared set of beliefs and rituals that people use to transcend the material world and give meaning to important aspects of their lives” (Coakley, 2009, p. 530). The American system primarily identifies and promotes Christianity as its main form of religion, which is broken down into a slew of different denominations (e.g., Catholic, Southern Baptist, Church of Christ, and Methodist). Applying McIntosh’s (1988) work on White and male privilege, Blumenfeld and Jaekel (2012) defined Christian privilege as “a seemingly invisible, unearned, and largely unacknowledged array of benefits accorded to Christians” (p. 128). In this sense, things (i.e., symbols, objects, rituals) that connect people to the supernatural are characterized as sacred. In contrast, things that promote the mundane world and ultimately hinder connection to the divine are considered profane (Coakley, 2009). Thus, for example, the religious practices of Islam are often deemed
profane through the hegemonic lens of Christianity. This is evident in the tensions experienced by Muslim athletes competing in American sport.

Fleming (1991) examined the Muslim faith in sport and found that Muslim athletes have experienced continuous tension between loyalty to their faith and also to their team. One participant stated:

It’s quite difficult for me. I have to pray five times a day. If I have to pray at 12 o’clock and there’s a match, I can’t play…If it’s a matter of ‘life or death’, you can pray afterwards. But sport doesn’t count as a matter of ‘life or death’ (p. 37)

In addition, Islamic practices limit a woman’s attire to remain in the parameters ranging from a head scarf to full-body covers. If Islamic women expose their bodies to any non-Muslim or male, they might experience feelings of shame and guilt. Given the typical, often very revealing, uniforms worn by American female athletes, this might prove a major barrier for Muslim female athlete sport participation and overall experience (Tinning, Macdonald, Wright, & Hickey, 2001). Applying Foucault (1978), Muslim athletes, for example, do not adhere to the norm of Christian discipline, which has subjected Muslims to marginalization in the United States. It is through this marginalization that Muslims are made docile, pressured to conform to American ideology by threats made off the basis of Muslims being considered terrorists. In this sense, athletes who do not identify with the hegemonic norm of Christianity are at a heightened risk of experiencing adversity. In this sense, non-Christian athletes are likely not afforded the unacknowledged benefits due to Christians, which exposes, for instance, Muslim athletes to increased experiences of adversity based upon their religious affiliation, which might hinder their ability to be resilient. Yet, another form of marginalization can be seen not only within religious affiliation but also social class.
Classism. Coakley (2009) has defined social class as “categories of people who share an economic position in society based on a combination of their income (earnings), wealth (possessions), education, occupation, and social connections (Coakley, 2009, p. 322). Individuals use this definition to socially stratify others by social class. For example, those in the upper-class possess higher income, more wealth, education, social connections, and have prestigious occupations. In contrast, individuals slated into the lower-class are deemed to have fewer opportunities and less economic success when compared to those in the upper- or even middle-class. This type of discourse contributes to class ideology in the United States. That is, Coakley (2009) has defined class ideology as

a web of ideas and beliefs that people use to understand economic inequalities, identify themselves in terms of their class position, and evaluate the manner in which economic inequalities are and should be integrated into the organization of social worlds (p. 325)

The prevailing ideology in the United States centers upon the American Dream, which is driven by the belief in meritocracy. Meritocracy is a way in which people categorize themselves in order to best determine who should be in positions of power. For example, meritocracy assumes that those who possess strong character (e.g., masculine characteristics) and make smart choices will be the individuals who obtain more power and success. In contrast, individuals who are associated with weak character (e.g., feminine characteristics) and make poor choices are slated to achieve less power and success (Coakley, 2009). This type of discourse is what strongly links economic success with individual ability, worth, and character. Thus, upper-class individuals are those who hold the most power within the context of sport. Social class also has been associated with the type of sport played as well as the frequency in which it is played. That is, upper-class individuals have the highest rates of sport participation
and attendance at sporting events (Booth & Loy, 1999). This largely is due to the luxury offered by the upper-class in so much as they are able to play at expensive clubs and resorts, which offer golf, tennis, skiing, swimming, sailing, and other self-funded sports. In contrast, the middle- to lower-class often partake in sports that are traditionally offered free to the public or available through public school organizations. While such sports might be free, there are still the costs of equipment and uniforms that pose a threat to what middle- to lower-class families might be able to afford (Coakley, 2009). Thus, the type of income, wealth, education, occupation, and social connections individuals possess will determine what kind of discipline (e.g., sport) in which they can partake.

While inequality is apparent among classes, there is also intersectionality of class in association with other socio-cultural norms. In regard to class and gender relations, women in lower-class families are less likely to engage in sport due to their lack of resources to allocate to sport—resources (e.g., time and money) that are needed in order to properly raise a family. In contrast, women in high-class families are more likely to participate in sport because they have the resources to, for example, hire a babysitter to watch the children while they go play tennis during lunch. Regarding class and heteronormativity, researchers have demonstrated differences regarding sport and masculinity among upper-, middle-, and lower-class males. That is, boys in upper-class families viewed sport as an arena where they could exercise and hone their masculine characteristics with the intent to gain power in the future. In contrast, boys in middle to lower-class families viewed sport as an arena in which they could be social and gain opportunities to be accepted into the male group (Laberge & Albert, 1999).

Regarding race, African-American males were most of whom composed sports associated with poor minority groups (i.e., professional boxing; Wacquant, 2004). Wacquant (2004) gave
voice to African-American boxers who explained that they knew they would not be boxing—a sport that requires little resources—if it was not for their class and minority status at birth.

Overall, the aforementioned socio-cultural norms are not an exclusive or exhaustive list. Rather, they are the main socio-cultural concerns that undergird the way in which individuals (e.g., athletes, coaches, media, and parents) operate within sport. It is the stories of homogenous individuals (i.e., female, homosexual, non-Caucasian, non-Christian, middle- to lower-class) that are rampant with adversity. Such socio-cultural stressors have the ability to impact athlete resilience (Walsh, 2002; Ungar, 2006), which is directly connected to athlete psychological well-being and sport performance (Nazhad & Besharat, 2010). Thus, it is necessary for power figures (e.g., coaches) to recognize, reflect upon, and challenge hegemony in order to promote more resilient athletes in the face of such hostility and tension.

**Socio-Cultural Norms and Athlete Resilience**

In order to understand resilience, it is necessary to first understand adversity. Within sport, adversity has been conceptualized as “negative life circumstances that are known to be statistically associated with adjustment difficulties” and can range from balancing work and training to major life events such as a death of a family member or injury (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2013, p. 1422). One such arena that has not been examined regards how various socio-cultural factors might impact athlete adversity. That is, how might athletes who do not identify with the hegemonic norm of American culture be at greater risk of experiencing adversity in the realm of sport? Regarding gender, female athletes are constantly bombarded with the pressure to conform to the hegemonic requirements of femininity (e.g., wearing makeup, being thin, sporting minimal clothes; Krane, 2001). One of the most prevalent issues concerning female athletes, for example, is eating disorders, which holds major health concerns. Johns (1998) has
demonstrated an environment that strictly monitors athlete eating habits and frequently measures weight places athletes at greater risk of physically harming their bodies to achieve performance standards.

Likewise, gay and lesbian athletes constantly experience “isolation, hostility, rejection by coaches and teammates, exclusion from team events, and, for elite athletes, the loss of sponsorships and endorsement” (Cassidy et al., 2008, p. 105). One lesbian athlete who advocated for the LGBTQ+ (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, additional sexual identities) community, stated that

while I was becoming more and more open about who I was, I found myself sitting on the bench more and more. I was there (on the team) as an athlete not a lesbian, but no one in the team could separate the two in their minds and accept me for who I was, so I had a pretty horrible season (Griffin, 1998, p. 98)

Latino baseball players who come to America to play are at risk of failure. For example, one statistics has slated an astounding 90-95% of Latino players who sign contracts in the United States never make it to the major league, which largely has been due to cultural adjustment and language barriers (Klein, 1991). Muslim athletes might have to sit out from practice or games during Ramadan or to observe prayer, which would impede upon opportunities for skill development and ultimately contribute to higher drop-out rates (Fleming, 1991). The aforementioned are only a few examples of how athlete identity—when juxtaposed to the hegemonic norms of American society—can create stress caused by dividing practices. Thus, it is imperative to not only examine how such minorities might experience adversity as a result of their socio-cultural background but also how power figures can influence such experiences.
**General Definitions, Conceptualizations, and Theoretical Frameworks of Resilience**

*Definitions of resilience.* Resilience has been examined within a multitude of contexts (e.g., family, medical, organizational, military) and populations (e.g., adolescents and youth) where similarities and differences regarding how resilience has been defined are evident. For example, investigations of resilience with youth offered one of its earlier definitions: “protective factors which modify, ameliorate or alter a person’s response to some environmental hazard that predisposes to a maladaptive outcome” (Rutter, 1987, p. 316).

Later, Connor and Davidson (2003) extended what we know about resilience with varies samples in a clinical setting such as a general population sample (e.g., non-help seeking), primary outcare patients, psychiatric outpatients, generalized anxiety disorder patients, and individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder (e.g., PTSD; Connor & Davidson, 2003). Their understanding of resilience emphasized resilience as a trait, which was defined as “the personal qualities [(e.g., time, age, gender)] that enables one to thrive in the face of adversity” (p. 76). Connor and Davidson’s (2003) definition differed from Rutter’s (1987) in so much as it focused more on individual traits rather than environmental factors. Yet, three-years later, Wilson and Agaibi (2006) argued for the inclusion of environmental factors back into a working definition of resilience after conducting a review of the literature with trauma and PTSD survivors. They recommended for definitions of resilience to include a “complex repertoire of behavioral tendencies” such as prosocial behavior, altruism, and engaging in bonding and fellowship (p. 374).

More recently, Lee and Cranford (2008) examined adolescents and introduced the concept of coping into the definition of resilience, which defined it as the “capacity of individuals to cope successfully with significant change, adversity or risk” (p. 213). Leipold &
Greve (2009) further defined resilience with adolescents and introduced the concept of recovery into a working definition of resilience, which was defined as “an individual’s stability or quick recovery (or even growth) under significant adverse conditions” (p. 41). While each of these definitions, as well as others in the literature (e.g., Bonanno, 2004; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Masten, Best, Garmezy, 1990), are slightly different across various domains—with some definitions attenting more to individual traits while others include variations of coping, recovery, and behavioral tendencies—there are two main similarities that link each definition: the existence of adversity and the ability to positively adapt.

The first main component of resilience is the concept of adversity. Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) have defined adversity as “negative life circumstances that are known to be statistically associated with adjustment difficulties” (p. 858). This definition of adversity evolved through the years to not only refer to circumstances that cause difficult adjustment but to also reflect any hardship, loss, or disappointment regardless its severity (Jackson, Firtko, & Edenborough, 2007). Later, researchers further delineated adversity on a severity scale ranging from major disasters such as death in the family to minor life disruptions such as the daily hassles of life (Davis, Luecken & Lemery-Chalfant, 2009; Davydov, Stewart, Ritchie, & Chaudieu, 2010). Even so, Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) have encouraged researchers to not simply rest upon these definitions of adversity but to appropriately determine what defines adversity within the inquired context. For instance, in the context of the military, an appropriate marker of adversity for a soldier might be the actual battle itself or the development of PTSD. In contrast, an appropriate marker of adversity for college students might be failing a class or dropping out of college.
The second main component of resilience is the concept of positive adaptation. Luthar and Cicchetti (2000) have defined positive adaptation as “behaviorally manifested social competence, or success at meeting stage-salient developmental tasks” (p. 858). For instance, a senior in high school would meet a stage-salient developmental task by graduating from their respective school and going to college. Similar to adversity, researchers have stated that such tasks should be evaluated appropriately given a particular context. For instance, in the context of school, an appropriate marker from which to measure a student’s positive adaptation would be linked to academic achievement. In contrast, positive adaptation in the family might be associated with decreased conflict among family members within the family unit. Thus, it is imperative that researchers consider appropriate markers from which to not only determine adversity but also positive adaptation for the particular context in question, which is especially pertinent when conceptualizing resilience.

**Concepts of resilience.** A wide array of literature regarding the conceptualization of resilience has been offered over the decades; yet, there is still confusion regarding its conceptualization. For instance, researchers have used terms such as resilience, resiliency, coping, recovery, mental toughness, hardiness, and grit interchangeably when referring to and examining the concept of resilience. Thus, for sake of clarity, it is necessary to understand the differences between each term.

