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### Division I Female Athletes' Experience of Team Cohesion

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Vanessa Regina Shannon entitled "Division I Female Athletes' Experience of Team Cohesion." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Dr. Craig A. Wrisberg, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Dr. Leslee A. Fisher, Dr. J. Amos Hatch, Dr. Cheryl B. Travis

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Dr. Leslee A. Fisher

Dr. J. Amos Hatch

Dr. Cheryl B. Travis

Accepted for the Council:

Anne Mayhew  
Vice Chancellor and Dean of  
Graduate Studies

(Original signatures are on file with official student records)

**DIVISION I FEMALE ATHLETES' EXPERIENCE OF TEAM COHESION**

A Dissertation

Presented for the Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Vanessa Regina Shannon

May, 2005

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandparents,  
Frank, Frida, Gail, and Helen,  
who crossed an ocean and moved across the country  
to provide me with unconditional support  
in all of my endeavors.  
You are all so much a part of who I am today.

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I would also like to thank the athletes who participated in this study; thank you for sharing your time with me, I only hope that I can give voice to your experiences. I would like to thank the women with whom I have competed; thank you for sharing your lives with me.

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life.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Based on previous research, it is clear that we do not yet have a firm understanding of female athletes' perceptions of cohesion. Evidence suggests that women define themselves in terms of relationships whereas men define themselves in terms of personal attributes (Gilligan, 1982; Mathes & Batista, 1985). Other studies suggest that female athletes are more socially oriented when it comes to their team than are male athletes (Kidd & Woodman, 1975). However, female athletes' perceptions of cohesion have likely been minimized in previous sport research, from the development of questions (Carron & Chelladurai, 1981) through the analysis of data (Schutz, Eom, Smoll, & Smith, 1994). The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of NCAA Division I female athletes' experience of team cohesion. More specifically, an attempt was made to gain a greater understanding of how female athletes interact with and relate to their teammates and how they feel these interactions and relationships may or may not impact the performance of the team and their own individual experience of sport. A semi-structured interview approach was utilized with 10 NCAA Division I female volleyball players. The 4 themes identified in the data were: constituents of cohesion, facilitators of cohesion, threats to cohesion, and consequences of cohesion. The results are discussed in relation to Carron and Hausenblas' (1998) general framework of group cohesion. Implications for coaches and sport psychology practitioners and suggestions for future research are discussed.



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# Part I: Introduction

In this introductory section, a brief review of the literature regarding female athletes and team cohesion is provided. The major topics include: (1) gender differences in social behaviors, (2) gender differences in cohesion, and (3) a critique of the cohesion literature from a feminist perspective, specifically one that examines the participants selected, the questions asked, and the methods and methodology used. Further, the significance of examining Division I female athletes' experience of team cohesion is discussed and the purpose of the study is presented. An expanded review of literature may be found in Appendix A.

#### *Gender Differences in Social Behavior*

In the popular book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, author John Gray (1992) suggests that men and women are entities from different planets who struggle to understand one another. This book reinforces the common cultural belief that women and men have different ways of communicating, have different emotional needs and exhibit different modes of behavior. Other books and sources of popular culture put forth unfounded claims regarding gender differences that seem to maintain the stereotypical misconceptions men and women have about one another; but is there actually any empirical evidence for differing behavior patterns between men and women?

Many researchers have identified moderate levels of difference in the social behaviors of men and women. Some research has shown that men and women utilize different ethics of moral reasoning or have different moral orientations when wrestling with real life dilemmas (Gilligan, 1982; Jaffee & Hyde, 2000). Similarly, some scholars

assert that each gender has its own distinct way of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), its own way of interacting within group settings (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and its own ideas about how to develop and maintain close relationships (Cross & Madson, 1997).

One factor that needs to be considered when examining differences in gendered notions of cohesion is the concept of goal setting. One might think that since certain behavioral differences appear to exist between men and women, each gender would have a different focus when it comes to setting and achieving goals. As a result, it might be assumed that while men set performance-related goals, women tend to set goals that focus on the needs of others. However, research suggests that goal-setting differs across situations, irrespective of gendered notions of the concept. For example, in academic environments, individuals might set goals that are related to performance, learning, or social responsibility (Wentzel, 1991, 1993); however, in a social context, they may tend to set goals that are related to relationships and morality (Rose & Asher 1999). And when individuals are in situations where they must work together with others to successfully complete a task, they may set goals that focus on the task at hand, relationships among group members, or both (Bales, 1950).

The discussion of gender differences in social behavior is prominent in the study of communication. Tannen (1990) has proposed a delineation of communication styles by suggesting that men usually use talk to protect their independence, whereas women tend to see communication as a tool to foster intimacy and closeness. As a result, recipients of

communication may adjust their interpretation based on the gender of the individual speaking. Specifically, individuals may perceive more cooperation in messages from women than in messages from men. In an attempt to test and extend Tannen's model of gendered communication (1990), Edwards and Hamilton (2004) constructed a multidimensional model of gender and communication that proposes that gender differences seen in communication are mediated by gender roles. Specifically, the relationship between gender and communication is assumed to be mediated by levels of "dominance" (a trait stereotypically seen as masculine) and "nurturance" (a trait stereotypically seen as feminine). Participants in the Edwards and Hamilton (2004) study were given four scenarios of communication, varying by gender of the receiver, and asked to rate the cooperativeness of the message. In addition, the participants were asked to complete 21 items of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) in order to assess dominance and nurturance. Participant responses were used to test the two models of communication and gender. The results revealed stronger support for the Edwards and Hamilton model (2004) involving the influence of gender roles than Tannen's model of communication (1990).

Analogous to Belenky and colleagues' (1986) two distinct ways of knowing, Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed two structures of self: interdependent and independent self-construals. Cross and Madson (1997) suggest that these two distinct self-construals can help explain gender differences seen in social behavior. Specifically, women may define themselves using interdependent self-schemas whereas men may

identify with independent self-definitions. Cross and Madson (1997) discuss the evidence for gender differences in social behaviors related to the development and maintenance of close relationships. These social behaviors include aggression, nonverbal sensitivity, and self-disclosure, and the gender differences underlying these behaviors are in line with the notion of independent and interdependent self-construals. For example, individuals may use the expression of emotion or disclosure as a way to present themselves in social situations. Since individuals with independent self-construals define themselves as separate and autonomous, these individuals may be apprehensive about sharing emotions that may threaten their sense of self-sufficiency. For instance, men have been shown to be less willing than women to disclose emotions perceived as negative (e.g., anxiety and depression) (Snell, Miller, Belk, Garcia-Falconi, & Hernandez-Sanchez, 1989).

A final factor that needs to be considered when examining gender differences is the concept of group behavior. Typically, men exhibit behaviors that demonstrate contributions to the group task, while women's contributions to the group are more social-emotional in nature (Carli, 1982 as cited in Eagly, 1987; Wood & Karten, 1986). Consistent with this notion, Wood, Polek, and Aiken (1985) found that men tend to be more successful in groups that emphasize task productivity, whereas women tend to be more successful in groups that require discussion in order to attain a positive outcome.

#### *Gender Differences in Cohesion*

Research on gender differences in social psychology is similar to that obtained in research in sport, particularly with respect to men's and women's perceptions of team

involvement. For example, Deaux (1976) found that female athletes exhibit stronger belongingness needs than males. In addition, White (1993) found that female athletes (in this case, skiers) were significantly more team oriented than their male counterparts. However, despite the differences found in male and female athletes' perceptions of team involvement and in various forms of men's and women's social behavior, the results of research on gender differences in cohesion are equivocal (Widmeyer, Carron, & Brawley, 1985; Spink, 1995; Gardner, Shields, Bredemeier, & Bostrom, 1996; Matheson, Mathes, & Murray, 1997).

*Defining group cohesion.* Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1998) defined group cohesion as “a dynamic process reflected by the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (p. 213). In addition to defining the construct of cohesion, Carron, Widmeyer and Brawley (1985) developed a conceptual model for group cohesion for use in investigating the impact of group cohesion on sport participation. The conceptual model divides cohesion into four discrete dimensions differentiated on two levels (Carron, et al., 1985). The first level involves the individual versus group bases for cohesion. For example, an individual participant might have personal attractions to the group as well as perceptions regarding the collectivity of the group. More simply stated, the individual basis for cohesion would be illustrated through ‘I’ and ‘me’ statements (‘this team gives me enough opportunities to improve my personal performance’) while the group basis for cohesion would be exemplified with ‘we’ and ‘us’ statements (‘we all



take responsibility for any loss or poor performance by our team’). The second level of group cohesion deals with the task versus social aspects of cohesion. For example, there are social outcomes (activities related to the development and maintenance of social relations) and task outcomes (activities related to accomplishing a task, productivity and performance) for both the individual and the group. From these two distinct levels, four dimensions of group cohesion are derived: individual attractions to the group-task (ATG-T), individual attractions to the group-social (ATG-S), group-integration task (GI-T), and group integration-social (GI-S) (Carron et al., 1985).

*Measuring athletes’ perceptions of cohesion.* The primary instrument used to test Carron and colleagues’ (1985) model is the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) (Widmeyer, et al., 1985). The GEQ is an 18-item self-report questionnaire that assesses an individual’s perceptions of cohesion in a sport setting. The GEQ assesses all four of the dimensions of cohesion proposed in the model: ATG-T (4 items), ATG-S (5 items), GI-T (5 items), and GI-S (4 items). Athletes responses are measured on a 9-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 9 (very strongly agree). Individuals with strong perceptions of cohesion will obtain higher overall scores on the GEQ. The GEQ and each of its 4 subscales have been tested and shown to be valid and reliable as a measure of cohesion in sport teams (Carron et al., 1985; Widmeyer et al., 1985).

*Female athletes’ experience of cohesion.* Normative data published during the development of the GEQ suggests that the absolute amount of cohesiveness in female and male teams is quite similar (Widmeyer, et al., 1985). However, some research has shown

that female athletes have significantly higher perceptions of cohesion than the norms for females established on all four dimensions of the GEQ (Wrisberg & Draper 1988).

In a study investigating cohesion, sex, and sex role orientation in collegiate basketball teams, Wrisberg and Draper (1988) found that female athletes had significantly higher perceptions of cohesion, demonstrated by higher mean scores on all four dimensions of the Group Environment Questionnaire, than established norms for females. In addition, when compared to the mean scores for cohesion presented by Widmeyer and colleagues (1985), males in the study scored lower on average three of the four dimensions, with no difference seen in the attraction to the group-social. Since there seems to be considerable evidence suggesting that men and women have different ways of understanding the world (Belenky et al., 1986), different ideas about the maintenance of relationships (Cross & Madson, 1997), and different ways of attending to group tasks (Carli, 1982 as cited in Eagly, 1987; Wood & Karten, 1986), it seems logical to expect that female athletes might perceive team cohesion differently than male athletes.

#### *Brief Feminist Critique of the Cohesion Literature in Sport Psychology*

A feminist critique of the cohesion literature may help provide several explanations for the equivocal nature of the findings of research examining gender differences cohesion. Jayaratne and Stewart (1991) suggest that feminist criticisms of traditional quantitative research address issues of participant selection and omission, the questions asked by the researcher, and inappropriate research designs.

Based on Jayaratne and Stewart's (1991) suggestions, there are several reasons

why differences in male and female athletes' perceptions of team cohesion may have not been found in previous research. These include the fact that women have typically been underrepresented as participants, that a male bias may exist in the questions being asked by researchers, and that the factorial validity of the instruments used to measure team cohesion was relatively weak.

*Dearth of research on female athletes' perceptions of cohesion.* Research has shown that gender differences exist in athletes' perceptions of team involvement and their motivation for participating in sport (Deaux, 1976; Flood & Hellstedt, 1991; White, 1993). However, despite the known differences that exist between men and women in social contexts, very little research has investigated female athletes' perceptions of team cohesion (Glenday & Widmeyer, 1993). Most research has examined male athletes' perceptions of cohesion in isolation with only a few studies addressing females' perceptions (Spink, 1995; Widmeyer, Carron, & Brawley, 1988).

*Problems with the conceptualization of cohesion.* In their study examining cohesion in collegiate basketball players, Wrisberg and Draper (1988) suggest that the lack of gender differences seen in research on cohesion may be explained by the conceptualization of cohesion. Previous research suggests that women may define themselves with respect to their human relationships, whereas men define themselves as a result of individual attributes (Mathes & Batista, 1985). In addition, research investigating athletes' motives for participating in sport suggests that female athletes place a greater importance on the social aspects of sport than do male athletes (Kidd &

Woodman, 1975). Based on this evidence, it might be predicted that cohesiveness is a feature more commonly seen or demonstrated by female teams than by male teams. However, early investigations of the factors influencing cohesion were based entirely on males (Carron & Chelladurai, 1981). The participants used in these investigations were male athletes and coaches. In addition, in a study attempting to identify the factors associated with athletes' perceptions of cohesion, Carron and Chelladurai (1981) examined only those factors known to enhance performance and omitted the two factors of friendship and power/influence originally proposed by Widmeyer and Martens (1978). Martens, Landers, and Loy (1972) defined the friendship factor as the interpersonal attraction that exists within the group and defined the power/influence factor as the relative power athletes' have to influence other group members. Based on previous research (Kidd & Woodman, 1975; Gilligan, 1982; Mathes & Batista, 1985), it would seem that the friendship factor and the power/influence factor may be instrumental to an understanding of female athletes' experience of cohesion.

*Measurement issues in cohesion.* Another explanation for the ambiguity that exists in the results of studies examining gender differences in cohesion may be the methodology used by researchers. According to Carron (1982), cohesion is a reflection of an individual athlete's perception of the degree of his or her commitment, attraction to, and involvement in and with the team as a whole. Specifically, based on research showing that women are more relationship or socially oriented than men (Wood and Karten, 1986; Strough, Berg, & Sansone, 1996; Cross and Madson, 1997; Jafee and

Hyde, 2000; Ryan & David, 2003; Edwards and Hamilton, 2004), it might be predicted that female athletes would report higher levels of social cohesion than male athletes on the GEQ. However, the results of research using this instrument to examine gender differences in athletes' perceptions of team cohesion have been ambiguous (Widmeyer, et al., 1985; Spink, 1995; Gardner, et al., 1996; Matheson, et al., 1997).