**Resilience versus resiliency.** While, at first glance, it might seem innocent to use these two terms interchangeably, researchers should note their discrete differences. That is, various researchers (e.g., Luther, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 1994) agree the term resilience should be used when referring to the “process or phenomenon of competence despite adversity” (Wagstaff et al., 2016, p. 6). In contrast, researchers should use the term resiliency “when
referring to a specific personality trait” associated with resilience such as positive personality, confidence, self-esteem (Wagstaff et al., 2016, p. 6). Thus, researchers and practitioners should not use these terms interchangeably to avoid confusion given that one term denotes the resilience process while the other regards resiliency traits.

*Resilience versus coping.* The concept of resilience also has been closely interwoven with the concept of coping but should be considered conceptually distinct (e.g., Campbell-Sills, Cohen, & Stein, 2006; Major, Richards, Cozzarelli, Cooper, & Zubek, 1998). The confusion is possibly due to the inclusion of coping within most definitions of resilience, such as “the process of coping with stressors…” (Richardson, 2002, p. 308) and “the capacity of individuals to cope successfully…” (Lee & Cranford, 2008, p. 213). Even so, researchers have regarded resilience as the way in which an event is appraised whereas coping refers to the strategies (e.g., breathing, optimistic explanatory style) used after the resilience appraisal occurs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this sense, an individual’s resilience precedes coping.

*Resilience versus recovery.* There are also conceptual differences between resilience and recovery. For instance, Leipold and Greve (2009) partially define resilience as “an individual’s stability or quick recovery…” (p. 41). This definition insinuates that recovery is a part of resilience and might lend to why some individuals use the terms interchangeably. However, researchers have situated recovery to be “characterized as a temporary period of psychopathology followed by gradual restoration to healthy levels of functioning” (Wagstaff et al., 2016, p. 12). In contrast, researchers have categorized resilience as an individual’s ability to experience minimal to no disruption in their daily functioning after encountering adversity (Wagstaff et al., 2016). To illustrate, individuals in recovery might experience anxiety or depression after the death of a family member, which can contribute to their inability to
complete daily tasks. After this initial stage of loss, they progress back to normal levels of functioning over a one to two-year period. For resilient individuals, they will not experience such psychopathological setbacks but rather continue daily life with minimal distractions.

**Resilience versus mental toughness.** Resilience and mental toughness are commonly confused. Researchers have positioned resilience as a subcomponent of mental toughness (Crust, 2007) given that mental toughness not only encompasses resilience but also other concepts such as self-efficacy, self-belief, confidence (Clough, Earle, & Sewell, 2002; Jones, Hanton, Connaughton, 2002), superior mental skills (Bull, Albinson, & Shambrook, 1996; Golby, Sheard, & Lavallee, 2003), and a competitive spirit with self and others (Bull, Shambrook, James, & Brooks, 2005; Clough, Earle, & Sewell, 2002). Resilience, on the other hand, solely focuses on the process of competence despite adversity, which does not include concepts such as self-efficacy, self-belief, confidence, mental skills, or competitiveness into its conceptualization. In this sense, resilience has been identified as a part of mental toughness but not the only construct, situating resilience underneath the larger conceptual umbrella of mental toughness.

**Resilience versus hardiness.** Likewise, resilience and hardiness have been two terms that have overlapped in the research. Researchers have defined hardiness by its three interrelated temperaments of commitment, control, and challenge (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982; Maddi, Harvey, Khoshaba, Lu, Persico, & Brow, 2006). An individual’s commitment refers to intense involvement in a particular task while an individual’s control denotes the belief that individuals do not lose power over their lives during stressful circumstances but rather feel that they remain in control during the adversity. Additionally, an individual’s challenge is expressed as the belief that change rather than stability is normal in life (Kobasa,
In this sense, hardiness is measured at the individual level whereas resilience has the
capacity to be measured at the relational and organizational level. Thus, hardiness is an
individual, psychological quality that contributes to and helps to explain resilience (Bartone,
2006).

**Resilience versus grit.** Grit is another term that is gaining popularity in the mainstream
media (e.g., Duckworth, 2016), which is rooted in the work of Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews,
and Kelly (2007) who defined grit as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (p.
1087). This definition of grit entails maintaining efforts over the years despite adversity. Part
of grit is to be resilient, but, as mentioned by Duckworth in an interview with Perkins-Gough
(2013), resilience is not the only trait of grit. To be considered a gritty person, individuals also
must possess passion (i.e., consistent interests connected to deep commitments). Thus, the term
grit, similar to mental toughness and hardiness, is a broader term from which resilience is
merely a tenet. Overall, this study seeks to examine resilience and cautions others to not
confuse it with other terms such as resiliency, coping, recovery, mental toughness, hardiness, or
grit when referencing resilience in context or theory.

**Theories of resilience.** To date, there have been a multitude of resilience theories
proposed within various contexts and populations. For example, Patterson (1988) offered the
family adjustment and adaptation response model as a way to understand how families go
through adjustment, crisis, and adaptation. Other scholars examined resilience in the realm of
medicine (Gillespie, Chaboyer, Wallis, & Grimbeek, 2007), organizations (Riolli & Savicki,
2003), developmental psychology (Brennan, 2008; Haase, 2004), the protective services
(Paton, Violanti, Johnston, Clarke, Burke, & Kennan, 2008; Reivich, Seligman, & McBride,
2011) with the most theoretical attention given to Richardson’s (2002) metatheory of resilience
and resiliency and its corresponding resilience model (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990).

The metatheory of resilience and resiliency (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990; Richardson, 2002) and its accompanying model (Richardson et al., 1990) posits that individuals begin in a space where they feel balanced physically, mentally, and spiritually (i.e., biopsychospiritual homeostasis). When adversity occurs, the biopsychospiritual homeostasis might be disrupted if they do not have adequate protective factors (e.g., support from parents, friends) from which to buffer against adversity. After experiencing the disruption, individuals begin the reintegration process which leads to four various outcomes: resilient reintegration, homeostatic reintegration, reintegration with loss, or dysfunctional reintegration. *Resilient reintegration* reflects an individual who has benefited from the adverse event by surfacing stronger. For example, this individual learns new skills, has more self-understanding, and experiences increases in self-efficacy toward facing future adverse situations. In terms of sport, this phase would be representative of an athlete who has experienced a major stressor and demonstrated better athletic or academic performance during and after the adverse event.

*Homeostatic reintegration* represents an individual who returns to the same level of functioning similar to that experienced prior to the adverse event. This particular individual did not learn from the adversity, which will likely result in the individual experiencing similar problems and continue to mishandle them. In terms of sport, this phase would be representative of an athlete who has experienced a major stressor and continued to function at the same level of performance similar to the performance levels demonstrated before the adverse event. *Reintegration with loss* happens when an individual is largely impacted by the adverse event which considerably diminishes her/his protective skills. That is, individuals
experiences decreases in self-esteem, a sense of adventure, expectations for self, and internal locus of control. Regarding sport, this phase would be representative of an athlete who experiences decreased protective skills, which ultimately hinders the athlete’s overall performance in practice and competition.

_Dysfunctional reintegration_ represents those individuals who reintegrate into society after the adverse event by abusing substances, withdrawing from society, or committing suicide (Richardson et al., 1990). In terms of sport, this phase would be representative of an athlete developing a drug or alcohol problem, potentially leading to an increased likelihood for sport drop-out. Yet, this theory and its model are not without limitations. That is, Richardson’s (2002) theory and corresponding resiliency model (Richardson et al., 1990) has been used dominantly in the context of sport where various researchers have outlined its shortcomings.

The metatheory of resilience and resiliency (Richardson, 2002) and its associated resiliency model (Richardson et al., 1990) are limited on a number of fronts. For instance, Wagstaff et al. (2016) have highlighted how the theory and its model do not consider how multiple adverse events, experienced simultaneously, might impact the reintegration process. In addition, this model does not account for the emotional or cognitive aspects of resilience, only behavioral, and how such components are represented in the reintegration process. Lastly, the model strongly emphasizes coping. As previously mentioned, researchers are cautioned against the interchangeable use of resilience and coping. Thus, researchers are encouraged to address these limitations in order to create a more comprehensible theory of resilience.

Fletcher et al. (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012, 2013; Morgan, Fletcher, & Sarkar, 2013; Wagstaff et al., 2016) have sought to answer this call by examining resilience in sport with the intent to first determine how resilience is characterized and functions within the sport environment. From
this stance, the following section outlines the literature on resilience in sport, further addressing the need to move beyond the examination of resilience as an individual construct.

**Resilience in Sport**

Athletes who participate in sport are constantly at risk of experiencing various adversities (Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009). In this sense, researchers have questioned that it is not “if an athlete will encounter adversity in sport, but instead how will they respond when adversity occurs?” (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015, p. 243). Thus, sport is a fruitful environment from which to examine resilience. To further justify the need for the investigation of resilience in sport, Nezhad and Besharat (2010) examined the relationship between resilience and athlete well-being and sport performance. A total of 149 athletes (96 male, 43 female) from the Physical Education and Sport Science sport clubs at the University of Tehran completed the Connor and Davidson Resilience scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003), the Mental Health Inventory (MTI; Besharat, 2006), and the Sport Achievement Scale (SAS; Besharat, Abbasi, & Shojaeddin 2002). Their results revealed that resilience was positively associated with athlete psychological well-being and performance. Thus, given the inevitable nature of adversity in sport (Galli & Gonzalez, 2015) and the connection between resilience and positive psychological and performance outcomes (Nezhad & Besharat, 2010), it is necessary to further understand resilience as it is conceptualized within sport.

**Adversity in sport.** Mellalieu et al. (2009) investigated the characterization of adversity in sport by examining a population of 12 sport performers ranging in ages from 19-56 years. Six of the participants met the criteria of elite athletes who had competed in major international and national competitions. The remaining six participants were classified as non-elite, which were those who had competed at a national school or university. Their results offered 10
factors that outline the sources of stress in sport, which were identified as five performance and five organizational. The five performance factors included preparation (e.g., technical and tactical skills), injury (e.g., fear or injury or reinjury), expectations (e.g., internal and external; ranking), self-presentation (e.g., coach and teammates evaluations), and rivalry (e.g., opponent behaviors, retaliation). The five organizational factors included factors intrinsic to the sport (e.g., competition environment, format of play), roles in the sport organization (e.g., on team, time management), sport relationships and interpersonal demands (e.g., leadership, personality types), athletic career and performance development issues (e.g., position security, income and funding), and organizational structure and climate of the sport (e.g., competition within the team, political environment; Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009).

Extending this research, Tammenin et al. (2013) examined sport adversity with a population of five elite female athletes between the ages of 18-23 years. Their results demonstrated a range of reported adverse situations such as performance slumps, coach conflicts, bullying, eating disorders, injuries, and sexual abuse, which, in turn, contributed to high-order, more emotional adverse circumstances such as isolation and withdrawal, emotional disruption, and questioning identity as an athlete (Tamminen, Holt, & Neely, 2013). Further, Sarkar et al. (2015) examined the adverse experiences of 10 Olympic gold medalists. Their results also demonstrated an array of adverse circumstances ranging from not being re-selected to compete, sporting failure, political unrest, serious injury, and the death of a family member (Sarkar, Fletcher, & Brown, 2015). In general, researchers reference Wage and Gordon’s (1994) work of adversity by characterizing adversity in sport as any physical or psychological stressor that has the potential to interfere with normal functioning.
Positive adaptation in sport. Researchers have mentioned the importance of identifying what constitutes positive adaptation in a particular context (e.g., Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Schinke et al. (2012) have identified various markers that contribute to athlete positive adaptation such as the appraisal of stressors, coping strategies, self-regulation strategies, and a consolidated adaptation response (Schinke, Battochio, Dube, Lidor, Tenenbaum, & Lane, 2012). These four factors are explained in Lazarus’ (2000) adaptation encounter. Lazarus proposed that individuals fluctuate in regard to their response to stressors. This process begins with how individuals appraise the stressor and its significance. Once appraised as relevant, individuals begin the adaptive response phase by employing various coping strategies (e.g., focus, social support) which seek to either suppress emotions, alter environmental conditions, or reevaluate the importance of the stressor (i.e., self-regulation strategies). Next, individuals respond in such a way as to restore balance in their life, which, in turn, results in gained insight and growth in regard to learning how to positively adapt in the future. From this process, Schinke et al. (2000) defined positive adaptation in sport as “the athlete’s ability and capacity to act and react competently to stressors perceived as significant in a sport context by restoring an internal sense of emotional and psychological balance” (Schinke, Battochio, Dube, Lidor, Tenenbaum, & Lane, 2012, p. 281). Given a working knowledge of what is not only known about positive adaptation but also adversity in sport, the following section historically offers research that has conceptualized resilience in sport.

Early studies of resilience in sport (1990-2004). Researchers began the examination of resilience in sport in the early 1990s. Seligman et al. (1990) investigated University of California-Berkley collegiate swimmers and their coaches in the competition setting. Swimmers were administered the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ; Peterson, Semmel,
von Baeyer, Abramson, Metalsky, & Seligman, 1982) in order to rate their explanatory style. Simultaneously, coaches were asked to rate their swimmers on two scales: (1) the coaches judgments about how the swimmer would perform from worse-than-average to better-than-average, and (2) coaches expectations about the athlete’s swim performance from worse-than-expected to better-than-expected. Seligman et al.’s (1990) results demonstrated that an optimistic explanatory style was the key contributor to the swimmers’ better-than-expected performance following poor performance (Seligman, Nolen-Hoeksema, Thornton, & Thornton, 1990).

To further this seminal work, Martin-Krumm et al. (2003) examined French school children, ages 14-16 years old, as they performed a basketball dribbling drill and defined adversity as a child’s worse-than-expected performance. After completing the basketball dribbling drill, participants were asked to complete the Sport Explanatory Style Questionnaire (SESQ; Martin-Krumm, Sarrasin, Peterson, & Famose, 2003), a 4-item questionnaire to assess participants’ perceived basketball ability, two statements concerning success expectations, a question assessing perception of success versus failure, and state anxiety. Their results indicated that participant low state anxiety, optimistic explanatory style, and success expectancies were indicative of the participant’s ability to be resilient in the face of adversity (Martin-Krumm, Sarrasin, Peterson, & Famose, 2003).

To promote the examination of resilience a different context (e.g., Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000) Mummery et al. (2004) further extended the resilience inquiry with Australian club swimmers ranging in age from 12 to 18 years. Participants were asked to complete the Athletic Coping Style Inventory (Smith, Schutz, Smoll, & Ptacek, 1995), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988), and the Physical Self-
Description Questionnaire (Marsh, Richards, Johnson, Roche, & Tremayne, 1994) Their results demonstrated that participants who had higher perceptions of physical ability in light of poor performance were more likely to improve performance after experiencing failure (Mummery, Schofield, & Perry, 2004). These earlier studies helped to explain how various individual traits (e.g., coping skills, explanatory style) impacted athlete resilience, independently. While these studies are paramount to our understanding on resilience, more recent investigations of resilience sought to understand resilience as more than just a unidimensional trait but as a dynamic variable, which is impacted by a multitude of factors and processes.

Recent studies of resilience in sport (2008-2013). More recent studies of resilience have expanded our knowledge of resilience in sport by offering practical models and definitions that better explain resilience as a dynamic variable. For instance, Galli and Vealey (2008) examined current and former college and professional athletes, six women and four men, who identified a difficult circumstance they encountered while participating in sport. Galli and Vealey (2008) formulated a semi-structure interview guide using Richardson et al.’s (1990) resiliency model as a framework to address the biopsychospiritual nature of resilience. Their study was the first of its kind to offer a model of athlete resilience, which conceptualized the process of resilience for athletes. Galli and Vealey (2008) proposed the five general dimensions of athlete resilience: breadth and duration (i.e., general dimensions of time and space), agitation (i.e., coping strategies to overcome unpleasant emotions and mental struggles), personal resources (i.e., personality traits such as determinations, competitiveness, commitment, maturity, and persistence), sociocultural influences (i.e., supportive others; racial and structural factors), and positive outcomes (i.e., growth through learning).
Athletes begin the process when they experience adversity, which generates a stage of agitation composed of unpleasant emotions, cognitive and behavioral coping strategies, and mental struggles. Bolstering the agitation phase are the athlete’s personal resources and sociocultural influences. That is, athletes identified personal resources and sociocultural factors either facilitated or hindered the resilience process. Yet, despite the adverse situation, agitation, personal resources and socio-cultural factors, all athletes mentioned that they benefitted from the stressor. Thus, the adversity and the consequence of agitation added to the athlete’s personal resources (e.g., strengthening personality traits) and sociocultural factors (e.g., better awareness of their social support and athlete identity). In this sense, all five dimensions (e.g., breadth and duration, agitation, personal resources, socio-cultural factors, and positive outcomes) work together to form the process of athlete resilience (Galli & Vealey, 2008).

Inspired by the work of Galli and Vealey (2008), Machida et al. (2013) investigated resilience in athletes with disabilities. They examined wheelchair rugby athletes who had sustained a spinal cord injury. Their phenomenological semi-structured interviews with 12 men ranging in age from 21 to 41 years, generated seven general categories, which resulted in an overall model of resilience after traumatic injury. The seven general categories included (1) pre-existing factors and experiences, (2) disturbing emotions, (3) multiple sources and types of support, (4) special opportunities and experiences, (5) various behavioral and cognitive coping strategies, (6) motivation to adapt, and (7) gains from the resilience process. These seven general factors do not come in a specific order or as predictable stages but rather are experienced by individuals through a complex, interactive process. That is, participants reports
that pre-existing factors (e.g., traits that individuals possess before the traumatic event) affected how they coped with the adversity from suffering a spinal cord injury.

Once the spinal cord injury occurred, participants reported that there was a time of disturbance, which manifested itself via disturbing emotions, thoughts, and challenges. To help cope with the disturbances, participants reported a number of factors that helped with reintegration back into life after injury. Such factors included the individual’s social support (e.g., parents, spouse, siblings, rehabilitation professionals, coworkers, teammates), which was reported as one of the most important factors in helping to bounce back from adversity. Similarly, participants reported a variety of special opportunities and experiences (e.g., playing sports and achievement experiences in sport and other contexts) along with various behavioral and cognitive coping strategies (e.g., thinking of adversity as a challenge, goal setting) that were important in to the reintegration process. Lastly, participants reported a motivation to adapt, which included pressure to appear strong in social situations, avoiding being dependent on others, life goals, and family (i.e., feeling the need to change for their children or spouse). All of the aforementioned factors worked together to produce gains from the resilience process. That is, participants reported that the traumatic event did not change their personality or core beliefs but rather that it had given them a new perspective and taught them new coping skills after experiencing the injury (Machida, Irwin, & Feltz, 2013).

While Galli and Vealey (2008) and Machida et al. (2013) offered two models of resilience in sport, no research to date has provided research with a definition of athlete resilience. Thus, Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) began a grounded theory investigation with Olympic gold medalists (eight men, four women) who had experienced pressure during their sporting careers (e.g., general stress experienced within training and competition). Results
from the semi-structured interviews revealed various psychological factors intrinsic to Olympic champion resilience as well as a definition of resilience in sport. Psychological factors indicative of athlete resilience were identified as achievement motivation (e.g., passion for sport, social recognition, goal attainment), social support (e.g., family, coaches, teammates, support staff), focus (e.g., not distracted by others, focus rather than outcome), confidence (e.g., sources included self-awareness, visualization, preparation, experience), and positive personality (e.g., openness, innovative, emotionally stable, optimistic). Likewise, Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) also offered the first definition of athlete resilience: “the role of mental processes and behavior in promoting personal assets and protecting an individual from the potential negative effect of stressors” (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012, p. 675).

Their definition of athlete resilience (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012) shifted away from the value-laden, usually negative term of adversity and shifted toward the more neutral term of stressor. Their reasoning for such a shift is associated with existing definitions of adversity, which often relate negative circumstances with damaging consequences, characterizing the adverse event as risky and often leading to maladjustment. However, Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) claim that positive life events such as newlywed couples navigating married life and job promotions are unlikely to be classified as risky and leading to maladjustment but rather are positive in nature and scenarios in which individuals can demonstrate resilience. Thus, when definitions of resilience include the term adversity as opposed to stressor, it excludes the inclusion of many ongoing stressors under the rubric of resilience (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

Yet, despite the evolution of various models (e.g., Galli and Vealey, 2008; Machida, Irwin, & Feltz, 2013) and a definition of resilience in sport (e.g., Fletcher & Sarkar, 2012), all research efforts to date have examined resilience from a individual lens. That is, resilience
research has examined what and how various factors (e.g., confidence, social support, focus, motivation, positive personality) impact athlete resilience. However, resilience researchers have not examined how resilience operates and develops within relationships. Thus, the following section outlines relational-cultural theory (Miller, 1976) as a fruitful lens from which to examine resilience as a relational construct.

**Relational Cultural Theory**

Relational-cultural theory (RCT; Miller, 1976) believes that “individuals’ lives are made in relational contexts” that are constructed through interactions with culture and claims that all psychological growth occurs in relationships (Walker, 2002, p. 2). In contrast, when individuals move out of connection and into isolation is when psychological distress occurs. To more fully understand the detriments of disconnection, Miller and Stiver (1997) have offered the central relational paradox, which postulates that when the less powerful individual in the relationship (e.g., the athlete) is unable to represent her/his feelings, either due to not feeling comfortable in the environment or receiving an indifferent response from the authority figure (e.g., the coach), the individual will begin to isolate parts of her- or himself from the relationship. As the individual increases relational separation, they also experience diminished passion, empowerment, clarity, worth, and desire for connection (Miller, 1988). Given this situation, the athlete’s natural desire for connection begins to be perceived as a social-threat, and the athlete begins to fear the vulnerability required to fully participate in connection with the coach (Jordan & Hartling, 2008). Jordan (2013) argues that a lack of connection with others is what hinders the development of resilience. Thus, they offer growth-fostering relationships as a way to relationally build resilience.
Growth-fostering relationships (GFRs) nurture an increase in (1) liveliness, (2) knowledge and transparency about one’s own experience, the other person, and the relationship, (3) creativity and productivity, (4) sense of worth, and (5) desire for more connection and differentiation (Miller & Stiver, 1997). GFRs challenge power battles that are inherent in most Western relationships (e.g., the coach-athlete relationship) and promotes a culture toward reciprocity characterized by mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and authenticity (e.g., courage to be one’s self). Mutual empathy is situated as the core component of GFRs and proposes that in order for individuals to facilitate change they must be able to see, know, and feel the responsiveness (i.e., mutual care and impact) of other individuals. In the context of the coach-athlete connection, this would resemble the coach acknowledging the athlete’s experience of stress and further affirming the athlete’s stress as a source that has affected the coach (e.g., coach heightened concern for the athlete during the stressful time). In response, the athlete sees, knows, and feels the coach’s care for the athlete, which thereby contributes to the relational efficacy and strength of the coach-athlete connection (Jordan, 2000; 2002).

Mutual empowerment is akin to relational courage in that it challenges the “traditional notion [that] courage [is an inherent trait, which] carries the expectation that strong people will not experience fear of uncertainty in frightening situations” but rather that “courage involves feeling fear [(e.g., stress)] and finding support to deal with it” (Jordan, 2010, p. 32). To illustrate, an athlete experiencing stress would be empowered to seek support to deal with the stressful situation if the coach has empowered the athlete to do so by creating a safe environment from which the athlete feels, sees, and knows that she/he is able to seek support
from the coach during the stressful time. In this exchange, an environment is created where both the athlete and coach are mutually empowered to seek and also give support.

Authenticity is characterized by the sense of safety needed in order to enjoy sufficient levels of vulnerability. This safety is jeopardized when “power over” dynamics, inherent in the coach-athlete connection, contribute to the stratification of differences within a particular culture. For instance, an athlete who is expected to blindly follow a coach’s instruction is at risk of not developing an authentic athlete experience. Thus, a coach would be encouraged to decrease the inherent power dynamic within the coach-athlete relationship by promoting similarities within the relationship in order to foster an authentic athlete experience (e.g., Denison, 2007).

In relation to social support literature (e.g., Cohen, 1988; Cohen, Underwood, Gottlieb, 2000; Thoits, 1995), a term that has been coined as vital to athlete resilience, most researchers have emphasized one-way support such as getting assistance or receiving love from another individual. RCT offers a relational perspective via GFRs, which emphasize the importance of engaging in relationships in order for all parties in the relationship to benefit. Applying this notion to the coach-athlete connection, the athlete would receive assistance and love from the coach during their time of stress, experiencing growth-fostering relationships. In turn, the coach also would also mutually benefit from the growth-fostering relationship by experiencing increased levels of liveliness, clarity, creativity and productivity, sense of worth, and desire for more connection (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Thus, RCT argues, that social support—as received from the coach—is not about getting for the self (e.g., a dominant Western cultural value) but rather is about mutuality of support (e.g., coach and athlete both benefitting from the
connection; Jordan, 2013). This type of connection can be accomplished by engaging in GFRs, which ultimately promote relational resilience.

**Relational resilience.** Relational resilience refers to “the capacity to move back into connection following disconnection and the capacity to reach out for help” and is achieved via GFRs (Jordan, 2010, p. 31). In this sense, resilience is developed—ability to positively adapt in the face of adversity—as individuals engage in high-quality relationships and work to maintain growth-fostering relationships with members of their social support group. From this stance, RCT researchers promote quality connections as the principal factor to promote the development of resilience. Thus, RCT does not support an individualized view of resilience, which has been the dominant level of resilience examination in sport, but rather posits that individual resilience is optimally developed in relationships so that both parties of the relationship (i.e., coach and athlete) can benefit from the growth-fostering characteristics of mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and authenticity.