Though the definition of cohesion proposed by Carron and colleagues (1998) and the instrument developed by Widmeyer and colleagues (1985) are the most widely used by sport researchers, there remains the question of whether either is the most accurate indicator or measure of athletes' perceptions of cohesion. Although the GEQ was developed based on theory, some have questioned the factorial validity of the instrument (Schutz, Eom, Smoll, & Smith, 1994) and, to date, no additional validation of the instrument has been conducted, or at least reported.

Schutz and colleagues (1994) performed a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis to examine the factorial validity of the GEQ and found that the original four-factor structure of the GEQ did not hold. Specifically, they found that even if the original four-factor model proposed by Carron and colleagues (1985) was "forced" on the data, "males and females could not be considered to share a common theoretical model of group cohesion" (Schutz, et al., 1994, p. 6). In addition, when Schutz and colleagues (1994) utilized the exploratory factor analysis suggested by Widmeyer and colleagues (1985), the analysis indicated that a one factor model rather than a four factor model was more appropriate. Based on their analyses employed, Schutz and colleagues (1994) proposed

that the GEQ lacks factorial validity.

Since the mid-1980s, the GEQ has been the most widely used measure of cohesion in sport. However, the suggestion that the measure may lack factorial validity leads us to question the way in which we are examining cohesion. Streat (1998) has argued that the ways in which athletes experience life and sport, including the context in which they experience it, have often been overlooked by sport researchers. Thus, it appears that if we are to achieve a better understanding of women's experiences of cohesion another research approach may be needed. In deed, the methodology that appears to offer researchers the best prospect of answering questions that remain about women's perceptions of team cohesion is qualitative methodology.

### *Significance*

Based on previous research, it is clear that we do not yet have a firm understanding of female athletes' perceptions of cohesion. Evidence suggests that women may define themselves in terms of relationships whereas men define themselves in terms of personal attributes (Gilligan, 1982; Mathes & Batista, 1985). Other studies suggest that female athletes are more socially oriented when it comes to their team than are male athletes (Kidd & Woodman, 1975). However, female athletes' perceptions of cohesion have likely been minimized in previous sport research, from the development of questions (Carron & Chelladurai, 1981) through the analysis of data (Schutz, et al., 1994). Therefore, a qualitative study investigating female athletes' perceptions of team cohesion appears to be needed. The intent of this study was to give voice to female athletes who

have historically been neglected in the research on cohesion, thus allowing a deeper understanding of the way in which female athletes experience team cohesion.

### *Purpose*

As a result of the lack of research examining female athletes' experiences of cohesion and the possible problems with current quantitative measures of cohesion, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of NCAA Division I female athletes' experiences of team cohesion. More specifically, an attempt was made to gain a greater understanding of how female athletes interact with and relate to their teammates and how they feel these interactions and relationships may or may not impact the performance of the team and their own individual experience of sport. To achieve this purpose the following research questions were addressed. First, how do female athletes define and experience cohesion? Second, how do female athletes feel their interactions with one another influence their performance, both as individuals and as a team? And finally, how do the ways in which female athletes interact with one another influence their experience of sport?

## Part II: Method



### *Participants*

The participant sample consisted of ten female NCAA Division I volleyball players (Table 1, Appendix G). Nine participants self-identified as white and one participant self identified as black. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 22 years. Their total years of participating in team sports ranged from 8 to 16 years, while years participating in volleyball at the current university ranged from 1 to 4 years. Five of the participants were starters, four were nonstarters and one participant was a red-shirt. All of the participants had a sport psychology consultant working with their team.

### *Sampling Procedures*

Participants were selected from the university where I am pursuing my degree; this allowed me easier access to athletes. The fact that I had a prior relationship (e.g. as a teacher or sport psychology consultant) with some of the participants may have eased the interview process, but it also may have influenced the way in which participants responded to the questions I asked. Therefore, in order to reduce the possibility of social desirability, I selected only those athletes whom I had never met.

Previous research suggests that some relationship exists between cohesion and performance (Carron, Coleman, Wheeler, & Stevens, 2002). To control for the impact of that relationship on the athletes' experience of cohesion, I chose athletes from the same team. This way the athletes all had the same experiences of success and defeat; as it turned out, the team ended the season with a winning record. Since cohesion can be formed in a relatively short amount of time, athletes were recruited from different classes

in school (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior).

#### *Access and Entry Procedures*

Prior to collecting data, the study was approved by the university's institutional review board. Participants were recruited after I contacted the head coach of the team to request permission to access the athletes for the study. Once permission was granted, I contacted each team member via email to explain the purpose of the study and inquire about her willingness to participate. If the participant agreed to take part in the study, she was asked to suggest a location and time for the interview. Nine of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and one of the interviews was conducted over the telephone. Eight of the in-person interviews were conducted in my office, while the other was conducted in the team's locker room.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

*Bracketing.* In qualitative inquiry the achievement of complete objectivity is neither possible nor necessarily desired (Ahern, 1999). However, from a constructivist standpoint it is important for the researcher to acknowledge her presuppositions. According to Ely (1991), "bracketing requires that [researchers] work to become aware of our own assumptions, feeling, and preconceptions, and then, that we strive to put them aside – to bracket them – in order to be open and receptive to what we are attempting to understand" (p. 50). Ahern (1999) suggests that bias exploration is a journey and throughout all the phases of a study the researcher must continue to be aware of her own experiences and how those experiences may have led to specific personal assumptions.

Consequently, to enhance my reflexivity and ability to bracket out my experiences and perceptions, I participated in a bracketing interview conducted by a graduate student in sport studies who was familiar with both the theoretical rationale for the study as well as semi-structured interview techniques.

Since I am a former female NCAA Division I volleyball player and have previous research experience in the area of team cohesion, my responses during the bracketing interview were based on experience and findings from the current literature. Regarding the phrase “team cohesion”, I expected the athletes to discuss the unity developed among team members who are working toward a common goal. I also expected the athletes to describe cohesion both on the court and off the court. I also expected the athletes to feel that friendship was a major component of cohesion and that relationships developed off the court influence interactions on the court. I speculated that the athletes might describe a cohesive team as a team with good communication, with a common goal, a team that gets along, and team that is successful. I presumed that the athletes would describe a team that is not cohesive in the opposite terms. I believed that athletes would suggest a number of factors that influence a team’s cohesion, including the personalities of the team members, performance, the amount of time collegiate athletes spend with teammates, personal conflicts off the court, and team norms. I also thought that the athletes would suggest that a team’s cohesion influences the athlete’s experience of sport, the athlete as a person, and both individual and team performance. I assumed that each of the athletes would identify differences in the way in which male and female athletes experience

cohesion.

*Pilot interviews.* Prior to interviewing participants, I conducted two pilot interviews with former Division I female athletes. Both women participated in coacting team sports and finished their eligibility within the last two years. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to provide me with experience with the interview guide and to detect possible problems. After each of the pilot interviews, the order of the questions was shuffled to promote fluency throughout the interview, and the wording of several questions was changed to encourage an expansion of the athletes' responses.

*Interviews.* A semi-structured interview format was used in this study. A brief rationale for using a qualitative interview approach is provided in Appendix B. The interviews ranged in length from 40 to 60 minutes, with the average interview taking 50 minutes. Before the interview began, I reminded the athletes of the purpose of the study and informed them that the interview would be audiotaped. I also assured the athlete that I would preserve confidentiality by deleting all identifiers, such as the athlete's name (athletes chose pseudonyms), the name of any teammates or coaches mentioned, and the name of the university, from the resulting transcripts. After the athlete agreed to participate, and prior to the start of the interview, I asked the athlete to read and sign a consent form (Appendix C). After the interviews, I sent each participant a summary of her interview via email. I asked each participant to read the summary and if she felt any part of the summary was a misrepresentation of what she shared with me she were asked to make changes accordingly. I received responses from two of the women; both of the

women indicated that the summary was accurate. However, I did not receive replies from the other eight participants, which I assumed to mean that they did not see any need for changes.

### *Interview Guide*

Previous research on cohesion in sport has been limited to quantitative methods, specifically the GEQ. However, it has been suggested that the GEQ lacks factorial validity and as a result, masks gender differences in perceptions of cohesion. It might be assumed that since the GEQ was based on a model of cohesion developed with only male athletes, the measure is unable to fully grasp the female athletes' experience of cohesion. In an attempt to give voice to female athletes, in the current study I developed interview questions aimed at uncovering female athletes' experience of cohesion and how that experience might influence performance and the athlete's experience of sport.

Carron and Hausenblas (1998) suggest four types of correlates influence cohesion – namely, environmental factors, personal factors, leadership factors, and team factors. Environmental factors are situational conditions outside the team that influence or impact perceptions of team cohesion. These include contractual responsibilities, distinctiveness of the team, and physical proximity. A second factor of cohesion, personal factors, considers the characteristics of individual group members. Similarity in personal attributes of individuals, such as race and social background are thought to be associated with greater cohesiveness. Leadership is the third type of correlate of team cohesion. In particular, leadership factors describe the influence the coach-athlete relationship may

have on team cohesion. A coach can also have a negative affect on team cohesion, if s/he treats players differently or if team members disagree with decisions made by the coach that influence the team. A final factor influencing team cohesion is team factors. Team factors include team norms, team stability, and player status. I included these proposed correlates (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998) in the interview questions in order to allow for a more holistic view of female athletes' experience of cohesion. The interview guide (see Appendix D) began with a question that asked the athletes to provide demographic information, and then moved to several open-ended questions covering the following topics: defining team cohesion, the factors that athletes perceive to influence cohesion, the correlates of cohesion proposed by Carron and Hausenblas (1998), possible gender differences in cohesion, and potential consequences of cohesion.

I began by asking athletes to provide specific background information. Then, I asked the athletes to respond to a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit information about their perceptions and experiences of team cohesion. I asked the questions one after the other in a semi-structured fashion allowing the athlete time to exhaust the question with her answer. Despite the structure of the interview, the order of in which I asked the questions varied from the guide for some athletes in order to foster fluency of the interview and augment the richness of the information garnered (Patton, 2002). If the athletes' responses directed me to further explore relevant issues, I explored those issues at that time. I also used a priori probes, such as clarification and elaboration, to cultivate more consistency in the depth and complexity of athletes' responses (Patton,

2002). Clarification probes included, “You said ‘ -----’, would you mind telling what you mean by that?” Elaboration probes included, “Anything else?” and “Would you mind telling me more about that?” (Patton, 2002, p. 373-374).

### *Data Analysis*

I recorded memos during and immediately after each interview to note details of the interview setting, nonverbal behaviors of the participant, and potential emerging themes. These notes regarding the quality of the information provided by the participant were helpful during the interpretation process (Patton, 2002).

I used two forms of analysis to examine the data. To examine the data from questions based on Carron and Hausenblas’ (1998) proposed correlates of cohesion, I conducted a typological analysis (Hatch, 2002). First, I identified typologies using the interview questions. Next, I read the interviews and highlighted relevant data, looked for patterns and relationships within typologies across participants, and searched the data for quotes to support my findings. It should be noted that if the athlete suggested one of the proposed correlates as having an impact on cohesion before they were asked about that correlate in the interview guide, then I also included those data in the interpretive analysis.

In addition to the typological analysis, I used a modified interpretive analysis to extract meaning from the data (Hatch, 2002). Interpretive analysis allows for themes to emerge from the text rather than being identified by the use of predetermined categories. This type of analysis also permits the researcher to interpret the text to better explain the

experiences of the athletes. In order to give accurate voice to the experiences of the athletes, I immersed myself in the data and constantly referred back to the text for affirmation of my interpretations. Based on the procedures outlined by Hatch (2002, p. 181), I personally transcribed the interviews word for word to become more familiar with the data. Next, I created a case study analysis for each athlete. After reading the transcript to achieve “a sense of the whole”, I re-read the transcript and identified common words and impressions. I then bracketed my interpretations of the coding within the text and highlighted words and quotes that supported my interpretations. Based on my initial findings, I noted possible themes and subthemes in the margins of the transcript. The initial findings, possible themes and support for those themes were compiled into a draft summary for each participant. Finally, I reviewed each individual draft summary and conducted a cross case analysis to compare possible themes and muster support for interpretations across participants.

In order to further establish the integrity of the data, I asked five independent researchers familiar with qualitative data analysis to examine the transcripts (Ely, 1991; Patton, 2002). I gave each researcher instructions for data analysis (see Appendix E) and asked s/he to sign a confidentiality agreement. After my initial analysis of the data I reviewed the interpretations of the other researchers and reanalyzed the data to portray the most truthful representation of the athlete’s experience of cohesion. If I had any questions regarding the other researchers’ interpretations, I spoke with them individually. Samples of data analysis can be found in Appendix F.



## Part III: Results

The findings derived from the typological and interpretive analyses are presented in this section (see Appendix G for a presentation of the expanded results). Prior to being asked about the correlates of cohesion, most of the women in the study identified sacrifice and time together or proximity as having the greatest influence. Typological analysis of the interview data revealed that all of the women felt that contractual responsibilities and the coach-athlete relationship had little or no impact on athletes' perceptions of cohesion. However, all of the women felt that adherence to group norms had a positive impact on team cohesion. In addition, nine out of the ten women in the study believed that perceptions of team cohesion were not influenced by similarity of personal attributes.

The findings that were derived from the interpretive data analysis of the participants' responses are classified into 4 themes: (a) constituents of cohesion, (b) facilitators of cohesion, (c) threats to cohesion, and (d) consequences of cohesion. These themes are further divided into subthemes. A discussion of all the major themes and related subthemes is presented, including a rationale for each theme and quotes from the athletes to support the findings. The themes and subthemes are outlined in Table 3. A proposed model of the way these themes and sub themes may interact can be found in Figure 1. All tables and figures are located in Appendix H.

### *Constituents of Cohesion*

Group cohesion in sport and exercise has been defined as “a dynamic process reflected by the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron,

et al., 1998). In this study, the athletes were asked to describe what they think of when they hear the phrase “team cohesion”. The first theme represented what the athletes suggested as the characteristics or constituents of team cohesion; subthemes include: unity, universality, and gender.

*Unity.* One characteristic of team cohesion is a sense of oneness or synthesis, a feeling of unity. Unity is used to describe the way in which the athletes come together and form an undivided element. While describing the phrase “team cohesion”, all the participants implied some form of unity. One of the athletes described unity this way,

To me it’s like teams that mesh well together and get along and you know they’ll stay together as a team and they won’t break off individually and that cohesion holds them together and will help them through anything. (Rachel)

Another athlete used the analogy of mesh and described the constituent of unity in this way,

I think of how well the individuals on the team, the characteristics...like personal drive and like their own motivation, like how that all meshes together with each other. (Sandra)

Several athletes used the phrase “team chemistry” when asked what they thought of when they heard the phrase “team cohesion”. Another athlete alluded to this idea of unity when she said,

I think of it [team cohesion] like everyone coming together, like personally and professionally. (Jennifer)

*Universality.* The word universality implies that a phenomenon exists in multiple contexts. When describing their experience of cohesion, each of the participants in this study characterized cohesion as a construct that extended beyond the playing surface and into all aspects of their lives outside of volleyball. When describing this universality of team cohesion one athlete stated,

I guess, you know, like when we're hangin' out you can tell that we all like each other because you know we don't have to talk about volleyball to talk to someone. You know how some teammates can only talk about "oh, the game today", but like with us usually when we get home we always go over to someone's house and hang out...so, I mean, I don't know it's just that off the court we're still friends but we don't have to have the volleyball aspect of it. (Rachel)

Another athlete described the way relationships off the court sometimes influence relationships on the court,

Everybody truly cared about each other and I think everybody kind of knew the strengths and the weaknesses and the personalities of the people they were playing next to which helps everything to be a little bit more rhythmic on the court, if you know what somebody's doing next to you or what they can or cannot do. Everybody kind of moves the way that they should be moving on the court and it just kind of helps us a lot on that level, the emotional and personal level, and you know how somebody plays like on the physical volleyball level. (Melissa)

*Gender.* Based on social stereotypes we would expect to see a difference in the

way men and women experience and understand cohesion. All of the women in the study suggested that gender differences do exist in perceptions of team cohesion. In fact, all of the women perceived a difference in the way women and men experience cohesion before the question addressing gender differences in the interview guide was asked. Within the context of responses to other questions, each woman alluded to a noticeable difference in the way men and women participate in same-sex interactions and relationships. One athlete stated,

I've decided that my whole life no matter what I've been doing -- class, school, sports, home, family -- women talk about each other; that's just what they do, its fun for them. Like I do it too, I am not even going to lie, but I'm not as nasty about it, some girls are really nasty about it, but I think on my team, I think a lot of girls talk about each other because it's a way that they can bond with other people.

(Melissa)

Another athlete suggested that female athletes deal with conflict differently than male athletes do and this, in turn, influences women's and men's perceptions of cohesion. She said,

Female athletes (laughs), they don't really know how to handle peer-to-peer criticism and male athletes, they don't care about peer-to-peer criticism ...male athletes know how to handle that criticism but there's a lot of individual stuff going around you can even see it in the NBA, people, you know, wanna do this and wanna do it my way, don't want to listen to coaches, you know, that's how it

is in college too. And, female athletes, half of them know how to handle criticism and half of them don't, but they all know that they need each other to win. (April)

Another athlete indicated that she thought that male and female athletes build cohesion differently. She discussed the use of initiation rituals as a form of bonding and how the rituals used by male and female athletes differ. Specifically, she said,

I think that the male and female bonding I think is different and I think that, like I don't have any brothers, but based on like my guy friends in terms of what they do, of like team bonding, and stuff like that it's different because I know like the [men's team on campus] their team bonding or team initiation...and they do a lot more horrific things than most girls would ever think to do. So, that male bonding experience is different than just talking and stuff like that. We go up to [team retreat] and have our girls talk and we all spill secrets but that's like our bonding.

(Nicole)

Several of the athletes also indicated that the relationship between cohesion and performance may not be as strong with male athletes. Specifically, one athlete suggested,

I think guys can be cohesive on a court and not really be close off the court, like they could pretty much hate each other off the court and be cohesive on the court. Whereas girls I think have to have some sort of friendship off the court otherwise it's hard for them to really flow on the court. (Summer)

### *Facilitators of Cohesion*

In addition to defining or describing team cohesion, each of the participants was asked to identify what she thought influenced a team's cohesion. The second theme illustrates specifically the aspects of sport that the women perceived to positively influence cohesion and includes the subthemes: time together, friendship, respect, sacrifice, congruency and positivity.

*Time together.* As a collegiate athlete you spend a great deal of time with your teammates (e.g., in the locker room, in the training room, at practice, in the hotel on away trips, etc). All of the participants found this time together to facilitate relationships and in turn enhance cohesion among teammates. One athlete agreed and indicated that she thought the time the athletes on her team spent together had everything to do with why they are cohesive. She stated,

I think we have a really strong relationship with our team just because of how long our season is and how long we're together all throughout the summer regardless if people come back the first session of summer or the second session, you know, we get a lot of team community and stuff like that. (April)

Another athlete suggested that it's hard not to form relationships with individuals you spend so much time with, she said,

I mean, you know, in the Fall you see them everyday for at least like four or five hours a day, like you're with them all the time so I think here you need to bond with those people. (Rachel)

*Friendship.* The time together and close proximity required of collegiate athletic team members often facilitates friendships with fellow teammates. The bond that is cohesion is furthered by feelings of attachment and connection with teammates. All of the athletes suggested that their teammates were also their friends.

My best friends are on the team and outside of volleyball we go to the movies or go to the mall and it's not just like two or three people it's pretty much like the whole team. (Erin)

Several of the athletes, alluded to a relationship deeper than simply friendship and closer to a kinship, similar to a familial connection. One athlete stated, "you just know each other so much better when you're around each other all the time, it's like having 12 or 13 sisters" (Summer). She went on to talk about the caring relationships built between teammates that are often a result of facing challenges together. Specifically she said,

I think of...well obviously you know you guys all get along and it's very positive, you have good chemistry on the court but it also makes me think of like the feeling that you have after you finish a hard workout together. And everyone's just like yeah we got through like there's usually a lot of love like after you finish...after you finish like a really hard workout together. (Summer)

Another athlete also likened her relationship with her teammates to that of family. She stated,

I'm 800 miles away from my house and so basically my teammates are kind of my family because you know we're all in the same boat, we didn't get to go home on



Thanksgiving and so we all went to a restaurant together and we all cried, but you know we were all there together so it's like, I think that you form a better bond because you have to because they're like the only people who are there to support you, I mean you have your phone but like it's not the same when you need a hug.

(Rachel)

*Respect.* While the women in the study all identified friendship among team members as an important facilitator of team cohesion, most of the women admitted that, to be successful, at the bare minimum team members must have respect for one another.

One athlete stated,

I think part of team cohesion is just being able to be social with everybody, I think that that plays a role in it but if you can have a common respect when you're on the court and when you're in the weight room then I think that that's really important too. (Sandra)

Another athlete saw respect as the first step in building relationships between teammates.

She said,

I think the number one thing is respect, you have to respect somebody or you're just not gonna see eye to eye with them, you have to give that person respect so that they'll give you respect. (Monica)

*Sacrifice.* Collegiate athletes make sacrifices everyday to be part of an institutionalized athletic team. The sacrifice extends beyond time to personal interests. Most of the women in the study felt that they were more willing to sacrifice for women

that they were closely connected to than for those they were not, and that their personal sacrifice would foster cohesion and, in turn, success. One athlete felt that sacrifice is something that is present on cohesive teams and not seen on teams that are not cohesive. She stated,

They would, certain people would make sacrifices, um, you know put aside what they personally wanted to make the team better. A non-cohesive team would be off doing whatever they wanted just because they wanted to and probably wouldn't care what the other people thought no matter what, no matter who it hurt or how. (Jennifer)

Several athletes acknowledged that seeing teammates put the interests of the team before their own personal interests would facilitate cohesion. One athlete in particular said,

If you're a good person and you want to see the other person do even better than you, which I think a lot of our teammates have that, you know, "I want to see you succeed, I want to see our team succeed" and putting others before yourself, putting your teammates before yourself, so, I think that really helps with cohesion as well. (Erin)

*Congruency.* For these women athletes, common goals, similar attitudes and beliefs, shared ideals and covenants to live by were unifying factors. This type of consensus and harmonious commitment from team members creates a congruency that is essential to team cohesion. There is a special closeness that accompanies working toward a common goal, or sharing a common ambition, or as one athlete put it, fighting a

“common enemy”,

That was kind of our common enemy at the beginning and then, we knew we were good last year and then we didn't make it to the NCAAs, so that was more of something to push us, so you know, we need to get into the NCAAs we need to do something good. (Erin)

Another athlete described the action of a team coming together and uniting to accomplish a common goal. She said,

That everything would uh, just like blend in one whole, I mean that's what team cohesion is like a whole team working for one goal and to win and so when you see this it don't feel like the six individuals in the game and you see like one whole team fighting for one goal, to win the game. (Sharon)

Yet another athlete discussed the way in which a common goal can bring individuals together when, without that goal, they may not have achieved congruency,

We had a common goal and we had all these different people, different personalities, but a common goal, so that really helped the cohesion because there were different, it felt like 5 million different people but we all had a common goal (Melissa)

*Positivity.* One specific attitude that can be a powerful tool used to foster alliances among teammates is positivity. The athletes involved in this study felt that a positive attitude would facilitate cohesion among teammates while a negative attitude would hinder cohesion among teammates. One athlete suggested that once a team adopts

a positive attitude, then team cohesion just comes naturally. She said,

But the lack of cohesion, if you have a lot of non-coachable people everybody who just wants to do it their way, people who don't wanna work hard and who talk back, just a negative attitude, negative attitudes aren't good for any person, in any sport, in anything. So, you know once you have positive attitudes and everybody is willing to work 100% then you won't have to worry about how well your team's gonna get along. (April)

Several of the other athletes indicated that staying positive can help a team through adversity. She described a cohesive team like this,

You know if someone makes a mistake, it's like "ok, let's get the next one" you know and not kind of like "you should've gotten that" and they get excited when they do things really, really well and they help each other through the tough times and just, as far as behaviors like high-fives and smiles and stuff like that, when people do things good and you know encouraging faces when people aren't doing as well. (April)

### *Threats to Cohesion*

Just as teams can bond together, so can they be torn apart. My interview questions were phrased to elicit responses about those things that might influence a team's cohesion or lack of cohesion. As a result, the third theme that emerged from the interviews was threats to cohesion. This theme dealt with the athletes' perceptions of aspects of sport that may be detrimental to a team's cohesion. Subthemes included: time

together, conflict, and change.

*Time together.* Although all of the athletes suggested that time together facilitates cohesion, they did acknowledge that sometimes too much of a good thing is not necessarily positive. Many of the participants indicated that the significant amount of time they spent with their teammates could be detrimental to team cohesion. One athlete stated,

I live with two of my teammates and we are great friends but sometimes we don't even hang out together you know...so I think we definitely need to go do our own thing and that helps us. (Monica)

Another athlete immediately acknowledged the double-edged sword that time together is for team cohesion. She said,

I think that it can work in a positive and a negative way, because I know there are times that because we are around each other so much it's like we need a break. Which I mean in that case on our off days we won't hang out with each other, we'll just, you know, take the day off. (Summer)

*Conflict.* Team conflict is viewed as the antithesis of cohesion. With that said, it is no shock that most of the women on the team mentioned conflict as a characteristics of a team that is not cohesive and saw conflict as harmful to a team's cohesion.

Specifically, when asked to describe a team without cohesion, one athlete stated,

On non-cohesive teams I think there are a lot conflicts between the players and everybody is fighting and the things which happen off the court affect the game on

the court and if a team is fighting on the court with each other, well then they won't be able to play well together on the court and that's when you are going to lose. (Sharon)

Another athlete referred to a situation where two women on the team had similar personalities and as a result were trying to fulfill the same informal role which led to conflict that in turn hurt the team's cohesion. She said,

I remember one time I think it was my sophomore year...where [teammate] had to be the center of attention and it's just her personality and she has great stories, but when [another teammate] came as a freshman and she had the exact same personality and so they were battling and we had to remind them that it was okay for both of them to be like that 'cause there were so many people you know. So that was not very good because they were screaming at each other. I didn't know a lot of the problems because like I said I wasn't really involved that much with going out and that's where a lot of the problems happened. (Jennifer)

*Change.* Change implies movement or transition. It is often difficult for groups to undergo change. According to the athletes in this study, change was perceived to damage team cohesion and hinder the development of cohesion. Most of the athletes identified a time in their career when they experienced a great amount of cohesion, but when they encountered change, that cohesion was diminished. One athlete stated,

It was a lot different last year, like, as far as on the court, we had a lot of freshman, we had about six freshman, most of us played and we had a transfer

who started and it just like everybody was new to each other and we didn't really know how to respond to our team captains and it was just I don't know, it was just, you know how teams are in their rebuilding years and that's where we were at and it was just hard to get the hang of things as far as being a freshman and new people, getting used to new people and people that's been here. (April)

Another athlete suggested that change and transition bring the unknown and that much of team cohesion is based on knowing your teammates. She illustrated this when she said,

She was a great leader but we weren't as cohesive just because there were eight new freshman coming in and there were I think six other girls, so I mean the freshman totally out numbered the upper classmen and although everything was organized it was just like "I don't know you" and so it was kind of hard on the court. (Erin)

### *Consequences of Cohesion*

The athletes in this study were asked to speak about their experience of cohesion and how the way they relate to and interact with their teammates influences them as a person and as an athlete. Thus, the fourth and final theme that arose from the data was consequences of cohesion. This theme dealt with aspects of sport and life that the athletes felt team cohesion positively impacted. Subthemes included: positive experience of sport, athlete as person, and cohesion-performance reciprocity.