To demonstrate the importance of relational resilience in context, researchers have investigated the relationships between GFRs and various outcome measures. For instance, researchers have demonstrated that women and girls reported lower depression scores when they engaged in highly mutual relationships (Sperberg & Stabb, 1998). Cancer patients who participated in support groups expressed less psychological and physical distress (i.e., decreased anxiety, depression, pain), which, in turn, resulted in them living twice as long as the cancer patients who did not participate in support groups (Spiegel, 1991). Further, the Relational Health Indices was created by Liang et al. (1998; 2002) to assess growth-fostering connections with peers, mentors, and communities. The 37-item questionnaire measured the three tenets of GFRs (i.e., mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, authenticity). Their research
with both men (Liang, Tracy, Glenn, Burns, & Ting, 2007) and women (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, Williams, Jordan, & Miller, 2002) in the context of community has demonstrated that GFRs were associated with increased resilience to stress.

Further, Liang et al. (2006) explored GFRs in the context of mentoring relationships among women. Their results revealed that GFRs contributed to higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of feeling lonely (Liang, Tracy, Kauh, Taylor, & Williams, 2006). Spencer (2007) also examined GFRs among male mentoring relationships, which revealed GFRs as important for building a safe environment, which promoted vulnerability and emotional support (Spencer, 2007). Outside of the context of social work, researchers within the field of counseling and education have examined relational resilience. In the context of counseling, for instance, a quality counselor-child connection has been positively related to child resilience (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001). In the context of education, nine to 12-year-old students identified teacher availability, positivity, listening, and connecting on a personal level as practical ways educators promote student resilience (Johnson, 2008). Together, the aforementioned studies have encouraged the implementation of GFRs into training programs given that such programs would enhance the relational qualities (i.e., mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and authenticity) needed for optimal relationships, lending to optimal resilience of all parties involved in GFRs. Given that sport is a didactic environment where power figures, especially the coach, hold prominent influence regarding an athlete’s development and performance (Hellstedt, 1987; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011), the connection between the coach and athlete will be the focal variable for this study.
Relational Resilience and the Coach-Athlete Relationship

Sarkar and Fletcher (2016) have addressed the importance of coaches developing resilient athletes given their influential role in the process of building resilience (White & Bennie, 2015; Young, 2014). That is, Sarkar and Fletcher (2016) have stated that coaches should assess and monitor athlete psychological factors such as positive personality, confidence, motivation, perceived social support, and focus. When coaches identify and monitor these factors they will be better able to intervene in order to enhance optimum levels of and balance among such factors. For instance, Sarkar and Fletcher (2016) have offered examples of ways in which coaches might intervene to enhance resilience such as implementing training programs that help athletes to challenge assumptions about stressful events, minimize catastrophic thinking, promote cognitive restructuring, and challenge counterproductive beliefs. While Sarkar and Fletcher’s (2016) propositions are promising, their stance neglects to address the mutual benefit needed in the coach-athlete connection in order to build relational resilience. In this sense, Sarkar and Fletcher’s (2016) account continues to promote resilience in sport as an individual construct rather than promoting resilience as a relational construct via growth-fostering relationships.

Relational Power

Sociologists have proposed a variety of theoretical stances regarding the concept of power in order to better understand its complex social processes that exist across a multitude of contexts. While each approach differs upon its tenets, there is large consensus that power is the “central dynamic of human societies,” which impact “not only our thoughts and ambitions, but also our interactions with others” (Tomlinson, 1998, p. 235). For example, French and Raven (1959) proposed the social basis of power via five power typologies: reward, coercive,
legitimate, referent, and expert power. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1979) notion of power contended that the amount of capital (i.e., economic, cultural, and social) accessible to individuals is what contributes to their degree of control over their personal fortune and also control over others’. Giddens (1984) posited that individuals have power to control and transform their own social worlds, arguing that power is not just a concept used by one person to exert influence over another but rather that subordinates have some power at their disposal. Kidman et al. (2001) extended Giddens (1984) concept further by conceptualizing power as that of empowerment, which is defined as “the process by which individuals acquire greater control over the decisions that affect their lives” (Kidman, Thorpe, Jones, & Lewis, 2001, p. 14). While each of the aforementioned theories of power are highly esteemed in the literature, one philosophical stance has received a great deal of attention in sport. The following section outline Michel Foucault’s thoughts regarding power as it pertains to discourse, discipline, and docile bodies.

**Foucault and discipline.** Foucault’s (1979) has contended since the beginning of time, power figures have sought to categorize “human nature” with the intent to produce societal order. That is, Foucault believes there is not one ideal social model in which to rule a society but rather has insisted that various types of discourse used by power figures are “invented and put to work in different types of societies as an instrument…or as a weapon” (Foucault, 2010, p. 6). He further has implied that such discourse is what contributes to the three modes of human objectification: dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification.

**Dividing practices** is a particular society’s way of objectifying those individuals who should be isolated from that society. For example, Foucault has acknowledged the Middle Ages and the isolation of lepers as a prime case of how a society might confine a certain group of people (Foucault, 2010). Similar to dividing practice but containing a different style of
discourse, scientific classification is characterized by the discourses used to define and structure acceptable disciplines, which, in turn, determines who can partake in such human practices. In terms of sport, this would be representative of injured athletes being isolated from the rest of the team (dividing practices) because able-bodied athletes are what constitute acceptable subjects that are allowed to partake in sport (scientific classification).

Foucault also acknowledged dividing practices and scientific classification as the vehicle which contributed to changes made to various disciplines across time. For example, the discourse of various power figures during the 16th century is what contributed to the Protestant Reformation, “displaying a conceptual discontinuity from the disciplines that had immediately preceded them,” thus, a new scientific classification was born (Foucault, 2010, p. 9). Foucault also identified subjectification as a way in which humans turn themselves into an objectified subject. This is connected directly to the discourse used by power figures, which operationalizes a person’s body, thoughts, souls, and overall conduct in society (Foucault, 2010). Foucault (1979) has contended that these concepts (i.e., dividing practice, scientific classification, and subjectification) ultimately work together to create and reinforce societal disciplines. For instance, in sport, coaching discourse creates the parameters of who, what, and how dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification are defined and used.

Foucault (1979) has proposed disciplinary power as what produces docile bodies. Docile bodies are a structured self in terms of time and space and are reinforced via constant self-surveillance (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2003). For example, the American university system offers different academic disciplines in which students must submit themselves in order to achieve a degree. In order for students to accomplish this task, students must allow the system to monitor their academic progress in order for the system to determine if they are
adhering to the discipline in a proper manner and developing into worthy representatives of that particular academic discipline (Danaher et al., 2003). This type of constant surveillance would consequently result in students internalizing such surveillance as to make themselves subject of their own gaze, constantly monitoring their own “docile bodies” (i.e., academic progress and behaviors). Foucault’s thoughts regarding the concept of discourse, discipline, and bodies is a great theoretical lens from which to understand the interdependence of sport, culture, and society. The following section outlines how sport is used as a discipline in order to promote the discourse of and produce docile bodies within a society’s culture.

**Foucault, the Coach, and Athlete Resilience**

Sport is an educational environment where power figures (e.g., the coach) hold prominent influence regarding an athlete’s development and performance (Hellstedt, 1987; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). As coaches become more considerate of the various socio-cultural factors that impact their athlete’, coaches will likely be more competent in regard to how they might help athletes overcome particular stressors. Researchers have positioned the coach as a “power-ridden” authority figure that has the ability to either reinforce or challenge socio-cultural norms (Potrac & Jones, 2009, p. 223). This type of coaching power was termed by Foucault as *panopticism*. This term derived from the architectural structure of Bentham’s model prison, the Panopticon. This structure positioned the prison guards in the center of a circular, cellular building. With the guards in the center, the prisoners believed that they were constantly being surveilled, which induced a state of continual subjectification resulting in docile bodies (Cole, Giardina, & Andrews, 2004). Reinhart (1998) has contended the notion of “panopticism is built into the coach…it is reinforced in the hierarchical structure of lane
assignments; and it is recollected in the lane-timing squad, whose decision supersedes the experience of the individual swimmers” (p. 43).

Applying the notion of the Panopticon, the coach uses sport-specific discourse, which results in proper disciplinary practices that foster a type of docile body adequate for that particular sport. Such adequacies are used to measure proper sport conformity. Athletes are subjected to normative judgements (socio-cultural norms) in order to understand what constitutes dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification. For example, coaches use dividing practices when they exclude homogenous athletes from various team events (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2008). Coaches partake in scientific classification as they constantly monitor athletes with the intent to shape athletes’ bodies into the desired product for that particular sport. For instance, Chapman’s (1997) investigation of lightweight rowers provides a great example of how coaches scientifically classify rowers through weight management. Eight rowers were interviewed regarding their experiences with weight management, dieting, reasons for dieting, weight loss techniques used, and weight changes achieved. The results of Chapman’s (1997) study indicated that coaches shared responsibility for creating the weight management scientific classification by enforcing the possibility of being weighed by the coach at any time, and the chance of being cut [(dividing practices)] from the team if the weight was too high, [which] ensured that the rowers monitored themselves and each other and followed the making weight regimen (p. 213)

In this way, the number on the scale was an objectified quantity used to scientifically classify athletes as worth or unworthy of group acceptance. Subjectification happened when athletes internalizes the constant surveillance of their coach and begin to cast their own gaze upon
themselves, specifically their weight, adhering to prescribed regimes in order to achieve a suitable docile body for optimal performance (e.g., developing an eating disorder to achieve proper body type; Johns, 1998).

Denison (2007) applied Foucault’s philosophical stance to his personal experience as a cross country coach. Regarding an account of one of his cross-country runners performing below expectations, Denison (2007) attributed his athlete’s low performance as fully the fault of the athlete. After further reflection, Denison (2007) began to understand how his actions as a coach might have contributed to his athlete’s failure. Using the framework of Foucault, Denison (2007) contributed his everyday coaching practices as a key element that contributed to his athlete’s failure. For example, Denison (2007) acknowledged that it was him “who decided what counted as legitimate for [his athlete] to do in training” as well as assigning the space from which his athlete would complete the training (p. 374). Additionally, and like any “good” coach, he assigned training timetables from which to control the rhythms, order, and regulations for that week’s training. All the while, Denison (2007) began to understand the words of Foucault (1979) in so much as “time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power to render a subject docile” (p. 123).

From this stance, Denison (2007) assumed more responsibility for the failure of his athlete. He contended that it was through his coaching practices—that are commonly accepted as productive ways from which to enact the coach-athlete relationship—that rendered his athlete docile and in turn hindered the athlete’s performance. Specifically, Denison (2007) mentioned normative coaching practices that “prescribed techniques to mold [athletes] into the vision of a productive competitor,” which actually hindered his athlete (Denison, 2007, p. 378). It is in this way that athletes are robbed of their sense of why and allegiance toward who
they are competing for. Denison (2007) suggested for coaches to exercise self-reflective practices that question the moral, social, and political dimensions that shape why coaches coach in a particular way and how these coaching practices might impact athlete well-being and performance. More so, Denison’s (2007) account can easily be seen as a way that coaches might also impact athlete resilience. That is, as coaches continue to partake in the normative coaching behaviors, which render athletes’ bodies as docile, they may also be contributing to athletes’ experiences of adversity rather than helping them be resilient.

The power paradox. What is evident in Denison’s (2007) account is what Keltner (2017) popularly has coined as the power paradox. First, Keltner (2017) uses a broadened definition of power, which defines powers as “the capacity to make a difference in the world, in particular by stirring others in our social networks” (p. 3). The power paradox then entails that “we rise in power and make a difference in the world due to what is best about human nature, but we fall from power due to what is worst” (Keltner, 2017, p. 2). That is, Keltner (2017) has further described the power paradox from a neurological basis in so much as once individuals obtain power, for instance, they lose the neurological capacities that were needed to gain power in the first place (e.g., empathy). Galinsky et al. (2006) examined this concept by first assigning participants to a high-power, neutral, or low-power group in which participants were power-primed. For example, participants slated into the low-power group were asked to “write about a personal incident in which someone else had power over them” (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006, p. 1070). Next, participants were instructed to, with their dominant hand, write a capital E on their forehead. Galinsky and et al. (2006) found that those who were in the high-power group were three times more likely to draw a self-oriented E as opposed to the low-power group who drew an other-oriented E. Additionally, the more power each
participant described having, the more prone they were to draw a self-oriented E (Galinsky et al., 2006). Considering the coach-athlete relationship, the coach is culturally slated into the more powerful position as opposed to the athlete. Thus, in light of Galinsky and colleagues (2006) study, coaches are likely to be more self-oriented, which would imply that they are more likely to not engage in behaviors (e.g., empathic understanding of athlete adversity) that would promote athlete resilience but rather might contribute to athlete adversity through their self-oriented stance. In this sense, coaches might be more likely to be distracted from ways they may be able to nurture athlete resilience.