*Positive experience of sport.* All of the athletes in this study indicated that their experience of team cohesion positively influenced their experience of sport. Specifically,

sport was made more enjoyable by interactions with others and the relationships forged through sport. One athlete suggested that the cohesion on her team allowed her to continue to enjoy playing a game that she loves. She stated,

Well it makes it much better because if everybody was looking at me badly on the court then I would have like no desire to play anymore with this team and I won't be able to enjoy it at all and since they're all so nice and I love playing volleyball, it's so great to play volleyball for me, my team makes me want more for myself and believe that I can really do it in games. I think the team makes me find the maximum of all my strengths and power into the game. (Sharon)

Another athlete implied that her experience of team cohesion added to her athletic quality of life and eased the transition from high school to college athletics. She said,

Well, if I went to [university] from [home state] just on my own I probably would have had like two friends the whole time just because of my personality, like I'm very shy and everything. But coming into a team like this, well you kind of like just have fourteen or fifteen people that you can go to automatically because they are your teammates because of what that word means in itself and you know that you have those friends and they might not be close friends but it's somebody you can rely on. (Jennifer)

*Athlete as person.* Knowledge of the benefits of sport participation allows us to see that there is more to learn from participation in athletics than how to pass a volleyball. The women in this study recognized the impact that team cohesion had on them as



athletes and as persons. One woman felt she learned a great deal about life through her close relationships with her teammates. She said,

I think it's good to meet all these people and be able to call them your friends and call them your teammates because you know you've been through a lot with them and I think dealing with a lot of different people is a good social and life experience. (Nicole)

Another athlete illustrated the idea of athlete as person when she described her experience of cohesion. She stated,

It's more than that you end up having to learn to deal with different people, to deal with issues, to deal with confrontation, deal with all these different things so you bond with people on a much higher level but I can't really explain it, it's like a life lessons type of level and, um, you just...it's so hard to explain...you're more of like, uh, you have to help people through things more like real issues and it's not just about making a joke and then like you're best friends with somebody like in middle school. (Melissa)

*Cohesion-performance reciprocity.* All of the participants identified a relationship between team cohesion and performance. In addition, most of the athletes indicated that this relationship was reciprocal. This theme described the athletes' experience of the reciprocal nature of the cohesion-performance relationship. When asked to speak more about the relationship between cohesion and success, one of the athletes said,

I think to be the best and to perform the best you all have to be on the same page and, you know, have pretty good team cohesion because if you don't then I don't think you're gonna play good and I don't think you're gonna have the heart to do well. You do have a bunch of very good individuals, like I think our [men's sport at university] has a bunch of really good individuals but they play as individuals and I don't think they have good team cohesion and I think that's why they're not that good. (Nicole)

Another athlete simply said,

Remember you asked me what a cohesive team would look like on the court? I think that's what any ideal team would look like and if you're together and if you're cohesive then it's gonna be like that and the better you guys are together, the better you're gonna perform. (Jennifer)

When asked to delineate between a cohesive team and a team that is not cohesive, one athlete simply said, "Well, they [cohesive teams] win more games." She continued on to describe the cohesion-success relationship as reciprocal. When asked to describe the "cohesion" on her current team she responded,

I mean it's been getting better every semester. I mean the more we win, the more we practice the more we succeed the better it gets. (Summer)

# Part IV: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of 10 NCAA Division I female athletes' experience of team cohesion. More specifically, an attempt was made to better understand how female athletes interact with and relate to their teammates and how they feel these interactions and relationships may or may not impact the performance of the team and their own individual experience of sport. Ten NCAA Division I female volleyball players participated in semi-structured interviews, their responses were analyzed, and four major themes emerged. These themes included: (a) constituents of cohesion, (b) facilitators of cohesion, (c) threats to cohesion, and (d) consequences of cohesion. In this section, the participants' responses are discussed with respect to Carron' and Hausenblas' framework for cohesion (1998) and other existing literature.

#### *Constituents of Cohesion*

Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1997) defined group cohesion as “a dynamic process reflected by the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron, et al., 1997, p. 3). This definition is intended to highlight the properties of cohesion and emphasize that cohesion is multidimensional, dynamic, instrumental in nature, and affective (Carron, et al., 1998). Although the findings of this study reinforce the importance of unity and what Carron and colleagues refer to as the “tendency of a group to stick together and remain united”, they also suggest that there may be more to the construct of cohesion than previously identified. Specifically, the findings of the

present study suggest that though team cohesion may be linked to “instrumental objectives” or “the satisfaction of member affective needs” it may also exist outside the context of sport. The athletes in the study discussed the entity of cohesion as a force in their lives both on and off the court. The universality of the cohesion described by these athletes is not entirely consistent with Carron and colleagues’ definition of cohesion; however, it is illustrated in the two levels of cohesion mentioned by those authors, task and social. Task cohesion refers to an individual’s attraction to the group’s task (or on-court cohesion) and social cohesion refers to an individual’s attraction to the group for social purposes (or off-court cohesion). Most of the athletes in the present study seemed to feel that, compared to male athletes, female athletes are more concerned about their relationships with teammates off the playing surface (social cohesion) and have a harder time keeping their relationship off the court as friends from influencing their relationship on the court as teammates. This is consistent with previous research that found that female athletes are more team oriented than their male counterparts (White, 1993).

#### *Carron and Hausenblas' Framework for Cohesion*

Carron and Hausenblas (1998) propose that there are four correlates of cohesion in sport teams and exercise groups. These correlates include: environmental factors, personal factors, leadership factors, and team factors. Carron and Hausenblas (1998) suggest that cohesion and each of these four factors may have reciprocal relationships. For example, while the way a coach relates to team members may influence the team’s cohesion, the team’s cohesion may also influence the way a coach relates to his/her

athletes.

*Environmental factors.* Within the context of this study, the athletes discussed the way in which they perceived that many of Carron and Hausenblas' (1998) four correlates of cohesion contributed to or detracted from a team's cohesion. With respect to environmental factors, all of the women in the study acknowledged a relationship between the time they spent together and team cohesion. More specifically, all of the athletes in the study perceived the amount of time they spent with teammates, as well as the traveling the team did as a group, to positively contribute to the team's cohesion. However, they also indicated that if too much time was spent with teammates, it could take away from the team's cohesion. Furthermore, none of the athletes perceived contractual responsibilities (e.g. scholarship, walk-on) to influence a team's cohesion. The findings of the current study contrast the relationships between cohesion and both proximity and contractual responsibilities suggested by Carron and Hausenblas (1998). In addition, although previous research would suggest that "task social unity" is developed more easily among athletes with less experience (Gruber & Gray, 1982; Carron & Hausenblas, 1998, p. 246), the athletes in the current study perceived the role of cohesion both off the court (social) and on the court (task) to be significant.

*Personal factors.* Based on previous research, Carron and Hausenblas (1998) propose that personal factors (e.g. demographic attributes, cognitions and motivations, and sacrifice behavior) influence a team's cohesion. Specifically, they suggest the potential for similarity in personal attributes, such as race and sex of group members, to

enhance cohesion. However, consistent with the findings of previous research (Widmeyer, Silva, & Hardy, 1992), the findings of the current study suggest that similarity of personal attributes may not be important. In fact, almost all of the athletes indicated that similarities in personal attributes may lead to tension among group members and that differences enhance cohesion by fostering communication and in turn relationships. One athlete, however, indicated that although differences in personal attributes might not have affected the team's perception of cohesion, they did in fact affect her own personal experience of cohesion.

Another personal attribute sometimes considered to influence cohesion is the sex or gender of the athletes. The findings of previous research examining gender differences in cohesion are equivocal. Based on the ambiguity of previous findings (Widmeyer, et al., 1985; Wrisberg & Draper, 1988; Spink, 1995; Gardner, Shields, Bredemeier, & Bostrom, 1996; Matheson, et al., 1997), Carron and Hausenblas (1998) conclude that there are no "systematic differences" in perceptions of cohesion based on gender (p. 247). However, Reis and Jelsma (1978) proposed that there are gender differences in athletes' basic orientation toward competitive sport and, in turn, researchers should expect to see a gender difference in the perceptions of team cohesion. More specifically, Reis and Jelsma (1978) suggest that while males may sanction beating the opponent and winning, and as such may be expected to perceive greater task cohesion, female athletes may support participation and interaction with others and would be expected to experience greater social cohesiveness.

The female athletes in the current study indicated it was their perception that male and female athletes experience cohesion differently. Almost all of the athletes acknowledged this difference before they were even asked about its possible existence. Most of the women mentioned gender differences within the context of other questions, using phrases like “that’s just girls”, “girls are so petty”, and “girls hold grudges”. When asked to elaborate on these comments, the athletes suggested that it was their perception that compared to men, women are more emotional, sensitive to criticism, less able to separate friend and teammate, and more likely to allow personal matters off the court to interfere with interaction and performance on the court. All of the women also indicated that it is easier for women than for men to achieve cohesion on the court and in turn improve performance when team members have friendships off the court.

Several of the women suggested that any problem the team experienced on the court was a result of a personal issue off the court. This finding parallels the theme from social psychology that women may have a greater tendency to use connected knowing while men may use separate knowing more often (Belenky et al., 1986). In addition, the notion suggested by one of the athletes that women need each other to win aligns with the stereotype of cooperative women and competitive men (Tannen, 1990). Several of the women also suggested that male and female athletes experience cohesion differently because, while men work through conflict, women tend to hold grudges and let conflict worsen. This finding supports previous research examining the way in which men and women approach and deal with conflict (Stamato, 1992). Specifically, several studies



have suggested that women may be more competitive and less cooperative than men in negotiation and conflict management (e.g., Hottes & Kahn, 1974). However, it should be noted that some researchers have suggested power as a situational constraint when examining gender and negotiation behaviors (e.g., Watson, 1994).

Another personal factor believed to influence athletes' perceptions of cohesion is shared perceptions. Carron and Hausenblas (1998) suggest that similar beliefs and attitudes among team members may enhance perceptions of cohesion among team members. All of the athletes in the present study agreed with this conjecture and felt that sharing common ideals and attitudes with team members enhances a team's cohesion. Specifically, positive attitudes were perceived to foster cohesion while negative attitudes were thought to be detrimental to a team's cohesion.

Prapavessis and Carron (1997) found that individual sacrifice in team sport fosters perceptions of both task and social cohesion. Although a few of the athletes in the current study stated that seeing teammates sacrifice for the good of the team breeds trust and may augment perceptions of cohesion, many of the athletes suggested that the relationship between sacrifice and cohesion may be moderated by friendship. Several of the athletes in the study indicated that because of the close relationships they had with teammates they were more willing to sacrifice individual goals for those of the team. Specifically, they were more willing to work for the good of the team and sacrifice their own personal interests when their teammates were also their friends.

*Leadership factors.* Previous research has suggested that when coaches assign

value to team cohesion and work to improve athletes' perceptions of team cohesion, cohesion increases (Widmeyer & Williams, 1991). However, the athletes in the current study felt that any attempt the coach made to foster cohesion within the team was contradicted and undermined by his behavior. Most of the athletes felt the coach had several athletes on the team whom he treated differently than the rest and saw this type of behavior as problematic. Although his efforts to build team cohesion failed, the athletes did find that his role as a "common enemy" unified them in opposition to the coach and increased their feelings of team cohesion.

*Team factors.* Carron and Hausenblas (1998) propose four aspects of group structure that may in turn influence team cohesion: position, status, roles, and norms. The relationship of cohesion and position has not been previously investigated; however, there is evidence to suggest that starting status may impact athletes' perceptions of cohesion. Specifically, in a study with high school and college football players, starters on teams reported higher task cohesion than athletes who did not start (Granito & Rainey, 1988). Furthermore, the relationship between starting status and cohesion may be moderated by team success (Spink, 1992). Although the athletes in the current study did not perceive starting status to influence perceptions of cohesion, several acknowledged that this situation may have been different if the team was less successful.

Existing literature suggests a positive relationship between cohesion and conformity to group norms (Prapvessis & Carron, 1997). Specifically, if athletes conform to norms identified as important by team members, perceptions of task cohesion are

improved. Athletes in the current study acknowledged that conformity or lack of conformity to team norms influences perceptions of team cohesion. For example, they felt that if an athlete chooses to break rules or not conform to team norms, it would be detrimental to the team's cohesion and influence the way her team members interact with her on and off the court. However, if an athlete conforms to the team norms and lives up to the team's expectations of its members, then team cohesion would be enhanced.

#### *Other Perceived Correlates of Cohesion*

*Facilitators of cohesion.* While a number of the findings from the present study are consistent with previous research, this was not the case for all of the correlates of cohesion. These athletes were asked to discuss both positive and negative experiences of cohesion and in response they discussed what they felt might influence a team's cohesion. With respect to facilitators of cohesion, the findings of the current study are consistent with many of the correlates of cohesion previously identified; however, several new facilitators of cohesion were identified, specifically, friendship, respect, and positivity.

Although the framework proposed by Carron and Hausenblas (1998) identifies a number of possible correlates of cohesion, it does not address the relationships formed while teams are building cohesion. The findings of the present study suggest that, for female athletes, these relationships are the foundation for any form of cohesion developed among team members. All of the women identified their teammates as friends, and most of the women acknowledged the relationship between friend and teammate. In addition, many of the women admitted that most intra-team conflict is rooted in personal issues off

the court and transferred onto the court.

Another facilitator of cohesion identified in the present study is respect. While Carron and Hausenblas (1998) suggest that shared perceptions enhance cohesion, the idea of respect has not been previously recognized as a facilitator of cohesion. The findings of this study imply that friendship may be at the heart of cohesion in female athletes, although it is possible that friendship may not be achieved without first attaining respect.

Finally, the findings of the current study indicate that a positive attitude may contribute to greater perceptions of team cohesion than a negative or neutral attitude. Again, in their framework for cohesion, Carron and Hausenblas (1998) suggest that common cognitions and motivations may positively influence team cohesion. When asked to describe a cohesive team, most of the athletes in this study mentioned a positive attitude. The athletes suggested that members of a cohesive team are encouraging, while members of team with little cohesion are pessimistic and negative.

*Threats to cohesion.* Just as important as identifying the factors that can create cohesion on a team is the need to identify those that may destroy it. Determining perceived threats to cohesion would aid coaches and sport psychology practitioners in their attempt to maintain a high level of team cohesion and possibly enhance performance. The findings of this study indicate that time together, conflict, and change may all be damaging to a team's cohesion. Although the athletes identified the time they spent together as advantageous to team cohesion, they also acknowledged that too much time together could lead to conflict and be detrimental to cohesion.