This research coincides with other research which has demonstrated that higher-power figures are more likely to ignore peripheral information and be more task-oriented (Guinote, 2007). Hogeveen and colleagues (2014) have stated that while power figures (e.g., coaches) who have a more task-oriented focus are more likely to demonstrate better performance standards on paper, they consequently are more apt to ignore peripheral information in social settings (e.g., sport) that in turn will have a negative impact on powerless individuals (e.g., athletes). They examined this claim to further consider the neurobiological impact that power has upon the brain. They contended that motor resonance—the human mirroring system in the brain, which drives a person to act in the way that they observe—is linked with power (Hogeveen, Inzlicht, & Obhi, 2014). Specifically, Hogeveen and colleagues (2014) stated that those in high-power positions will demonstrate lower levels of resonance whereas low-power participants will demonstrate higher levels of resonance. To test this assertion, participants were power-primed into three separate groups: high-power, low-power, and neutral. Motor resonance was measured via motor cortical output from transcranial magnetic stimulation. Their results support the main hypotheses. That is, participants in the high-power group
demonstrated lower levels of motor resonance, and low-power group participants demonstrated higher levels of motor resonance (Hogeveen, Inzlicht, & Obhi, 2014). This could mean high-power individuals are more likely to rely on cultural stereotypes rather than being culturally sensitive to each person within the organization. High-power individuals who operate in this way are likely to see short-term success via task completion but will reap the detriments of long-term failure as their subordinates increasingly become marginalized to the point of higher turnover rates (Hogeveen, Inzlicht, & Obhi, 2014).

The power paradox and athlete resilience. The coach-athlete relationship largely has been stitched together by power-dominated threads. That is, as the coach-athlete relationship is currently conceptualized, coaches are viewed as those in possession of knowledge and athletes are in need of this knowledge in order to improve their performance (Cassidy et al., 2008, p. 115). In this sense, and considering the role of the coach as a part of the power paradox, coaches are likely to lose the empathy needed in order to nurture athlete resilience through major stress. As coaches engage in the normative discourses surrounding sport, athletes are more likely to acquire an unquestioning and compliant attitude (Johns & Johns, 2000). This type of relationship reinforces the inherent power dynamic within the coach-athlete relationship and, thus, situates coaching discourse to be “rippled with overt and covert social biases, stereotypes and inequities” (Messner, Duncan, & Jenkins, 1993, p. 110). Such discourse is what contributes to social oppression from a physical and psychological standpoint. As coaches engage in their sport’s discourse, they are physically reproducing acceptable athlete bodies and psychologically marginalizing athlete socio-cultural factors, which might be in direct opposition to what is considered appropriate in that particular sport, (e.g., gay football players; Apple, 2004). Thus, researchers have argued for the reformulation of current sport
performance discourse in so much as coach should “reject the current binary coach-athlete relationship structure, and alternatively emphasize a greater respect for athletes through the establishment of more equitable relationships” (Cassidy et al., 2008, p. 123). As thinking changes from a less binary us and them to a more collective we, coaching discourse will follow suit in so much as the discourse will lessen the inherent power dynamic and widen coaching peripherals to consider the socio-cultural backgrounds of their athletes (Cassidy et al., 2008).

Organizational Effectiveness & Resilience

Within the context of sport, organizational effectiveness has been defined as an organization’s ability “to be productive, to be efficient in their operations, to adapt readily to changes prescribed by internal and/or external constituencies, and to be flexible in handling unexpected crises” (Branch, 1990, p. 162). It is evident to see similarities between the definition of organizational effectiveness and organizational resilience in so much as both definitions include the ability to positively adapt to change when experiencing unexpected events (e.g., Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2012). Researchers have credited the individual’s level of resilience within the organization to be what largely determines the organization’s resilience (Doe, 1994; Lengnick-Hall & Beck, 2003). Thus, it can be argued that if an organization prioritizes and actively seeks to enhance member resilience, increases in the organization’s resilience will result and, in turn, positively impact the organization’s effectiveness. Within the context of sport, athletic department effectiveness has been most commonly characterized by student-athlete graduation rates, athletic achievement (Byer, 1995; Chelladurai, 2001; Scott, 1999; Smart & Wolfe, 2000; Trail & Chelladurai, 2000; Zimbalist, 1999), student-athlete satisfaction, and ethical behavior as measured by compliance with Title IX (Cunningham, 2002).
As previously mentioned, resilience is a “concept crucial for organizational survival in turbulent, chaotic, and unpredictable environments” (Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2012, p. 762). Given that resilience is the most commonly cited variable remaining after crisis and the dominant determinant of whether an organization survives or thrives in the face of adversity it is imperative that organizations prioritize individual and organizational resilience (Kantur & İşeri-Say, 2012). Thus, as the new Associate Athletic Director and Student-Athlete Experience Coordinator, I place organizational resilience at the top of my priority list. The following sections outline various leadership theories, which articulate traits I will adopt to achieve success.

**Leadership Theories**

*Coach-Athlete Relationship.* Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) have determined the following four characteristics of a quality coach-athlete relationship: closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. *Closeness* is defined as the emotional tone of the coach-athlete relationship. That is, this construct reflects the degree of connection between the coach and athlete and embodies characteristics such as trust, respect, appreciation, and liking. *Commitment* refers to the coach and athlete’s level of dedication to maintaining the relationship within and after sport. *Complementarity* concerns the coach-athlete interaction and its perceived cooperation and effectiveness. This concept is two-fold: 1) when the interaction is mutually friendly, responsive and relaxed, and 2) when the coach provides constructive feedback and the athlete is open to the feedback given. Lastly, *co-orientation* refers to the interdependence of closeness, commitment, and complementarity and the coach and athlete perspective within the relationship. That is, this construct addresses the bi-directionality of the relationship by determining whether the coach and athlete have similar views and opinions.
For example, an athlete or coach would rate both of the following statements, “I trust my coach/athlete” and “I believe that my coach/athlete trusts me” to determine the level of congruence between the coach and athlete’s perspectives (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002).

Previous research has demonstrated a coach-athlete relationship with higher levels of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation to be positively associated with positive outcomes such as an athlete’s self-concept and satisfaction (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004), harmonious passion in one’s sport (Lafrieniére, Jowett, Vallerand, Donahue, & Loriner, 2008), and team cohesion (Jowett & Chaundy, 2004). While the coach-athlete relationship is not fully characteristic of my role as an administrator, the component of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation serve as a gauge from which to measure the quality of my professional relationships. To extend these components into my administrative role, servant leadership has received positive recognition in regards to mediating the relationships between these constructs in other contexts.

**Authentic Leadership.** Researchers have demonstrated subordinate resilience is positively impacted by leadership behaviors (Harland, Harrison, Jones, & Reiter-Palmon, 2005), which must be rooted in some sort of leadership theory. One such framework serves as my ontological and epistemological foundation. Authentic leadership defines authenticity as “owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs” and further articulates that “one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings” (Harter, 2002, p. 382). This leadership framework further articulates authentic leaders as those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/morals perspectives, knowledge, and
strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character (Avolio, Luthans, & Walumbwa, 2004, p. 4)

Thus, authentic leadership contends that the self is dynamically involved in social construction, which both shapes and is shaped by social exchanges with others (Hewitt, 1989). This further classifies authenticity as not an either/or condition (e.g., being fully authentic or inauthentic in a given moment) but rather as a both/and construct, which situates authenticity on a continuum (Erickson, 1995; Heidegger, 1962).

This relative stance situates authentic leadership as a “root construct,” that better articulates the basic components (e.g., positive leadership characteristics) of all other leadership theories (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 328). For example, authentic leadership incorporates transformational, servant, altruistic, and spiritual leadership components; yet, such leadership theories do not fully define authentic leadership. That is, authentic leaders do not necessarily have to be transformational (George, 2003), but transformational leadership must be authentic in order to be effective. At its core, authentic leaders emphasizes the relational nature of leadership and more so fixate on building authentic relationships. To better inform my philosophical stance, it is necessary to examine the components of quality relationships. Jowett and colleagues (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004) have identified such components to quality relationships in sport via the coach-athlete relationship.

**Servant Leadership.** The origin of servant leadership was introduced into the organizational context by Greenleaf (1977). It has been defined as a leader who “places other people’s needs, aspirations and interests above their own” and the “chief motive, paradoxically,
is to serve first as opposed to lead” (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 57). This type of leadership style has been noted as the inverted model of leadership, which places more hierarchical power in the hands of the organizational member. This model is broken down into two dimensions: ten behaviors and seven components. Spears (1995) identified the first dimension of servant leadership via ten behaviors: building community, stewardship, awareness, foresight, listening, conceptualizing, healing, empathy, persuasion, and commitment to the growth of people. Regarding the second dimension, Page and Wong (2000) identified seven components of servant leadership: power & pride, empowering and developing others, serving others, participatory leadership, courageous leadership, inspiring leadership, and visionary leadership. Within these two dimensions, it is clear to see that interpersonal relationships are cultivated and essential to the essence of servant leadership and has demonstrated to be positively associated with well-being and performance outcomes.

Within the realm of sport, Reike and colleagues (2008) introduced servant leadership with a group of high school basketball players. The Revised Servant Leadership Profile for Sports (RSLP-S; Hammermeister, Burton, Pickering, Chase, Westre, & Baldwin, 2008) was used to measure the coach’s level of servant leadership, which is composed of three constructs identified as trust/inclusion (e.g., the head coach always keeps his/her promises and commitments to others), humility (e.g., the head coach doesn’t look at his/her position as one of power), and service (e.g., the head coach has a heart to serve others) (Hammermeister et al., 2008). After statistical analysis, the researchers concluded that servant leadership is positively associated with sport satisfaction, enhanced perceptions of quality training and instruction from the coach, intrinsic motivation, and mental toughness (Reike et al., 2008). Further, Hammermeister and colleagues (2008) introduced the RSLP-S with a group of 251 collegiate
athletes. Their research demonstrated that college coaches who possessed a servant leadership style produced athletes who were more confident, resilient in the face of adversity, coachable, had better concentration, were better able to handle pressure situations, and were less anxious when compared to athletes associated with a non-servant leader coach. Overall, servant leadership consistently has demonstrated to be positively associated with organizational effectiveness across multiple contexts.

Organizational scholarship researchers have analyzed the Fortune survey, which credited servant leadership as the foundation of the best companies in the United States (Levering & Moskowitz, 2000). For example, the CEO of TDIndustries, one of the largest mechanical contractors, has illustrated servant leadership by not only calling his 1,273 employees “partners” but by putting action to his word via giving the top thirty managers ownership of 25% of the stock and letting lower-level employees own the rest. This ultimately has contributed to an enhanced culture of trust. Likewise, Southwest Airlines consistently has received recognition regarding their positive organizational culture, deeming them top Airline for multiple consecutive years. This has been largely due to Southwest placing the servant leadership style at its core. For example, Southwest’s mission and vision embody altruism, which is defined as the constructive, gratifying service to others (Quick, 1992). Lastly, the multi-billion dollars company, Synovus Financial Corporation has demonstrated servant leadership through its policies centered upon family. This has been accomplished by promoting a better work-life balance via leave for new parents, work flexibility, and advancing women in their careers.

With authentic leadership acting as the philosophical foundation, I am confident that my employment of servant leadership will positively impact the degree of closeness, commitment,
complementarity, and co-orientation that I have within my relationships as the Associate Athletic Director and Student-Athlete Experience Coordinator. Yet, this is not enough. Researchers have proposed virtuousness as a mediating factor that may influence the impact of servant leadership on organizational performance (Searle & Barbuto, 2011). Thus, I not only want to employ the constructs of trust/inclusion, humility, and service in order to enhance my relationships but be deliberate in how I embody virtuousness in and through servant leadership within the department.