Conflict was also identified as a threat to cohesion. Sullivan and Feltz (2001) examined constructive and destructive styles of conflict in male hockey players. Their findings suggest that certain types of conflict may enhance cohesion; specifically, constructive conflict may actually increase team members' perceptions of social cohesion (Sullivan & Feltz, 2001). However, the athletes in the current study felt that intra-team conflict originating off the court could transfer onto the court and dismantle cohesion during competition. In addition, if conflict was allowed on the court and not managed it could be devastating to the team's performance. This finding parallels those of previous research on cohesion and groups' resistance to disruption which revealed a positive relationship between team cohesion and resistance to disruptions (Brawley, Carron, & Widmeyer, 1988).

Change is often difficult to endure. When change occurs within a group it does not affect just one life but many. This change can lead to a shift in the dynamics of the group and have a negative influence on team cohesion. The findings of the present study suggest that change can stunt the development of cohesion. In particular, the addition of new team members was identified by the athletes as a change that could be detrimental to a team's cohesion. The athletes all discussed the development of cohesion as a process of getting to know one another and implied that cohesion was fostered through knowledge of others in the group. When a new team member is introduced to the group, the team has to re-educate itself. While the team members are adjusting to newcomers and getting to know one another, cohesion may be stagnant and previous levels of cohesion may

decrease.

### *Consequences of Cohesion*

While it is important to identify the factors that influence a team's cohesion or lack of cohesion, it is also important to identify the outcomes or consequences of team cohesion. The findings of the current study suggest three such consequences: a positive experience of sport, athlete as person, and cohesion-performance reciprocity.

*Positive experience of sport.* A positive sport experience would be expected to yield greater benefits for team members. The findings of the current study suggest that team cohesion may be one way to enhance an athlete's experience of sport. The athletes in this study indicated that the cohesion on their team added to their experience of sport. More specifically, the relationships and friendships they were able to develop with teammates on and off the court made their experience of sport more enjoyable.

*Athletes as person.* Programs like the NCAA-sponsored CHAMPS/Life Skills program promote the importance of helping athletes become well-rounded individuals and the personal development component of their program provides opportunities for individuals to learn life skills that will benefit them during their time as student-athletes and in the future. In an article published by the Women's Sports Foundation, entitled "25 Benefits of Girls Playing Sports", two of the benefits listed included sport as a means to help girls build leadership skills and understand team-work (WSF, 1999). The findings of the current study provide further evidence that athletes can take what they learn through interactions and relationships with their teammates and apply it to their everyday

lives.

*Cohesion-performance reciprocity.* Previous research on cohesion and performance has produced a range of findings. Some early research revealed a negative relationship between cohesion and success (Landers & Lueschen, 1974), while other studies reported that cohesion and performance were unrelated (Melnick & Chemers, 1974). More recently, a meta-analysis conducted by Carron and colleagues (2002) revealed a significant positive relationship between cohesion and performance. The findings of the current study provide further evidence for a positive cohesion-performance relationship for female athletes and suggest, as does previous research (Carron et al., 2002), that the relationship may in fact be reciprocal in nature. All of the athletes in the current study acknowledged a relationship between cohesion and performance. When asked to describe a cohesive team, most of the athletes indicated that a cohesive team was a successful team. In addition, several athletes suggested that a team that is cohesive is more likely to be successful than a team that is not cohesive. Furthermore, in conjunction with the findings of previous research (Kennedy & Stephan, 1977), several athletes felt that negative experiences, such as defeat, could also enhance cohesion. Specifically, the athletes in the current study alluded to a loss they suffered early in their season and the way they were able to find positive value in this loss as a result of their high level of cohesiveness. However, it should be noted that these women were all members of a very successful team and it may have been their success that allowed them to see that particular loss in a positive light. Based on the findings of this

study it is evident that these women believe there to be a connection between cohesion and performance. But the question remains: which comes first, cohesion or performance?

#### *Limitations and Future Recommendations*

The findings of this study represent the experience of ten Division I female volleyball players and cannot be generalized to all female athletes. It should also be noted that the participants were all members of the same team. However, due to time constraints and geographical issues (e.g three athletes transferred to other institutions), several of the team members did not participate. As a result, it is acknowledged that those athletes who did not participate in the study may have had different experiences and perceptions of team cohesion. However, it should be noted that the athletes in this study were asked to discuss their experience of cohesion with their current team; they were also asked to talk about their overall experience of cohesion. In response these women discussed other teams of which they were members and indicated that their previous experiences, along with their experience on their current team, had added to their perceptions of cohesion. In the future, researchers should examine the experiences of all members of a particular team, as well as those of female athletes in other sports.

As previously mentioned, the ten athletes involved in this study were all members of the same NCAA Division I volleyball team. Previous research has suggested a relationship between cohesion and performance (Carron, et al., 2002); therefore, choosing members of the same team controlled for the impact of performance on these athletes' perceptions of cohesion. Specifically, all of the athletes experienced the same successes



and same defeats. However, the participants were all members of a very successful team. In fact, the team experienced only three losses during the entire season, making it the most successful season in the history of the sport at the university. Since research has suggested that performance success influences cohesion in female interactive teams (Matheson, et al., 1997), it may be assumed that the success experienced by these athletes led to heightened perceptions of cohesion. In fact, several indicated that the high cohesion they experienced with their teammates may have been mediated by their successful season. Again, it should be noted that the athletes were asked to discuss their experience of cohesion with respect to their current team as well as past experiences. Although the team's success may have influenced their responses to questions regarding their current team, it should not have influenced their overall experience and perceptions of cohesion. Nevertheless, future research is needed to examine the experience of cohesion among female athletes on less successful teams.

Although previous research has failed to answer the question of gender differences in athletes' perceptions of cohesion, the current study provides some evidence of perceived gender differences. One limitation to this finding is the lack of a male perspective. All of the findings are based solely on women's assumptions of how male athletes experience cohesion. However, several of these women have male siblings and all of the women in the study are surrounded by male athletes. As a result, their conjectures about male athletes and cohesion are based on experiential evidence and should not be summarily dismissed. Future research should use similar methods to

investigate male athletes' experience of cohesion in order to determine the possible similarities and differences to those of females.

It should also be noted that most of the participants in this study represented a fairly homogenous sample of healthy, white, heterosexual women. Thus, the findings of this study may be painting a picture of a very specific type of cohesion. As a result, future research should examine the experience of cohesion in a more homologous sample of women athletes.

### *Practical Implications*

All of the athletes in the study perceived female athletes as being unable to keep their relationships with their teammates off the court from influencing their interactions and performance on the court. Although at times positive relationships off the court can foster cohesion, problematic issues off the court can transfer onto the court and have a negative influence on cohesion. All of the women agreed that it is the close bond among team members that prevents them from separating their relationships off the court as friends from those on the court as teammates. This finding is not surprising when considering the gender differences in group behavior addressed in previous research (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Cross & Madson, 1997). According to Markus and Kitayama, individuals hold one of two "self-construals" or self-definitions: interdependent and independent. While the interdependent self-definition is mostly determined by group memberships and an individual's pursuit of harmony in relationships with others, the independent self-definition is formed by an individual's

need to distinguish him/herself from others and is defined by an individual's own attributes and abilities. Cross and Madson (1997) suggest that these two distinct self-definitions can help explain gender differences seen in social behavior; specifically, women have interdependent self-schemas whereas men have independent self-definitions.

In addition, previous research in sport suggests that female athletes exhibit stronger belongingness needs (Deaux, 1976) and are significantly more team-oriented (White, 1993) than their male counterparts. As a result, it would seem important for coaches and sport psychology practitioners to acknowledge the possibility that female athletes may perceive social cohesion (e.g. cohesion developed off the court) to be essential to the development of task cohesion (e.g. on court cohesion) and, in turn, performance enhancement.

### *Conclusions*

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are offered: (1) There are several characteristics or constituents of team cohesion, including: unity, universality, and gender. Although unity aligns with previous definitions of cohesion (e.g. Carron et al., 1998), these athletes perceived their experience of team cohesion to extend beyond the lines of the court and believed their experience of team cohesion was different than that of male athletes. (2) While a number of the findings from the present study are consistent with previous research, many of the relationships between the proposed correlates and team cohesion (Carron & Hausenblas, 1998) remain equivocal (e.g. respect, friendship, positivity). In addition, it is possible that the influence that many

of the proposed correlates have on cohesion may be mediated by some other factor (e.g., performance). (3) Some correlates enhance team cohesion, while others deplete it. Some of the threats to cohesion suggested by the athletes included: time together, conflict, and change. (4) The experience of team cohesion for these participants had a positive influence on them as athletes and as persons, made their experience of sport more enjoyable, and made them feel that the relationship between cohesion and performance was significant and reciprocal.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Expanded Review of Literature

In this section, an expanded review of the literature regarding female athletes and team cohesion is provided. The major topics include: (1) gender differences in social behaviors, (2) gender differences in cohesion, and (3) a critique of the cohesion literature from a feminist perspective, specifically one that examines the participants selected, the questions asked, and the methods and methodology used.

### *Gender Differences in Social Behavior*

Although a significant amount of research in the field of sport psychology has examined athletes' perceptions of cohesion, it is clear that we do not yet have a firm understanding of female athletes' self-reported perceptions of cohesion. While some research in the field suggests that male and female athletes experience cohesion quite similarly (e.g. Carron and colleagues, 2002), other research proposes a gender difference in athletes' experience of team cohesion (e.g. Wrisberg & Draper, 1988).

If we assume that individuals, specifically females, may relate similarly to teammates as they do to other individuals outside of sport, then the results of the research on social behaviors outside of sport may provide some insight into female athlete's experience of cohesion and the ways in which they relate to their teammates. For example, it has been proposed that women have a tendency to define themselves with respect to their human relationships, whereas men may define themselves as a result of individual attributes (Lyons, 1983). This notion from social psychology would suggest that, when compared to male athletes, female athletes may be more likely to perceive team cohesion as an important part of the sport experience.

The popular book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* suggests that men and women are entities from different planets who struggle to understand one another. This book reinforces the common cultural belief that women and men have different ways of communicating, different emotional needs, and exhibit different modes of behavior. Other books and sources of popular culture continue to put forth gender stereotypes regarding social behavior. Some of these cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes and the empirical research testing these beliefs are discussed in the following sections.

*Ways of Knowing: Separate and Connected*

Existing theories suggest that there are a variety of different ways an individual can learn or acquire knowledge. For example, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) suggest that individuals use procedural knowledge, to obtain and evaluate information and communicate general knowledge. More specifically, Belenky and colleagues (1986) identified two types of procedural knowledge, which they labeled “separate” and “connected” knowing. According to Belenky and colleagues (1986), separate knowing is objective and analytical. An individual who utilizes separate ways of knowing is detached from the object of knowledge. Conversely, connected knowing defines the self in relation to others. Connected knowing emphasizes understanding, acceptance, and collaboration. It should be noted that Belenky and colleagues (1986) identified these two ways of knowing through interviews with women only. As a result, they made it clear that these two ways of knowing may not necessarily be delineated by gender. However, they did suggest that connected and separate ways of knowing may be

related to gender; specifically, that women may have a greater tendency to use connected knowing while men may more often use separate knowing.

Some research examining individuals' ways of knowing does provide evidence for gender differences (Galotti, Clinchy, Ainsworth, Lavin, & Mansfield, 1999; Ryan & David, 2003). For example, Galotti and colleagues (1999) developed the Attitudes Toward Thinking and Learning Scale (ATTLS) to assess differences in people's ways of knowing. The scale requires participants to agree or disagree with a series of connected knowing and separate knowing statements. Their results revealed higher separate knowing scores for men when compared to women and higher connected knowing scores for women when compared to men. Galotti et al. (1999) reported the results of four studies that examined male and female ways of knowing. The results suggest that there are gender differences in connected (CK) and separate (SK) ways of knowing; specifically, women report using connected knowing more often than men whereas men report using more separate knowing. In addition, when participants' were assigned to one of four groups based on CK and SK scores, more women fell into the High CK group and more men in the High SK group. The findings of this study were later replicated by Galotti, Reimer, and Drebus (2001).

#### *Justice v. Care*

Early investigations of moral judgment, including Piaget's stage approach (1965), focused on abstract notions of rights and justice. For example, Kohlberg' (1976) model of morality seated justice at its apex. Specifically, Kohlberg's system of moral reasoning

contained six stages within three levels, with each level representing a way in which the self and society's expectations interact. The first level, the preconventional level, proposes that morality is based on the ego and consequences, specifically rewards and punishments. At the second level, the conventional level, reasoning about moral judgments is based on membership and social conformity, where an individual as a member of society, for the good of society, conforms to its rules and expectations. Finally, in the third level, the postconventional level, moral reasoning is based on an understanding of the universal worth of humankind and an individual's acceptance that the rules within a society are created to protect the individual (Kohlberg, 1976).

As a student of Kohlberg's, Gilligan (1982) felt it necessary to challenge the generalizability of Kohlberg's model of moral reasoning. Gilligan argued that Kohlberg's model and other traditional models of morality were based solely on the experiences of men and, as a result, were gender biased. Using interviews from women and men in which she evoked real-life dilemmas, Gilligan (1982) proposed the ethic of care as a second facet of moral reasoning, separate from the ethic of justice and more typical of women.

Gilligan's (1982) system suggests that moral reasoning is a result of how individuals use and experience care and how they develop responsibility. Similar to the way in which Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning (1976) move from an inter-directed egotistical morality to an outward acceptance and understanding of the universal worth of humankind, Gilligan's phases of care morality (1982) move from a selfish concept to

seeing the ethic of care as universal. Gilligan (1982) believes that a complete model of moral reasoning must include a construct of justice representing an individual's rights and a separate construct of care couched in responsibility. Thus, Gilligan (1982) contends that a model of moral development needs to include a morality of care that focused on relationships with others; specifically, how individuals care for and empathize with others. Gilligan (1982) bases her ethic of care on the way in which women and men describe their experiences of moral conflict and resolution.

Gilligan's (1982) suggestion that there are two ethics of moral reasoning, justice and care, has been the subject of a significant amount of empirical research. Jafee and Hyde (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of 160 quantitative research studies examining gender differences in moral orientation and found small differences favoring men in the justice orientation and women in the care orientation. However, the authors noted that although a gender difference was evident, this did not necessarily suggest a specific orientation is predominantly used by the associated gender.

#### *Independent vs. Interdependent Self*

Analogous to Belenky and colleagues' (1986) two distinct ways of knowing, Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed two forms of self-construal: interdependent and independent. An individual's self-construal is said to influence the way in which the individual develops and maintains relationships with others. Specifically, an individual with an interdependent self-definition would seek harmony and connection in relationships with others. In contrast, an individual with an independent self-construal



may use interaction with others as a means to distinguish him/herself from others. Cross and Madson (1997) suggest that these two distinct self-construals can help explain gender differences seen in social behavior. Specifically, women have interdependent self-schemas whereas men have independent self-definitions. Cross and Madson (1997) focus on gender differences in social behaviors related to the development and maintenance of close relationships. These social behaviors include aggression, nonverbal sensitivity, and self-disclosure.

#### *Competitive vs. Cooperative*

The stereotype of cooperative women and competitive men is embedded in our society (Tannen, 1990). Often described in terms of negotiation, men are described as more competitive bargainers and tougher than women, who are assumed to be more accommodating of others and more cooperative than men. This stereotype is perpetuated by research that suggests that women do not engage in argument as often, are more easily persuaded, and perceive themselves as less deserving of rewards than their male counterparts (Eagly & Carli, 1981; Major, McFarin, & Gagnon, 1984; Rancer & Baukus, 1987). The stereotype of cooperative women and competitive men concurs with research that suggests men and women approach and deal with conflict differently (Stamato, 1992).

Although the stereotype of competitive men and cooperative women has been examined in a considerable number of empirical studies, findings remain equivocal and no definitive conclusions have been reached (Stamato, 1992, Watson, 1994). Some of the

research suggests that men and women demonstrate the stereotype and others suggest that it is merely a myth. For example, several studies have shown women to be more competitive and less cooperative than men in negotiation and conflict management (e.g., Hottes & Kahn, 1974), while other studies have found the opposite to be true (e.g., Scudder, 1988), and still others have found no gender differences (e.g., Watson & Hoffman, 1996).

### *Task vs. Relationship*

The stereotype of the task-oriented man and the relationship-oriented woman is rooted in Bales' (1950) delineation of two types of group behavior: task and social-emotional. According to Bales (1950), task behavior is directly related to achieving the group's task or group's goals. Conversely, social-emotional behavior is related to sustaining relationships between group members. Carli (1982 as cited in Eagly, 1987) conducted a meta-analysis of 17 studies comparing task behavior and 15 studies comparing social-emotional behavior in men and women. The significant results revealed that men demonstrated greater task contribution than women whereas women contributed more social-emotional behavior than men. These gender differences were replicated in a subsequent study by Wood and Karten (1986).

It is important to note that research also suggests that gender differences found in task and social-emotional behavior may impact group performance. Wood, Polek, and Aiken (1985) found that the differences seen in task and social-emotional behavior of men and women may influence the types of group tasks in which each gender is

successful. Specifically, men tend to be more successful with tasks for which productivity is directly related to output, whereas women tend to be more successful with tasks that require group discussions to achieve a positive outcome.

*Communication Styles: Independence vs. Connection*

Stereotypes embedded in popular culture suggest that women use conversation to create connections, while men use communication to establish status. Tannen (1990) furthers this delineation of differential communication styles by suggesting that men may use talk to protect their independence, whereas women may see communication as a tool to foster intimacy and closeness. In an attempt to empirically test Tannen's model of gendered communication (1990), Edwards and Hamilton (2004) conducted a study contrasting Tannen's model to a more complex model of their own. The results revealed that the more complex model, which includes the influence of gender roles, explains more about gender differences in communication than did Tannen's model.

*Goal Orientation: Task vs. Interpersonal*

It is a common cultural belief that women are more nurturing than men. As a result, we may assume that while men set performance related goals, women tend to set goals that focus on the needs of others. However, research suggests that people's goals differ across situations. For example, in academic environments, individuals may set goals that are related to performance and learning (Wentzel, 1991, 1993). Alternatively, in a social context or group setting, individuals may set goals related to relationships. More specifically, in situations where individuals must work together with others to

successfully complete a task, they may set goals that focus on the task at hand or on relationships among group members, or both (Rose and Asher, 1999).

According to previous research, gender similarities and differences in goal-setting are in fact influenced by the situation. For example, when setting goals for everyday problem solving, women report a greater focus on the needs of others than do men (Strough, Berg, & Sansone, 1996). Conversely, when setting goals to solve a problem involving other people, both men and women set goals focused on the needs of others. However, when other people are central to the problem, men and women are equally concerned with other-focused goals.

### Causes of Gender Differences

#### *Evolution or Socialization?*

Although psychologists are willing to acknowledge that differences exist between women and men with regard to social behavior, personality, and abilities, the specific causes of these differences remain at the forefront of debate among researchers (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Theories examining the ultimate or basic cause of sex differences are called origin theories. Two such theories stem from two very different camps, evolutionary psychology and social structural origin. In brief, evolutionary psychologists believe that women and men differ psychologically and hold different social roles because of evolved sex-specific mechanisms. However, social structural origin theorists believe that women and men occupy different social roles and therefore each gender psychologically adapts to fit its respective role (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

Evolutionary psychologists believe that differing reproductive capacity was the integral aspect of ancestral life that influenced sex-typed differences (Eagly & Wood, 1999). In the process of learning to adapt to their environmental conditions, men and women developed sex-specific mechanisms that caused behavioral differences seen between the sexes. Evolutionary psychologists give little regard to the contribution of individual, situational, and cultural conditions to variations seen between the sexes. Instead, sex differences are seen as universal (Buss, 1998).

One example of an evolutionary basis for gender differences is found in the negotiation literature. While empirical findings remain unclear, some researchers have attempted to explain why women should be cooperative negotiators and men should be competitive (Tannen, 1990). The basis for these explanations is the notion that women are inherently nurturers and relationship oriented while men are independent and often task-oriented. Specifically, Tannen (1990) suggests that women believe conflict threatens intimacy and, as a result, they may avoid conflict or accommodate others in an attempt to end the conflict and protect the relationship. Alternatively, men may prefer conflict because they tend to see relationships as hierarchies and they may believe that their status is partially determined by the outcome of conflict with others. Tannen (1990) suggests that the reason men participate in more ritualistic conflict, such as competitive sports, than women is that men have a greater need or preference for conflict.

On the other hand, research using social structural theory suggests that individuals whose behavior deviates from traditional stereotypes are viewed negatively (Watson,

1994). The idea that social reinforcement perpetuates stereotypes suggests that men and women learn to behave the way they do as a result of gender-role socialization. For example, in sport, male athletes who exhibit competitive behavior are often applauded while their female counterparts are criticized. In addition, when differences between men and women do occur, the differences are more often than not consistent with gender stereotypes; specifically, women portray hegemonic femininity and men portray traditional masculinity (Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, & Madon, 2003). As a result, in order to understand gender differences, we must also include a discussion of the common cultural beliefs and stereotypes associated with the social behaviors and personalities of women and men in conjunction with the empirical evidence on existing gender difference.

The results of research examining gender differences in social behavior suggest that such differences are more easily seen in same-sex interactions. These findings provide additional evidence for the influence of gender-role socialization. According to Deaux and Major (1987), individuals place gendered expectations on other individuals regardless of whether these individuals are same-sex or other-sex. Furthermore, previous research suggests that the gender expectations an individual places on others are incorporated into the goals that individuals set (Berg, Strough, Calderone, Sansone, & Weir, 1998). For example, if a woman places a gender-stereotype of “competitive” on a man in a specific situation, then she may interpret that situation as competitive and any goals she sets will be competitive in nature. On the other hand, if a woman is working

with another woman and she imposes a gender-stereotypical belief of “cooperative” on the other woman, she will perceive that situation accordingly and may in turn set a goal to work cooperatively with the other woman. In the same way, men who assume that the men and women they are working with fit gender-stereotypical beliefs may set “competitive” goals when working with other the men and “cooperative” goals when working with the women. As a result, individuals confirm gender stereotypes in the ways they behave when working with women and men (Berg, et al., 1998).

#### *Power and Status*

Eagly and Wood (1999) caution against viewing sex differences solely in terms of the two origin theories and note that the debate surrounding the origins of sex differences cannot be dismissed as a simple nature-versus-nurture dichotomy. Both theories incorporate nature and nurture components and consider the influence of both biological and environmental factors on gender differences. One such environmental factor is power or status.

With respect to the issue of cooperativeness in negotiation, it has been suggested that differences between men and women are not as much a result of gender as of the power differential between the genders (Watson, 1994). More specifically, the power in society more often lies in the hands of the patriarch. As a result, society is situated in a hierarchy of power where women tend to hold less power and status than their male counterparts. Male hegemony sees women as subordinate, agreeable, and submissive. Therefore, one would not expect to see women as assertive and competitive

negotiators.

According to *expectation states theory*, inequalities during in-person interactions occur as a result of a difference in the status or power of the participants engaged in the interaction (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977). This theory proposes that status is mediated by the situation, for example specific contexts or different cultures. For instance, an individual's characteristics may be perceived as low in status in one culture or situation but high in status in another. In American culture status is defined by the same characteristics that are used to assess ability and competence. These status characteristics include gender, physical attractiveness, age, race, class, education, and occupation (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Eagly, 1983). Expectation states theory suggests that people with relatively high status are expected to be more capable, perform better, and to have more attractive qualities than those with low status. Berger and colleagues (1977, 1980) suggest that one reason individuals with high status are more influential is because they are provided more opportunities to enhance performance. In addition, when individuals of different relative status interact, it is seen as inappropriate for the individual of lower status to behave in an assertive manner (Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neill, 1977). As a result, if an individual of low status behaves assertively s/he will be seen as acting outside of expectations and as a result, may be alienated (Berger et al., 1980; Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neill, 1977).

The idea that gender differences may be mediated by status is supported by research that demonstrates that gender differences diminish when gender is a salient



factor. For example, when Wood and Karten (1986) examined men and women interacting in unstructured groups, men were judged to be more competent when they engaged in less positive social behavior and more task-oriented behavior. However, when the researchers established status at the start of the study, gender differences vanished and status differences emerged.

In general, support for status as a mediator of gender differences in social behavior can be found in research examining gender differences in social influence, language use, negotiation, and many other social behaviors (Carli, 1990; Lockheed, 1985). Some researchers have proposed that gender and lower status are confounded in research on moral development (Puka, 1989; Tronto, 1987). Tronto (1987) suggests that lower status implies a lack of power for an individual and leads to an inherent concern with others because, in part, those others are in charge of the individual's outcomes.

### *Gender Differences in Cohesion*

#### *Defining Cohesion in Sport*

At the heart of team dynamics is group cohesion. In the domain of sport and exercise, Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1998) defined group cohesion as “a dynamic process reflected by the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (p. 213). This definition is intended to highlight the properties of cohesion and emphasizes the notion that cohesion is multidimensional, dynamic, instrumental in nature, and affective (Carron, et al., 1998).

Carron, Widmeyer and Brawley (1985) developed a conceptual model for group cohesion to stimulate investigation of its impact on sport participation. In their model, Carron and colleagues (1985) divide cohesion into four discrete dimensions differentiated on two levels. The first level involves the individual versus group bases for cohesion. For example, an individual participant has personal attractions to the group as well as perceptions regarding the collectivity of the group. More simply stated, the individual basis for cohesion is illustrated through 'I' and 'me' statements ('this team gives me enough opportunities to improve my personal performance'), however, the group basis for cohesion can be exemplified with 'we' and 'us' statements ('we all take responsibility for any loss or poor performance by our team'). The second level of group cohesion is the task versus social aspects of cohesion. For example, there are social outcomes (activities related to the development and maintenance of social relations) and task outcomes (activities related to accomplishing a task, productivity and performance) for both the individual and the group. From these two distinct levels, Carron and colleagues (1985) derive four dimensions of group cohesion: individual attractions to the group-task (ATG-T), individual attractions to the group-social (ATG-S), group-integration task (GI-T), and group integration-social (GI-S).

#### *Measuring Athletes' Perceptions of Cohesion*

After developing a conceptual model of cohesion, Carron and colleagues' (1985) constructed a scale with which to measure it, the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ). The GEQ is an 18-item self-report questionnaire that assesses an individual's

perceptions of cohesion in a sport setting. The GEQ includes the four dimensions of cohesion proposed in the model: ATG-T (4 items), ATG-S (5 items), GI-T (5 items), and GI-S (4 items). The GEQ is measured on a 9-point Likert type scale, with possible responses ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 9 (very strongly agree). Individuals with strong perceptions of cohesion would demonstrate higher overall scores on the GEQ than those with weaker perceptions of cohesion. The GEQ and each of its 4 subscales have been tested and shown to be a valid and reliable measure of cohesion in sport teams (Carron et al., 1985; Widmeyer et al., 1985).

#### *Female Athletes' Experience of Cohesion*

Normative data published during the development of the GEQ suggests that the absolute amount of cohesiveness in female and male teams is quite similar (Widmeyer, et al., 1985). However, some research has shown that female athletes have significantly higher perceptions of cohesion, on all four dimensions of the GEQ, than the previously established norms for females (Wrisberg & Draper 1988).

In a study investigating cohesion, sex, and sex role orientation in collegiate basketball teams, Wrisberg and Draper (1988) found that female athletes had significantly higher perceptions of cohesion, demonstrated by higher mean scores on all four dimensions of the Group Environment Questionnaire, than the norms for females established by Widmeyer and colleagues (1985). In addition, when compared to the mean scores reported by Widmeyer and colleagues (1985), males in the study scored lower on three of the four dimension of cohesion, with no difference seen in the attraction to the

group-social. Since there seems to be considerable evidence suggesting that men and women have different ways of understanding the world (Belenky et al., 1986), different ideas about the maintenance of relationships (Cross & Madson, 1997), and different ways of attending to group tasks (Carli, 1982 as cited in Eagly, 1987; Wood & Karten, 1986), it seems logical to expect that female athletes might perceive team cohesion differently than male athletes.