**Virtuous Organizational Leadership.** Virtuousness has been described by Plato and Aristotle as the “desires and actions that produce personal and social good” (Cameron, 2003, p. 2), and is considered to be done *in* and *through* organizations. For example, virtuousness *in* an organization is demonstrated via the behaviors adopted by the leader such as hope, optimism, resilience, wisdom, compassion, and forgiveness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2009). Virtuousness *through* the organization relates to leaders that foster virtuousness in the organizational environment. While trust/inclusion, humility, and service are virtues in and of itself, virtuousness is quiet unique from these constructs. That is, virtuousness does not stand in opposition to servant leadership but rather extends beyond it. For example, leaders who solely behave through the lens of service might ask, “How can we give back to our community?” In contrast, leaders who use a virtuous lens from which to view service would ask, “How can I add value to achieve the highest in you?” (Cameron, 2003). The latter focuses more on the motivations toward fostering social benevolence without expecting anything in return (e.g., you versus our).

When organizations employ a level of virtuousness alongside their leadership framework, the organization is likely to have a significantly higher rate of productivity, quality
output, and lower employee turnover. Likewise, leaders who adopt this stance have demonstrated to be positively related to profitability, productivity, customer retention, and employee compensation (Cameron, Caza, & Bright, 2002a; 2002b). Even through adversity, virtuous organizations still held higher scores and associated positively with such outcome measures. Therefore, the concept of virtuousness is noted as a prerequisite for organizational resilience (Dutton, Frost, Worline, Lilis, & Kanov, 2002; Wildavski, 1991). Given that research has demonstrated organizational resilience to be a prerequisite for organizational effectiveness (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003), it can be argued that a leader’s virtuousness is the driving force behind organizational resilience and, in turn, positively impacts organizational effectiveness. Thus, I will adopt a virtuous servant leadership style as I interact on a daily basis with my partners (e.g., employees, colleagues, student-athletes). The following section outlines my virtuous servant leader action plan intertwined with the various “soft skills” I will employ to achieve my goals.
SECTION 4: Extended Methodology

In this chapter, I describe several important elements of the methodology for my dissertation study. First, my positionality statement situates me (the researcher) in the context of my research endeavor. This positionality informs my desire to conduct research in the field of youth sport psychology, and ultimately leads to the statement of the problem and guiding research questions for this dissertation. Next, the research paradigm and philosophical assumptions related to this dissertation are described, eventually linking these constructs to the methodology to be used for my dissertation. Then, I describe case study methodology and provide a detailed rationale for why it is appropriate for my dissertation. Finally, the case study methods are outlined, providing specific considerations for conducting qualitative research with child and adolescent participants. These elements combine to create an empirically-supported and thorough qualitative methodology section.

Positionality Statement

The term positionality includes the researcher’s worldview, and how this worldview situates the researcher in relation to the inquired phenomenon (Foote & Bartell, 2011). That is, the researcher’s worldview informs her or his beliefs regarding the nature of reality (ontology) and how knowledge is generated (epistemology). In this sense, a researcher’s positionality may be influenced by personal stories or culturally assigned concepts such as gender, race, sexual orientation, or religion (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). Denzin (1986) has mentioned that “interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher” (p. 12); thus, it is necessary to offer my positionality as it is relevant to this investigation.

Generally speaking, I am a Caucasian, cisgender, heterosexual, female who grew up in a middle-class, heterosexual, non-divorced family in Huntsville, Alabama. I am a current Ph.D. student who is positioned to continue my privilege into a middle- to upper- socio-
economic class upon graduation. Out of the multiple identities mentioned, I am privileged on most accounts. That is, while, yes, I am female which is not assigned as the hegemonic norm, I am aware that I am more privileged than not. Thus, I find interpretive research to be an honor from which to be reflexive about my own identities, how these identities interact with others, and also engage with others who have different realities from my own. In the words of Sikes (2004):

…it is important for all researchers to spend some time thinking about how they are paradigmatically and philosophically positioned and for them to be aware of how their positioning – and the fundamental assumptions they hold – might influence their research related thinking and practice (p. 15)

A few of the major identities that largely have influenced by positionality have been born from a tension created by a dualistic Christianity and gender roles.

**Religious Tension**

“And he said to them, ‘Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?’ Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm,” stated Jesus (Matthew 8:26, English Standard Version). This bible verse solidified in my mind the positive correlation of strong faith with high levels of resilience. That is, I believed high levels of individual resilience were contingent upon faith—a position I held as an inevitable truth during my child and adolescent years. You see, I was socialized into a dualistic world. By the time I was born, my mother was in the process of becoming a born-again Christian while my father, simultaneously, was renouncing religion based upon his childhood experience with Catholicism. From a sociocultural lens, my mother was buying into the American hegemonic
norm of Christianity whereas my father was taking the road less traveled—especially alarming in a Southern context.

I was raised in the bible belt of America: The South. I grew up in a Caucasian Southern Baptist church that dominantly preached a dualistic (e.g., either/or) discourse, which exclaimed, “You either are a Christian or you are not! Come accept Christ and be one of us!” (e.g., the righteous). It was simple for me, if Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life,” (John 14:6, English Standard Version), then non-Christian individuals were not connected to the Truth. In this sense, I believed non-Christians’ cognitive, affective, and behavioral actions were profane (i.e., promote the mundane world and ultimately hinder connection to the divine; Coakley, 2009) and needed to be avoided. Thus, I only cultivated relationships with those who were connected to Truth, which would strengthen my connection, and, in turn, I would experience increased resilience during stressful times. Applying relational resilience (Jordan, 2010), if I were to experience disconnection with a fellow Christian, I was motivated to reconnect since it is written, “If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew, 6:15, English Standard Version). Thus, I sought relational resilience with other Christians solely because it strengthened my favor with God. William Campbell (2010), a Southern Baptist minister who preaches resistance toward an egocentric Christianity, best envelopes this motive in the following narrative: “’We really don’t care about you,’…” “We care about ourselves” (p. 77). In this sense, I self-servingly abused relational resilience with my fellow Christians.

**Gender Roles**

I was raised in a heterosexual family that did not adopt the hegemonic norm of gender roles. That is, my mother worked in a prestigious role for the National Aeronautics and Space
Administration (NASA) while my father served as a hard-working, part-time Federal Express driver. While my father provided for the family in other meaningful ways, this was not the norm in society. Historically, men were supposed to be the financial providers while women the caretakers of the family (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Yet, I quickly learned that my normal was not the overarching standard in a Southern Baptist culture. Within the church, males were strictly positioned as the leaders while women were cast as the supportive heroine.

Male leaders. Foucault (2010) contended that since the beginning of time, power figures have sought to categorize “human nature” with the intent to produce societal order, and that various types of discourse used by power figures are “put to work in different types of societies as an instrument…or as a weapon” (Foucault, 2010, p. 6). In the context of the church, husbands—traditionally males—have been equated to that of the power of Christ: “For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior …Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:21-33, English Standard Version). Applying Foucault, husbands have been assigned the role of leaders, which provides them the power to influence the discourse of the church. From this power position, Foucault offered the three modes of human objectification often reinforced by those in power: dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification.

Dividing practices is a particular society’s way of objectifying those individuals who should be isolated from that society. Similar to dividing practice but containing a different style of discourse, scientific classification is characterized by the discourses used to define and structure acceptable disciplines, which, in turn, determines who can partake in such human practices. Subjectification is defined as a way in which humans turn themselves into an
objectified subject, which operationalize a person’s body, thoughts, souls, and overall conduct in society (Foucault, 2010). Those in power get to create the parameters of who, what, and how dividing practices, scientific classification, and subjectification are defined and used. In the context of the church, males create those parameters.

To illustrate, as a middle-schooler, I remember sitting among a large congregation as we watched a non-married pregnant woman stand in front of the church and confess her sin. Her behavior (i.e. getting pregnant outside of wedlock) was deemed impermissible (scientific classification); thus, the Pastor requested that she confess her sins in front of the entire church as her penalty. In this way, her confession objectified her as a sinner (subjectification), which led to her eventual disappearance from the church (dividing practices).

**Submissive women.** According to the Bible, “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet” (1 Timothy 2:11-12, English Standard Version). “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7, English Standard Version). Even though these verses have historical undertones—under law women had less rights than men—, it is from its discourse—prescribed by God and reinforced by male leaders—that Christian women, especially Southern Baptist women, willingly submit to the weaker role. Thus, in order to abide by the scientific classification of their role, most Southern Baptist women not only willingly submit to the marginalized role but also campaign for male church leaders. In their eyes, it is honorable to hold fast to such a discourse, because it is written that the “husband is the head of the wife even
as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior” (Ephesians 5:23, English Standard Version).

**Dualistic Confusion**

What I came to understand was that the church was a platform from which Christianity was performed in such a way as to promote a dualistic society, especially as it pertains to religious affiliation (e.g., Christian versus non-Christian) and gender roles (males versus females). Growing up, I found safety and comfort in this dualism; yet, it was the safety and comfort of this mindset in me that ultimately lead to an internalized and uncomfortable confusion. My Christian values had created a tense dichotomy of, on the one hand, I was a part of the majority (i.e., Christians) while, on the other hand, I was a part of the minority (i.e., women). As a Christian woman, I was powerful yet powerless. I held the keys to the kingdom (i.e., heaven) as a Christian yet I was oppressed within the church because I was a woman. This sparked a battle within myself. Applying Foucault (2010), I found myself internalizing the modes of objectification—defined as *panopticism*—by viewing myself as the “weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7, English Standard Version) when juxtaposed to men; thus, I disciplined myself in such a way as to be accepted in the eyes of the Church (scientific classification) by not actively seeking leadership positions but rather willingly submitting to the marginalized group. In this sense, I began to objectify my body, thoughts, soul, and overall conduct in society as that of a worthy servant of the Church (subjectification) rather than as a volitional human being.

**Female leaders.** My confusion with dualism hit its peak when I was introduced to my middle school basketball coach, Coach Markham. She was a powerful woman who demanded much from her athletes. Similar to Coach Markham, Coach Henderson was also another
powerful woman who led our middle school volleyball team to one of its first winning seasons. Within their positions of power, I began to comprehend that women are not the weaker vessel but rather are powerful human beings that deserve to have authority, working in tandem with men rather than being beneath them. As I interacted with these women, my preconceived notions of female leaders began to shatter. Their presence in the head coach role served as a pivotal time in my life. My stereotype of female leaders—a discourse of submissiveness—began to shift. I no longer viewed women in leadership roles as profane but rather as empowering. The outcome of such a shift found me more comfortable in a more pluralistic and fluid discourse.

**Pluralistic and Fluid Comfort**

My enlightenment toward a pluralistic Christianity and fluid gender roles started in middle school and continued into the setting of prestigious university buildings and knowledge-filled library stacks six floors tall. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville has provided a platform from which I better understand and accept pluralism and fluidity. That is, I have found comfort in understanding that religions can co-exist and gender roles have no fixed parameters. In the words of Jonathan Sakes, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth:

> So don’t think of one God, one truth, one way. Think of one God creating this extraordinary number of ways, the 6,800 languages that are actually spoken. Don’t think there’s only one language within which we can speak to God (as cited in Tippett, 2016)

Applying Foucault, those who uphold a pluralistic and fluid worldview ultimately shake the foundation of what we currently understand as dividing practices, scientific classifications, and
subjectifications in traditional society. Rather, the adoption of pluralism and fluidity brings into question those who hold the power and the ways in which discourse has been used in order to generate the parameters that uphold the traditional standards of human objectification, which, for me, was dominantly disseminated within the church (i.e., One God, one Truth, one Way to heaven). In this light, I have come to understand that Christianity is not the only way but rather is another unique reality; and, with this context, powerful women are not profane but rather are to be celebrated. While the abovementioned experiences have played the largest role in my positionality, a few other experiences are worthy to note as they also pertain to this research inquiry.

**Personal Experience of the Coach-Athlete Relationship**

From an early age, sport came easy to me. It started with softball. I distinctly remember the ease at which I was able to toss, catch, run, and hit. I was selected for and excelled on the elite team. Next up, it was volleyball and basketball. While I had a pretty steep learning curve to overcome because I began both sports later in my athletic career, I quickly found my way onto the starting line-up. Not only was I able-bodied, I was privileged with what others might call “elite ableism.” That is, I found a way to excel at each task assigned to me in sport. I was above average when juxtaposed with my teammates.

My experience of the coach-athlete relationship. This elite style of ableism was the driving factor behind my relationship with the coach. Retrospectively, I understood that my relationship with the coach was contingent upon how well I performed. If I performed well, I was connected with the coach. If I performed poorly, I was disconnected. This was evident in how the coach would punish me with less playing time for not performing to their standards. When I approached the coach to ask what I did wrong, they did not acknowledge me but rather
stated that they were busy. In those moments, I felt my self-worth take a hit and I knew that in order to achieve connection again, I had to perform better. It was the unwritten rule, and without the help of the coach, that I had to prove myself before I was afforded another opportunity back in the game. In this sense, I felt that resilience was performance-oriented. That is, I measured by resilience based upon my performance level. If I performed well, I was resilient. If I performed poorly, I was not resilient enough. My conditional relationship with the coach ebbed and flowed between connection and disconnection based upon how I performed. Thus, my performance was the driving force behind whether I was disconnected from the coach and suffering the psychological consequences (i.e., lack of zest and worth; Jordan, 2010).