*Brief Feminist Critique of the Cohesion Literature in Sport Psychology*

A decade ago, Gill (1994) insisted that with the increasing number of females participating in sport, feminist perspectives and approaches to research were not just welcome, but essential. Recent literature in sport psychology has challenged feminists in the field to make personal issues political (Roper, 2001). In a paper discussing feminist methods and methodologies, Whaley (2001) suggests that researchers begin to asking themselves whether or not the research they conduct is representative of the lived experience of all individuals involved in sport and whether their findings actually inform real change.

Feminist critiques of traditional quantitative research tend not to be seen or heard by individuals in power (Adrienne Rich, as cited in Whaley, 2001, p. 419). Jayartne and Stewart (1991) suggest that feminist criticisms of traditional quantitative research focus on issues of participant selection and omission, the questions asked by the researcher, and the appropriateness of research designs. Based on Jayartne and Stewart's (1991) suggestions, the following section includes a critique of cohesion literature that centers on

the omission of women as participants, the lack of female participants which likely biases the questions being asked by researchers, and the lack of factorial validity of instruments used to measure team cohesion.

*Dearth of Research on Female Athletes' Perceptions of Cohesion*

To date, female athletes have been underrepresented in research examining cohesion. Research has shown that gender differences exist in athletes' perceptions of team involvement. Specifically, Deaux (1976) found that females, in general, report a greater need to belong than do males. Furthermore, White (1993) found that female skiers, when compared to their male counterparts, reported being significantly more team oriented. In addition, Flood and Hellstedt (1991) investigated individuals' motivation for participating in intercollegiate athletics and found that female athletes appeared to value the social aspects of participation while male athletes were more competitively oriented.

Despite these differences, and suggestions that females may have very different perceptions than males on issues of separation and connection (Belenky, et al., 1986), very little research has examined female athletes' perceptions of team cohesion or possible gender differences in athletes' perceptions of cohesion (Glenday & Widmeyer, 1993). Most research in this area has examined male athletes' perceptions of cohesion, with only a few including the perceptions of females and even then only indirectly (Spink, 1995).

### *Problems with the Conceptualization of Cohesion*

It is likely that the lack of female participants in cohesion research has biased the questions asked of participants. Moreover, reports of gender differences in cohesion have been equivocal (Widmeyer, et al., 1985; Wrisberg and Draper, 1988; Spink, 1995; Gardner, Shields, Bredemeier, & Bostrom, 1996; Matheson, Mathes, & Murray, 1997). In fact, after the development of the GEQ, published normative data suggest that the absolute amount of cohesiveness in female and male teams is quite similar (Widmeyer, et al., 1985). More specifically, gender analyses conducted during the development of the GEQ suggested that men's and women's teams do not generally differ in the degree to which they are cohesive. Similarly, in a meta-analysis of the cohesion literature, Carron, Coleman, Wheeler, and Stevens (2002) found no significant effect sizes for the gender factor.

An exception to this pattern was reported by Wrisberg and Draper (1988) in their study investigating cohesion, sex, and sex role orientation in collegiate basketball teams. Wrisberg and Draper (1988) found that female athletes had significantly higher perceptions of cohesion than did males as demonstrated by higher mean scores on all four dimensions of the Group Environment Questionnaire. In addition, when compared to the gender norms obtained by Widmeyer and colleagues (1985), males in this study scored lower than the male norms on three of the four dimensions, with the only nonsignificant difference being the attraction to the group-social dimension.

Interestingly, Wrisberg and Draper (1988) suggested that the gender patterns they

obtained may be due to the prevailing conceptualization of cohesion. According to Carron (1982), cohesion captures an athlete's understanding of the extent of commitment, attraction, and involvement of individual athletes to the team. Research investigating athletes' motives for sport participation suggest that female athletes place a greater emphasis on the social aspect of sport than do male athletes (Kidd & Woodman, 1975). In addition, it has been proposed that women have a tendency to define themselves with respect to their human relationships, whereas men define themselves in terms of their individual attributes (Gilligan, 1982; Mathes & Batista, 1985). Based on this evidence, it appears that cohesiveness may be a phenomenon more commonly seen or reported by female teams than by male teams (Wrisberg & Draper, 1988).

Early investigations of the factors influencing team cohesion were conducted with male athletes (Carron & Chelladurai, 1981). Moreover, these investigations examined only those factors known to enhance performance. As a result, two of the original eight factors proposed by Widmeyer and Martens (1978) (e.g., friendship and power/influence) were removed from the analyses. According to Martens, Landers, and Loy (1972), the friendship factor describes the interpersonal attraction within a group while the power/influence factor involves the relative power athletes' feel they have to influence other group members. Given the evidence suggesting that female athletes are more attracted to the social aspect of sport and hold less power than male athletes (Kidd & Woodman, 1975; Tannen, 1990), it is likely that the friendship and power/influence factors would be integral components of a female athlete's experience of team cohesion.

In addition, in the context of a female model of sport, Bennett and colleagues (1987) propose:

One can envision changing the means by which successes are defined and measured, so that value would be in cooperative growth and in seeking mutual joy in one another's accomplishments rather than in the annihilation of an opponent. One can envision shared decision-making, shared knowledge, a return of control of sport to the performers, and their empowerment as subjects rather than their oppression as objects.

Based on this model and on other feminist perspectives, friendship and power/influence may be two of the more important factors involved in team cohesion, yet neither was included in the development of the GEQ. The fact that since the mid-1980s the GEQ has been the most widely used measure of cohesion in sport psychology research suggests that we presently know little about women's experiences of cohesion. *Measurement*

#### *Issues in Cohesion*

Although Carron (1982) identified gender as a personal characteristic that might affect team cohesion and presented descriptive statistics and normative data separately for males and females according to type of sport (team vs. individual), potential gender differences in the psychometric properties of the GEQ remain equivocal. Schutz, Eom, Smoll, and Smith (1994) performed a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis to examine the factorial validity of the GEQ and found that the original four-factor structure of the GEQ did not hold and when it was "forced" on the data, "males and females could not be considered to share a common theoretical model of group cohesion" (Schutz, et al., 1994, p. 6). In addition, when Schutz and colleagues (1994) replicated the exploratory factor analysis suggested by Widmeyer and colleagues (1985), they found that a one-factor



model fit the data better than did a four-factor model. Based on their analyses, Schutz and colleagues (1994) proposed that the GEQ lacked factorial validity. As a result, they recommend that other researchers attempt to replicate their analyses of the GEQ, that individuals using the GEQ investigate the factor structure of their own data, and that the gatekeepers in the field become more cognizant of the questionable reliability and validity of measures used in studies submitted for publication.

Recently, Carron and Brawley (2000) responded to Schutz and colleagues critique of the GEQ; they stressed the importance of considering the varied nature of groups and the construct of cohesion in their studies. Furthermore, they believe it is this failure to see cohesion as dynamic and groups as multidimensional that has led to the current status of ambiguous findings of cohesion studies and any critique of the GEQ (e.g. Schutz et al., 1994). Carron and Brawley (2000) suggest that when responding to questions about team cohesion, athletes "...may reflect a group effect as well as individual member variability" (p. 102). In other words, athlete' responses represent the integration of their experiences as an athlete/person and as a team member. As a result, when examining cohesion, the context in which the athletic team is situated must be considered. With this in mind, Streaan (1998) has asserted that qualitative research, rather than quantitative research, may be a better means of understanding the way athletes experience life and sport and the environment in which they experience it.

## Appendix B

### Rationale for Using Qualitative Inquiry

In addition to the lack of consideration given to female athletes in the cohesion literature to date, the available research conducted on team cohesion has been almost entirely quantitative in nature. The majority of quantitative studies examining team cohesion have used the GEQ to assess cohesion. Although the GEQ was developed based on theory, the instrument may lack factorial validity (Schutz, Eom, Smoll, & Smith, 1994). Schutz and colleagues (1994) performed a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis to examine the factorial validity of the GEQ. The original four-factor structure of the GEQ did not hold. Specifically, Schutz and colleagues found that even if the original four-factor model proposed by Carron and colleagues (1985) was “forced” on the data, “males and females could not be considered to share a common theoretical model of group cohesion” (Schutz, et al., 1994, p. 6). In addition, when Schutz and colleagues (1994) utilized the exploratory factor analysis suggested by Widmeyer and colleagues (1985), their analysis revealed more support for a one factor model than a four factor model. Based on the analyses they employed, Schutz and colleagues proposed that the GEQ lacked factorial validity. As a result of the questions surrounding the psychometric stability of the GEQ and the potential gender bias inherent in the original conceptualization of cohesion proposed by Carron and colleagues (1985), the use of qualitative methods to examine female athletes’ experience of cohesion appears warranted.

### *Rationale for using qualitative research*

Creswell (1998) identified eight reasons to use qualitative methods. Several of the reasons are to describe an experience, to fill a gap in the literature or discuss neglected topics, to acquire a more detailed picture of a topic, and to use a new form of research accepted by the target audience. Due to the recent surge in acceptance of qualitative research in the field of sport psychology and the familiarity of my dissertation committee with qualitative research, I decided to use a qualitative approach to examine female athletes' experience of cohesion. In addition, due to the equivocal nature of the existing research on team cohesion, specifically the lack of research involving female athletes and the methodological concerns regarding the GEQ, I chose a qualitative form of inquiry to gain a greater understanding of women's ways of understanding cohesion. Finally, in an attempt to add to the literature and fill any gaps regarding gender differences in cohesion, I felt using qualitative methods would give female athletes a voice in describing their own experiences of team cohesion.

According to Creswell (1998), a qualitative study is defined as “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p. 1-2). Alternatively a quantitative study is “an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true” (Creswell, 1998, p.2). Qualitative

research places a greater emphasis on understanding an individual's experience by examining an individual's words, actions and records. However, the traditional, or quantitative, approach to research quantifies the individual's experience into a set of numbers.

Rainer Martens (1987), one of the pioneers of the field of sport psychology made a plea for the acceptance of new and diverse methods of research in sport psychology. As a new era in sport psychology began, sport psychologists started to criticize the positivistic way in which knowledge in the field was produced (Dewar & Horn, 1992). While positivism and quantitative research was believed to be the best way to answer some questions in sport psychology, some researchers asserted that it may not be the best way to study all experiences. Dewar and Horn (1992) issued a challenge to researchers "to abandon the belief that there is only one legitimate way of knowing in sport psychology" (p. 17) and to find different ways to examine the experiences of athletes. They suggested a need for research in sport psychology to consider "the importance of studying the whole, subjective experience of individuals by examining the way people perceive, create, and interpret this world" (Dewar & Horn, 1992, p. 17).

As a result of the challenges proposed by Martens (1987) and Dewar and Horn (1992), researchers in the field of sport psychology began to change the face of research design in the field. Over the past decade, the field of sport psychology has seen increasing discussion of qualitative methods, a greater acceptance of qualitative methods, and an increase in the number of qualitative studies investigating the athlete's experience of

sport (Dale, 1996; Krane, Andersen, & Strean, 1997; Krane, 2001).

### *Paradigm*

The design of a qualitative research study begins with the selection of a topic and a paradigm. A paradigm is made up of a researcher's philosophy, ontology, and epistemology. More simply stated, a paradigm is a worldview -- a framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research takes place (Hatch, 2002).

I am a woman and I am a feminist. In my world, the two go hand in hand. I believe that women who have the freedom to believe should believe in woman's rights and equality. I believe that sports are gendered activities. I believe that many sports distort ideas of masculinity. And, I believe that we can use sports to challenge and change gender relations. However, when it comes to research I cannot situate myself in the radical feminism (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1994). You see, I only recently became comfortable with my feminist beliefs. As a result of my recent journey to feminism, I am not as comfortable as some with confronting others about their beliefs. As a critical researcher, I would be expected to confront my participants about their beliefs and if their beliefs are not in line with feminist beliefs, I would be expected to inform them about societal and gender issues from a feminist perspective. I am not comfortable with telling my participants that their view of the world is not the right view of the world; as a result, I do not feel comfortable conducting my research from a critical perspective.

In addition to my feminist beliefs, I also believe that there exists a socially constructed power dynamic between women and men. I believe it is important to

understand the experiences of women alone. I also believe that knowledge is constructed and truth and reality are defined within individual perspectives. Based on my beliefs about the world, I am a feminist; but, I chose to conduct my research within a constructivist paradigm.

### *Tradition*

A researcher's paradigm influences the traditions with which the researcher chooses to answer research questions. A researcher's beliefs about the world determine the paradigm the researcher uses to conduct research and influence the types of questions the researcher asks and the tradition the researcher uses to answer the questions asked. Creswell (1998) divides qualitative research into five main types or traditions: 1) biography, 2) phenomenology, 3) grounded theory, 4) ethnography, and 5) case study. However, other accepted traditions of qualitative research, such as semi-structured interview designs, can be useful methods as well, depending on the research question. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), interviews are a tradition within themselves. In fact, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) propose that "interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings"(p. 645).

Kvale (1996) describes the interview as a conversation. However, according to Kvale (1996), the interview is different from the daily conversations we have with our family and friends. The main way in which interviews and everyday casual conversations differ is the inherent power dynamic in interviews that does not necessarily exist in everyday conversations. Though Kvale (1996) compares an interview to a conversation,

traditionally, the two are seen as very different. Where a conversation is seen as reciprocal, an interview usually involves one person asking the questions and, in turn, controlling the conversation. More often, qualitative researchers are beginning to see interviews as give-and-take interactions between the participant and themselves, conversations if you will, that lead to a shared production of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Specific to sport psychology, Streaan (1998) suggests that while quantitative forms of research may help researchers identify the types of coping a group of athletes' uses, an interview can clarify and elaborate on how individual athletes employ those coping techniques in life and their sport experience. Streaan (1998) suggests that good qualitative inquiry attempts to achieve "thick descriptions" in an effort to identify "characterizations" of an experience or phenomenon. More specifically, Streaan (1998) identifies interviews as a way of attaining information to further our understanding of these experiences. The processes by which athletes experience life and sport and the context in which they experience it is often overlooked by researchers in the field. According to Streaan (1998), qualitative methods, and specifically interviews, give researchers the opportunity to describe these entities that are integral to understanding the athlete, yet so often overlooked. Since female athletes have here to fore been forgotten in the study of cohesion, I chose an interview study in order to gain the greatest understanding of women's experience of cohesion and to give voice to female athletes'.