According to relational resilience, a term enveloped with RCT (Miller, 1976), growth-fostering relationships (GFRs)—high-quality interpersonal connections—produce increases in both relational partners (e.g., coach and athlete) via increases in (a) energy, (b) knowledge and transparency about one’s own experience, the other person, and the relationship, (c) creativity and productivity, (d) sense of worth, and (e) a desire for more connection and differentiation (Miller & Stiver, 1997). GFRs are in stark contrast to the kind of relationship I experienced with my coach. Our conditional, performance-oriented relationship (a) decreased my energy levels, (b) created ambiguity between myself and the coach, (c) lessened my productivity due to not knowing how I needed to improve, (d) decreased my self-worth, and (e) my desire to want to stay in connection with the coach. This type of relationship contributed to my feelings of relief when I graduated, which marked our permanent disconnection as I was no longer enslaved to his position of power.
Applying Foucault (2010), the coach was afforded the power of discourse, which was used to isolate those who performed poorly (dividing practices) and unite with those who performed optimally (scientific classification). Thus, when I experienced a poor performance, I objectified myself as an athlete based upon my ability to compete, internalizing the surveillance of the coach onto myself. Similar to the power dynamics rampant within the Southern Baptist church, I was, again, slated as the weaker vessel. That is, as a woman in the church, my allegiance was given to the man. As an athlete, my allegiance was given to the coach. While more gender fluidity was welcomed in the coach’s role, they still were considered the more powerful vessel in the context of sport.

**Research Paradigm and Philosophical Framework**

My positionality largely informs my philosophical framework and research paradigm. In general, paradigms are ways researchers view the world (ontology) and determine how knowledge is produced (epistemology; Markula & Silk, 2011). The researcher’s ontological and epistemological viewpoints are what work together to create the philosophical boundaries from which guide the researcher to make various research design decisions. These philosophical parameters inform, for instance, how research questions are generated, methods are employed, and interactions are conducted with the participant. I ontologically believe that there are multiple realities and that these multiple realities are co-constructed as individuals interact with their respective environments (e.g., interpretative; Markula & Silk, 2011). From this stance, I situate myself (the researcher) and this research within a social constructivist lens, an interpretive paradigm.
Research Paradigms

Historically, there are three types of paradigms from which research can be explored. In general, qualitative researchers have largely rejected the traditional paradigm (e.g., logical empiricism, positivist; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) with few qualitative research paradigms adopting a modernist approach (e.g., logical positivism, post-positivist; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative researchers who adopt the traditional paradigm argues for one universal truth (ontology) and that generation of knowledge regarding this one truth has to remain objective (epistemology). Positivist researchers employ methods such as online surveys, structured interviews and objective observations in order to keep themselves physically and emotionally distant from the participant so as to not impose any personal bias upon the investigated phenomena. The modernist paradigm was the first philosophical push against the positivist paradigm in order to promote the natural setting from which a variable is examined. Post-positivist researchers, thus, sought to yield a thicker description (e.g., timing, sequencing, and consequences of behavioral acts; Geertz, 1994) of each participant’s account. The modernist paradigm still claims only “one view as to the nature of reality” (ontology, Owen, 1982, p. 6) but argues that individuals create the same reality in a different way (epistemology, Markula & Silk, 2011). Thus, post-positivist paradigms are best used when a researcher is more comfortable with traditional positivist approaches, unsatisfied with the depth and breadth of information gained from quantitative methods, but unwilling to adopt fully humanistic interpretive or critical paradigms to answer research questions.

Interpretive Paradigm

I situate myself and my research within the interpretive paradigm, which acknowledges the limitations of the traditional and modernist paradigms in so much as it puts the social world
at the forefront of the research inquiry (Markula & Silk, 2011). Interpretive researchers claim multiple realities (ontology) and that such realities are generated as humans interact with the social world (epistemology; Markula & Silk, 2011). In opposition to positivism and post-positivism, interpretivist researchers renounce objectivity by claiming that it is impossible to scientifically prove facts given the influence of theoretical frameworks from which the research inquiry is produced. For instance, interpretivist researchers claim that any research regarding human subjects is interactive, which means that the researcher has the power to influence the results (i.e., choose specific questions to be asked in an interview) and is exposed to being influenced by the results (i.e., inform the researcher’s analysis of the data). In this sense, knowledge is generated not within a vacuum but through interactions between the researcher and the participant. Thus, rather than simply calling this paradigm interpretive, Markula and Silk (2011) further claim the interpretive paradigm is delineated into two anti-positivist categories: Humanist (i.e., interpretive and critical) and postmodern/post-structural. For the sake of this research, I discuss interpretive humanism, the category in which social constructivism falls.

**Interpretive humanism.** Interpretive humanism is often referred to as the constructivist paradigm given that it is based upon how humans construct knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Schwandt, 2003). The constructivist paradigm refers to the mind as an active agent in the construction of knowledge rather than discovering or letting knowledge emerge from the data (Schwandt, 2003). The participant’s and researcher’s interpretation of culture (i.e., language, beliefs, values, experiences) are what contribute to the construction of knowledge. Constructivist researchers ontologically and epistemologically differ from positivists and post-positivists by taking a more relativist stance rather than realist. That is,
constructivist researchers shift away from the positivist and post-positivist stance of one, objective reality (e.g., realism) to the notion that multiple realities can be socially and experientially constructed within the minds of individuals and researchers (e.g., relativism; Markula & Silk, 2011).

**Social constructivism.** Social constructivism is similar to constructivism in the sense that they hold the same ontological and epistemological beliefs. That is, social constructivist researchers believe that there are multiple realities (ontology) that are created as individuals interact with their social worlds (epistemology; Markula & Silk, 2011). Thus, social constructivist researchers also understand that knowledge is generated as the researcher and the participant interact throughout the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998). In this sense, social constructivist research attempts to value the individual beliefs of the participants rather than insert the values of the researcher into the physical representation of the project under examination. Instead, a social constructivist methodology allows room for a more literary style of data reporting, in which the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of the participant gained through the data collection process (e.g., the interview) are analyzed inductively and reported with a more narrative style of writing (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

An inductive analysis requires that few to no theories are overlaid onto participants’ responses in a deductive or objective manner. Rather, researchers are encouraged to promote the rich, subjective, individualistic nature of the participants’ words by preserving and representing the meaning of those words. If the inductively produced results are in line with existing theoretical frameworks, that is highlighted in the discussion section. In this sense, the analysis process generates novel and contextualized interpretations of meanings for the participants.
I situate myself within the social constructivist paradigm in so much as I believe the participants will have a different reality from my own (ontology) and that their realities were generated as they interacted with their respective social environments (epistemology). I also contend that my reality continues to be co-created with those whom I interact with on a daily basis. In this regard, I believe participants will not only co-create knowledge as we (participants and I) interact but also as participants recollect the co-created experiences generated between them and their coach(es). The following section outlines the methodological approach that I will be using, which pairs well with social constructivism.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS
Pseudonym __________________
Sport _______________________________________________________________________
Total years of participating in your sport _______________________________________
Year in school or year graduated ______________________________________________
Years with the current team or before you graduated _____________________________
Scholarship (full, partial, none) ____________________
Is there one coach in particular that made an impact either positively or negatively on you—or more than one? ____________________________________________________________

INTRODUCTION
In general, I am interested in having a stronger understanding of your NCAA sport experiences of major stress, how your coach related to you during this time, and how that relationship impacted your ability to be resilient through the major stress.

GENERAL
1. Tell me about a time you dealt with major stress while participating in your sport?
2. Tell me about the kind of relationship you had with your coach during the major stress.  
   i. **Probe: Connection and disconnection**
3. In what ways did the kind of relationship you had with your coach during this time influence …
   a. …you reaching out to your coach for help while experiencing the major stress?
   b. …your coach reaching out to you while you were experiencing the major stress?
   c. …your ability to be resilient (e.g., bounce back) through major stress?  
      i. **Help / Hinder / Contribute to** you overcoming the major stress?
         1. How did this make you feel?

I also am interested in having a stronger understanding of the power dynamic between you and your coach and how/if it influenced your ability to be resilient.

POWER DYNAMICS
4. In what ways did/does power play a role in your relationship with your coach?
5. In what ways did/does your coach’s use of power impact the kind of relationship you had with your coach during the major stress?
6. In what ways did/does your coach’s use of power influence …
   a. …you reaching out to your coach for help while experiencing the major stress?
   b. Your coach reaching out to you while you were experiencing the major stress?
   c. …your ability to be resilient through major stress?  
      i. **Help / Hinder / Contribute to** you overcoming the major stress?
         1. How did this make you feel?

I also am interested in having a stronger understanding of how sociocultural factors such as age, gender, race, and religion influenced your ability to be resilient. So, first, please tell me how you identify with the following:
**SOCIOCULTURAL IMPACT**

Age and generational influences 
Developmental and other physical, cognitive, sensory, and psychiatric disabilities 
Religion and spiritual orientation 
Ethnic and racial identity 
Socio-economic status 
Sexual orientation 
Indigenous heritage (non-native vs. native?) 
National origin (U.S. born vs Immigrant?) 
Gender 

7. In what ways have your sociocultural factors influenced your ability to be resilient through the major stress?  
   a. Help / Hinder / Contribute to you overcoming the major stress?  
      i. How did this make you feel?  

*From the questions I asked about your sociocultural background, what do you know about your coach’s sociocultural background (e.g., age, gender, race, SES, sexual orientation, religion, family structure)?*  
8. How does knowing or not knowing you coach’s sociocultural background impact your relationship with the coach?  
9. How does this relationship—as influenced by sociocultural factors—impact …  
   a. …you reaching out to your coach for help while experiencing the major stress?  
   b. Your coach reaching out to you during your major stress?  
   c. …your ability to be resilient through major stress?  
      i. Help / Hinder / Contribute to you overcoming the major stress?  
         1. How did this make you feel?  

10. How might the interaction of you and your coach’s sociocultural backgrounds influence your ability to be resilient through major stress?  
   a. Help / Hinder / Contribute to you overcoming the major stress?  
      i. How did this make you feel?  

**GROWTH-FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS**  
11. Ultimately, what did you need or not need from your coach during your major stress? How does that compare with what you got?  
12. What do you believe the ideal coach-athlete relationship should look like in order to help student-athletes be resilience through major stress?  
   a. *Probe type of attributes coaches should embody* in order to nurture high quality relationships when student-athletes are experiencing major stress?  
13. Anything else you think is important for me to know about your major stress, your relationship with your coach, your ability to be resilient, etc.?
Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

Exp211 Rev Approval (No Provisos)
November 27, 2017

Sara Marie Erdner,
UTK - Coll of Education, Hlth, & Human - Admin-Education, Health & Human Sciences

Re: UTK IRB-16-02837-XP
Study Title: Coach-Athlete Relationship and Resiliency in Sport

Dear Dr. Erdner:

The UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application for revision of your previously approved project, referenced above.

The IRB determined that your application is eligible for expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(2). The following revisions were approved as complying with proper consideration of the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects:

Approved Revisions to Study:
1. Earlyn Lasser added as an additional investigator.
2. The study's purpose, population, and procedures were revised to include youth coaches in addition to the originally approved NCAA coaches and NCAA athletes.
3. Revised consent form.
5. Revised Appendix B - Recruitment Letter for Coach to Forward to NCAA Athletes.

Approved Revised/New Study Documents:
IRB Application v1.9
Informed Consent 10.23.17 v1.1
Appendix E - Confidentiality Agreement v1.0
Appendix F - Student-Athlete Recruitment letter v1.0
App. D - Athlete Interview Guide 10.23.17 v1.3

Approval does not alter the expiration date of this project, which is 03/05/2018.

Institutional Review Board | Office of Research & Engagement
1534 White Avenue | Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7010 | 865-974-7000 (fax) | irr.eufs.edu

BIG ORANGE. BIG IDEAS.
Flagship Campus of the University of Tennessee System
Appendix C: Sample of Researcher Journal

**Sunday, January 3rd at 11:30am**

- A few interesting things that have manifested:
  - Two participants (Zane & Cade) have marked themselves as not religious. Stated that religiosity might have helped but did not contribute it as a major factor that would have made them more resilient than they already were.
  - Participants are referring to their sport team as a “family” → Potential connection with the family resilient literature?

I also listened to the Liturgist Podcast today with Hilary McBride (therapist, researcher, author, speaker--[http://hillarylmcbride.com/](http://hillarylmcbride.com/)) as a guest. The podcast regarded shame and how it influences a person’s ability to relate with others. I saw a lot of similarity in what she was saying with the words of the participants, particular Zane & Cade. The following section is the transcribed section of her portion of the Liturgist podcast.

[reference podcast for McBride interview]

The portions of the interview that I believe highly resonate with the words of the participants are the following transcribed interview portion, which regard messages of shame (How might these messages be seen in the participant’s stories?)

*Messages given by shame systems are control. What this sounds like: “You have to be in control or else bad things will happen, and if bad things then someone needs to be blamed. & if you can’t blame somebody else, you are blamed.”* *Shame systems talk about perfectionism* - you always have to be right, because if you are not right then you have no value here. Shame systems say, ‘We don’t talk about hard things, because we have a no talk policy. We don’t talk about things that are wounding. How you’ve been hurt or how I’ve hurt you.” It creates a culture of silence where people feel alone. There is a denial - Don’t talk about the things that you need. Don’t talk about anything. don’t be vulnerable. Disqualifications - the things that hurt you here are not as bad as someone else’s pain. Trauma, the way that you were touched by that person, I am sorry that happened to you, but it wasn’t as bad as what happened to that one person. Your pain doesn’t count. Unreliability - don’t expect things to go the way you want them too. You can’t trust anybody. You are just going to get let down again--an incompleteness. Don’t try to finish anything or go to the hard places and let yourself be seen, this won’t happen. If you do try it, you will be pushed away and denied. If you want to be fully you, the part is not welcome. That thing that you want to say or want to acknowledge, not here. Often, we will choose to cut that part off just to be loved. The pain that comes with the shame drives them to do all sorts of things to just get rid of the shame. I am going to drink to forget how lonely I am. The things we do to get away from shame, create more aloneness and that make us feel even more disconnected. I mean, that is a really easy example to point out, but they end up costing us. I don’t always say to my clients, “I want you to be happy,” but I do say to them, “I want you to feel fully alive.” I want you to know that when you are fully alive when you are here with me is good.
Appendix D: Recruitment Letter

Dear [insert name of NCAA DI student-athlete],

I am excited to announce that the data collection process has begun for my dissertation study, which pertains to how the coach-athlete relationship impacts your ability to be resilient through major stress.

If you are still interested in participating in this study, I would love to set-up a time to hear your story.

Note: We anticipate the interview to last approximately 90-120 minutes. The time frame can be adjusted based on your availability and at your convenience. Your participation is greatly appreciated and your responses will be held in strict confidence. In other words, no references will be made in oral or written reports that could link your participation to the study.

Sincerely,

Sara Erdner, M.S.  
Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Kinesiology, Recreation, & Sport Studies  
Sport Psychology and Motor Behavior Program  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Email: serdner@vols.utk.edu; Phone: 865.974.1250
Appendix E: Informed Consent

INTRODUCTION

As a current or former NCAA DI student-athlete who has demonstrated positive adaptation through a major stressor while participating in your sport, we would like to invite you to participate in a research study examining the ways coaches influenced your resilience through your major stressor while you were participating in your collegiate sport.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

If you agree to participate in the study, we will schedule a convenient time to conduct an interview with you and the lead researcher (Sara Erdner), either in-person, by telephone or Skype. Unless you request otherwise or due to distance issues, in-person interviews will take place in the Applied Sport Psychology Lab in the HPER building on the University of Tennessee campus. We anticipate the interview to last approximately 90-120 minutes. The time frame can be adjusted based on your availability and at your convenience.

The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Once the interview is transcribed the audio-recording will be destroyed. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript. We will then attempt to identify the major interview themes and subthemes and write them up in a paper.

RISKS

There are no unusual risks to participating in the study. It is possible that participating in this study may lead you to becoming more aware of your own experiences and challenges in sport as related to your major stressor, the connection you had with your coach, and your ability to be resilient.

BENEFITS

The study will potentially allow for a better understanding of the concept of resilience in NCAA level sports. In doing so, coaches, sport psychology professionals, and others involved in athletics will be aided in creating positive connections that will enhance the development of resilience. In addition, this study will likely add to the current knowledge base within resilience and sport.

_______ Participant's initials

IRB APPROVAL DATE: 02/09/2017
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 03/05/2018
CONFIDENTIALITY

Your data will be stored securely and will be made available only to the persons involved in the data analysis process (i.e., Sara Erdner-lead research, Dr. Rebecca Zakrjasek-Faculty advisor, the critical friend, and two other potential interview transcribers), unless you specifically give permission in writing for us to do otherwise. All investigators will treat your interview as strictly confidential.

No references will be made in oral or written reports that could link your participation to the study. The members of the research team are the only ones who will have access to the audio recordings. Audio recordings will be destroyed once the interviews are transcribed. The interview transcript and informed consent document will be kept in a locked file cabinet in room 119 of the HPER building on the University of Tennessee campus for three years and then destroyed.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the lead researcher, Sara Erdner, at 1801 Volunteer Blvd, Knoxville, TN 37996; (865) 974-1250, or by email at serdner@vols.utk.edu; Faculty Advisor, Dr. Rebecca Zakrjasek at (865) 974-9253, email raz@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the UT Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

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

Participant's signature ______________________________ Date __________

Investigator's signature _____________________________ Date __________
Appendix F: Email Soliciting Participant Feedback on Transcript

Hi, [Laurel]!

Hope you had a great holiday season! Just finished transcribing your interview, see attached! I invite you to read through your transcript to double check that everything that was transcribed is in line with your story. Please let me know which spots in the interview need more clarification or don't seem to fit well with what you remember providing me. This procedure is simply to make sure that we are upholding the integrity of YOUR story as a NCAA DI student-athlete. Thanks again for giving me a chunk of your time!

I have a few probing questions after re-listening to your interview again:

1. At the beginning of the interview (pg. 1), you mentioned the Myer's Briggs test and how it has an assertive versus a turbulent personality style. You mentioned that you “have an assertive personality style, one that doesn't necessarily ruminate too much on the past or let the past dictate the outlook you have in the present or on the future.” In contrast, the “turbulent personality style tends to ruminate a lot about how former actions and the past reflect on the present moment and future” and that you and [your coach] have a different personality style from each other.
   - **Questions:**
     - How do you believe your assertive personality style influenced the kind of relationship you had with [your coach]?
     - What kind of personality (assertive or turbulent) would you say [your coach] is?
     - How did this resulting relationship influence your ability to be resilient through your injuries?
     - How might a turbulent personality style have influenced the relationship you had with [your coach] and your ability to be resilient?

2. Lastly, you mentioned toward the end of the interview (pg. 60) that [your coach] tended to have a "too reserved" mentality when it came to injuries.
   - **Questions:**
     - How did [your coach's] "too reserved" mentality influence your relationship with him?
     - How did his "too reserved" mentality influence your ability to be resilient?

Thank you!

Cheers,

Sara Erdner, M.S.
Ph.D. Candidate, Sport Psychology and Motor Behavior Program
*University of Tennessee, Knoxville*
serdner@vols.utk.edu
Appendix G: Sample of Coding Audit Trail

January 3, 2018, coding with critical friend

Diary entry #1: SA resilience
* Connected with existing lit. about athlete resilience
  Galli & Vealey (2009); Fletcher & Sarkar (2012)

Diary entry #2: The Bridge & Coach behaviors
* (-) Coach behaviors: Culture of disregard
  Gentry dissertation research;
  Decker (2009); Stirling & Kerr (2008)

Transition, diary #3: The Bridge, Coach as the Bridgetender

Diary entry #4: Athlete wishes had from coach
* Culture of Regard
  Relational–Cultural Theory, growth-fostering relationships (Miller, 1978)
  Carl Rogers - Unconditional positive regard, empathy & authenticity
* introduce Positive SA interviews

How socio-cultural factors & power is present throughout these:
Power = (#2) hierarchical relationship; (#4) reciprocal relationship || Socio-cultural: Inclusion vs. Isolation - Acceptance, Inclusion, Motivational displacement, recognizing differences. How is who they are as a sociocultural person influencing our relationship and what they need from me in order to help support them through this.

January 22, 2018, coding with critical friend

Introduction
Prologue
Section #1: My major stress: Toxic mega death
Section #2: Resilience in mine
Section #3: The W.O.A.T. versus the G.O.A.T.
  W.O.A.T.: Culture of Shame
    Coaching robot, power-ego coach-centered
    Disconnected
  G.O.A.T.: Culture of Trust
    Braveheart coach relationship-centered Connected
  Section #4: Messages of the W.O.A.T. versus the G.O.A.T.
    W.O.A.T.: Messages of perfectionism (dysfunctional)
      performance-oriented
      over-training
    G.O.A.T.: Messages of perfectionism (functional)
      process-oriented
      autonomy
    W.O.A.T.: Messages of abuse
      Silenced
      Degraded
      Disregarded
      Humiliated
      Shunned/Isolated
    G.O.A.T.: Messages of regard
      Acknowledge & Validated
      Included
      Role clarity
      authenticity & vulnerability

Section #5: Knowing what I know now...
  W.O.A.T. creates the Wall
    How interact to influence my resilience?
  The Bridge
    G.O.A.T. tends to the bridge
  Section #6: How to survive the system
Acknowledgements
Appendix H: Final Thematic Map

January 26, 2018

Introduction
Prologue

Theme 1: Student-Athlete Core Resilience
- Positive: optimistic personality
- Focused: focused on controllables during stressor
- Motivated: motivated to bounce back
- Confident: confident would bounce back from stressor
- Social Support: external supports (e.g., parents, teammates) helped them bounce back

Theme 2: The W.O.A.T.: Hierarchical, superficial relation

Theme 3: The G.O.A.T

Theme 4: W.O.A.T. Coach Behaviors
- Hide & suppress: wanted to know more about their coach and for their coach to know more about them.
- Win-at-all-costs mentality: Coach all about athlete performance, no concern for holistic care of athlete
- Comparison of contribution: Compare athletes to other able-bodied athletes on team.
- Overtained: excess training volume
- Role ambiguity: Did not provide role clarity once athlete experienced major stress.
- Disregarded: Shunned the athlete when they experienced the major stress because no longer useful to the team.
- Silenced: Did not provide athlete with a platform from which to be heard.
- Degraded: Belittled as a human (e.g., called pussies).
- Discriminated: Marginalizing athletes based upon their religious orientation.
- Dominated: The coach dominates the tone and flow of the conversation (e.g., coach’s way or the highway)
- Assaulted: physical, emotional, and verbal abuse

Theme 5: G.O.A.T. Coach Behaviors
- Process-oriented: Coach focusing and directing the athlete’s attention on the process. Not focusing on when the athlete is going to get back to playing sport.
- Athlete autonomy: Coach providing athlete an opportunity to voice their opinion on training, etc. Letting them take a leadership role while experiencing major stress.
- Acknowledge & validate: Acknowledged but validate athlete core resilience while they are going through the major stress.

Theme 6: The W.O.A.T., the G.O.A.T., and Student-Athlete Resilience
- The W.O.A.T. & student-athlete resilience: Negatively influence student-athlete resilience by forcing the athlete to have to focus their energy on survive the coach-athlete relationship rather than mobilizing their energy toward overcoming their major stress.
- The G.O.A.T. & student-athlete resilience: Positively influence student-athlete resilience by modeling resilience and also affirming student-athlete core resilience, allowing athletes the freedom to deal with their major stressor.
Theme 7: The Effects of Coach Major Stress & Student-Athlete Resilience

Coach were identified as not dealing with their major stress in the most effective manner, which negatively influenced student-athlete resilience. This happened because coaches were negatively influenced by their own personal stress, which then trickled down to their influence on student-athletes while student-athletes were dealing with their own major stress.

Theme 8: The Relational Shift: From Bad to Better, Good to Great

Three of the seven participants mentioned a relationship shift. Two of which talked about a relational shift from bad to better with a W.O.A.T. coach. One reported a relational shift from good to great with a G.O.A.T. coach. This relational shift was due to the power of vulnerability within the relationship.
VITA

Sara Marie Erdner was born in Huntsville, Alabama on January 25, 1990. She is the daughter of Cheryl and James Erdner and has one older brother, Joseph Erdner. Sara received her Bachelor of Arts in Communication Arts with a concentration in interpersonal communication from the University of Alabama-Huntsville in December 2012. She then attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville August 2013 and achieved her Master of Science in Communication Studies with an emphasis in interpersonal communication in May 2015. She began her doctoral studies in Sport Psychology and Motor Behavior at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville under the supervision of her advisor Dr. Rebecca Zakrajsek August 2015. She received a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in Kinesiology and Sport Studies with a concentration in sport psychology and motor behavior in May 2018.