# Appendix C

## Informed Consent

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this project is to better understand female athletes' experience of team cohesion. The study will include a 45-60 minute interview during which you will be asked to describe your experience of team cohesion and how that experience may or may not affect team performance and your personal experience of sport. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym and any published accounts of your experience will reference only the pseudonym you choose.

Participating in this project is voluntary. Even if you agree to take part in the study you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. This consent form, along with the audio-taped interviews and transcriptions of those interviews, will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office (HPER 350) for a three year period and then destroyed in accordance with research protocol.

This project has been approved by the Human Subject's Review Board at the University of Tennessee. If you have any questions for the review board regarding research regulations at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, please call (865) 974-3466. If you would like to know more about this project please contact Vanessa Shannon at (865) 310-9724.

Sincerely,

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I acknowledge that the research procedures for this study have been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been informed that there are no foreseeable risks as a result of participation in this study and all of the procedures involved in participation. I have been assured that records relating to me will be kept confidential and no information will be released or printed. I also know that at no time during the study or after the end of the project will my personal identity be disclosed without my permission. I understand that I am free to remove myself from the study at any time. In addition, I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

---

(Name of Participant)

---

(Signature of Participant)

---

(Date)

# Appendix D

## Interview Guide

## Proposed Interview Guide

(NOTE: Remember to establish with the athlete the fact that I want to hear anything she has to say about team cohesion, positive or negative.)

### 1) Demographics

- a. How old are you?
- b. What is your race? What is your ethnicity?
- c. What year in school are currently completing?
- d. How many years have you competed in [sport] here at UT?
- e. Have you experienced a break in playing here based on injury, etc.? What happened?

### 1) Would you start by describing for me your background in sports?

- a. When did you begin playing sports?
- b. How did you get involved in sports?
- c. How long have you been participating in team sports?

### 1) What sport do you play here at the university?

- a. What type of playing time do you get on your current team?
- b. What do you perceive to be your role on your team?

### 1) Tell me about your relationship with your current teammates...

### 2) What do you think of when you hear the phrase “team cohesion”?

### 3) Can you describe for me how a cohesive team might look?

- a. On the field?

b. Off the field?

- 1) How is a cohesive team different from a team that is not cohesive?
- 2) Tell me about the cohesion on your team...
- 3) Can you describe for me a time when your team was very cohesive? Can you tell me about a time when your team was not cohesive?
- 4) What do you believe influences your team's cohesion or lack of cohesion?
  - a. I'm going to ask you about several factors and I want you to tell me how much you think each influences cohesion.
    - i. In what way, if any, do the environmental factors on your team influence team cohesion (ex. Scholarship/walk-on, close proximity)?
    - ii. Individual characteristics of the members of your team?
    - iii. Coach?
    - iv. Leadership?
    - v. Team norms?
- 1) Earlier you said you believe [insert a brief summary of her answer here] influences your team's cohesion. I just asked you to discuss some of the factors proposed in the research and how they may or may not influence your team's cohesion. Do you notice any difference between what you said and what the research says? Is there anything else you want to add?
- 2) In what way, if any, does your team's cohesion influence you as an athlete?

- a. Your experience of sport?
  - b. You as a person?
  - c. Your performance?
  - d. Your team's performance?
- 1) Has the way you experience cohesion and your relationships with teammates changed since you began participating in team sports? If so, please describe the changes for me.
  - 2) Do you believe male athletes and female athlete experience cohesion similarly or differently?
  - 3) Is there anything else about cohesion you think is important to talk about that I haven't asked you?
  - 4) Thank you!

## Appendix E

### Instructions for Examining Transcripts

Dear Research Team,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the analysis of my dissertation. Below you will find a brief rationale for my study and the research questions I am trying to answer. Please read both and then read the transcripts I have provided you. As you read through the transcripts, please identify emergent themes or ideas that are expressed by the co-participants. If possible, use the participants' words or ideas for the title of your themes. Please write down the theme in the right column next to the quote. Each page is numbered and lines are numbered for more clarity if we need to discuss any interpretations.

#### Significance and Research Questions

Based on previous research, it is clear that we do not yet have a firm understanding of female athletes' perceptions of cohesion. Evidence suggests that women define themselves in terms of relationships whereas men define themselves in terms of personal attributes (Gilligan, 1982; Mathes & Batista, 1985). Other studies suggest that female athletes are more socially oriented when it comes to their team than are male athletes (Kidd & Woodman, 1975). However, female athletes' perceptions of cohesion have likely been minimized in previous sport research, from the development of questions (Carron & Chelladurai, 1981) through the analysis of data (Schutz, Eom, Smoll, & Smith, 1994). Therefore, I propose that a qualitative study investigating female athletes' perceptions of team cohesion needs to be conducted. The intent of this study will be to give voice to female athletes who have historically been neglected in the research on cohesion, thus allowing will allow us to gain a greater understanding of the way in which female athletes experience team cohesion. To achieve this purpose the following research questions will be addressed. First, how do female athletes define and experience cohesion? Second, how do female athletes feel their interactions with one another influence their performance, as individuals and as a team? And finally, how do the ways in which female athletes interact with one another influence their experience of sport?

Thank you again for your time and effort.

Vanessa



# Appendix F

## Data Analysis Examples

Sample of a Draft Summary  
Dissertation Interview # 1 Erin 01.20.05

Initial Findings:

- “love” for teammates
- teammates = “best friends”
- socialize “outside of volleyball”
- cohesion exists on and off court
- cohesion = how well individuals “get along”
- cohesion = “team chemistry”
- cohesion ⇒ being “supportive” of one another
- “time together” fosters cohesion
- cohesive team = successful team
- cohesion ⇒ “helping each other through the tough times” [teammates = social support]
- “same goal” [cohesive team has a common goal]
- cohesive team “celebrates” together
- not cohesive ⇒ “not as loud” [cohesive = communication]
- not cohesive ⇒ “playing as individual” [cohesive team plays as a team]
- “like to hang out with each other” [cohesive team ⇒ enjoy each other]
- relationships off the court transfer onto the court
- coach is “common enemy”, provides “same focus” [coach has indirect affect on cohesion; common enemy, goal, focus enhances cohesion]
- “play for every single point” [when cohesive on court ⇒ playing in the present, one point at a time]
- common motivation ⇒ cohesion
- “anything to beat ‘em” [sacrifice ⇔ cohesion]
- not focused don’t work well [not focused ⇒ not cohesive on court]
- relationships influence cohesion
- relationships off court influence behavior on court
- problems over guys [conflict off court ⇒ conflict on court]
- putting others before yourself [sacrifice ⇔ cohesion]
- “want to be good” [common motivation, drive ⇒ cohesion]
- [time fosters cohesion, too much time can diminish cohesion]
- build relationships [time and close proximity build relationships ⇒ enhance cohesion]
- appreciate differences [individual characteristics ⇒ off court cohesion]
- [transition and change can hinder cohesion]
- [knowing off the court makes playing together on court easier]
- [team norms or examples ⇒ cohesion]
- [issues off court will influence cohesion on the court]
- [common ideals, goal ⇒ cohesion]
- cohesion ⇒ “more enjoyable”, “more fun”
- [cohesion = + influence on person]
- teammates = friends [teammates on court = friends “in real world”]
- [cohesion influences individual performance]
- [if teammate is a friend then more motivated to work hard and sacrifice]
- [“fun off court” ⇒ “relaxed” and “focused” on court]
- [can’t separate teammate and friend]
- girls “hold grudges”, guys “duke it out” [gender differences, conflict resolution]
- “guys higher tolerance for arguing”, “girls are possessive” [gender differences, guys better at separating]

## Sample of Draft Summary Continued

### Possible Themes and Sub-themes:

#### **THEME:** Facets of Cohesion

##### **Subtheme:** Unity

- cohesion = “team chemistry”
- cohesion = how well individuals “get along”

##### **Subtheme:** Universality

- socialize “outside of volleyball”
- cohesion exists on and off court
- relationships off the court transfer onto the court

#### **THEME:** Gender

- girls “hold grudges”, guys “duke it out” [gender differences, conflict resolution]
- “guys higher tolerance for arguing”, “girls are possessive” [gender differences, guys better at separating]

#### **THEME:** Facilitators of Cohesion

##### **Subtheme:** Teammates as friends

- teammates = “best friends”
- “love” for teammates
- “like to hang out with each other” [cohesive team ⇒ enjoy each other]
- teammates = friends [teammates on court = friends “in real world”]
- cohesion ⇒ “helping each other through the tough times” [teammates = social support]
- “like I love all my teammates. Like my best friends are on the team and outside of volleyball we go to the movies or go to the mall and this is like, it’s not just like two or three people it’s pretty much like the whole team if like someone who I normally don’t hang out with is like going to the mall they’ll call me and like I’ll take people to like the store to get food”

##### **Subtheme:** Collectivity

- “same goal” [cohesive team has a common goal]
- coach is “common enemy”, provides “same focus” [coach has indirect effect on cohesion; common enemy, goal, focus enhances cohesion]
- common motivation ⇒ cohesion
- “want to be good” [common motivation, drive ⇒ cohesion]
- [common ideals, goal ⇒ cohesion]
- [team norms or examples ⇒ cohesion]

##### **Subtheme:** Positivity

- [cohesion = + influence on experience of sport]
- cohesion ⇒ “more enjoyable”, “more fun”
- [cohesion = + influence on person]

**Subtheme:** Making it personal

- relationships off court influence behavior on court
- [knowing off the court makes playing together on court easier]
- [issues off court will influence cohesion on the court]
- [if teammate is a friend then more motivated to work hard and sacrifice]
- [can't separate teammate and friend]
- ["fun off court"  $\Rightarrow$  "relaxed" and "focused" on court]
- putting others before yourself [sacrifice  $\Leftrightarrow$  cohesion]
- "anything to beat 'em" [sacrifice  $\Leftrightarrow$  cohesion]

**Subtheme:** Togetherness

- "time together" fosters cohesion
- build relationships [time and close proximity build relationships  $\Rightarrow$  enhance cohesion]

**Subtheme:** Individual characteristics

- [individual characteristics don't influence on court cohesion]
- appreciate differences [individual characteristics  $\Rightarrow$  off court cohesion]

**THEME:** Cohesion-Success

**Subtheme:** Reciprocity

- cohesive team = successful team
- [cohesion influences individual performance]
- [cohesion influences team performance]
- not cohesive  $\Rightarrow$  "playing as individual" [cohesive team plays as a team]
- "play for every single point" [when cohesive on court  $\Rightarrow$  playing in the present, one point at a time]
- cohesive team "celebrates" together
- not cohesive  $\Rightarrow$  "not as loud" [cohesive = communication]
- not focused don't work well [not focused  $\Rightarrow$  not cohesive on court]
- problems over guys [conflict off court  $\Rightarrow$  conflict on court]

# Appendix G

## Expanded Results

The findings derived from the typological and interpretive analyses are presented in this section. Prior to being asked about the correlates, most of the women in the study identified sacrifice and time together or proximity as having an influence on cohesion. When asked about the correlates, all of the women felt that contractual responsibilities and the coach-athlete relationship had little or no impact on athletes' perceptions of cohesion. However, all of the women felt that adherence to group norms had a positive impact on team cohesion. In addition, nine out of the ten women in the study believed that perceptions of team cohesion were not influenced by similarity of personal attributes.

The findings that were derived from the interpretive data analysis of the participants' responses are classified into 4 themes: (a) constituents of cohesion, (b) facilitators of cohesion, (c) threats to cohesion, (d) consequences of cohesion, and (e) cohesion-performance reciprocity. These themes are further divided into subthemes. A discussion of all the major themes and corresponding subthemes are presented, including a rationale for each theme and quotes from the athletes to support the findings.

#### *Constituents of Cohesion*

Group cohesion in sport and exercise has been defined as “a dynamic process reflected by the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs” (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998). In this study, the athletes were asked to describe what they think of when they hear the phrase “team cohesion”. This theme represents what the athletes suggested as the characteristics or constituents of team cohesion; subthemes

include: unity, universality, and gender.

*Unity.* One characteristic of team cohesion is a sense of oneness or synthesis, a feeling of unity. Unity is used to describe the way in which the athletes come together and form an undivided element. While describing the phrase “team cohesion”, all the participants implied some form of unity. One of the athletes described unity this way,

To me it’s like teams that mesh well together and get along and you know they’ll stay together as a team and they won’t break off individually and that cohesion holds them together and will help them through anything. (Rachel)

Another athlete used the analogy of mesh and described the constituent of unity in this way,

I think of how well the individuals on the team, the characteristics...like personal drive and like their own motivation, like how that all meshes together with each other. (Sandra)

Several athletes used the phrase “team chemistry” when asked what they thought of when they heard the phrase “team cohesion”. Another athlete alluded to this idea of unity when she said,

I think of it [team cohesion] like everyone coming together, like personally and professionally. (Jennifer)

*Universal.* The word universal implies that something exists everywhere. While describing their experience of cohesion, each of the participants described cohesion as a construct that extends beyond the playing surface and into their lives outside of volleyball. All of the women indicated that cohesion involves how well the members of a

team get along both on and off the court. In this way, cohesion seems to be a universal construct that involves a relationship as a teammate on the court and as a friend beyond the court. When describing this universality of team cohesion one athlete stated,

I guess, you know, like when we're hangin' out you can tell that we all like each other because you know we don't have to talk about volleyball to talk to someone. You know how some teammates can only talk about "oh, the game today", but like with us usually when we get home we always go over to someone's house and hang out...so, I mean, I don't know it's just that off the court we're still friends but we don't have to have the volleyball aspect of it. (Rachel)

Another athlete described the on court and off court components of cohesion in this way,

Everybody truly cared about each other and I think everybody kind of knew the strengths and the weaknesses and the personalities of the people they were playing next to which helps everything to be a little bit more rhythmic on the court, if you know what somebody's doing next to you or what they can or cannot do.

Everybody kind of moves the way that they should be moving on the court and it just kind of helps us a lot on that level, the emotional and personal level, and you know how somebody plays like on the physical volleyball level. (Melissa)

In general, all of the women indicated that cohesion exists among team members both on and off the court and that the cohesion within each of these two contexts influences cohesion in the other.

*Gender.* Based on social stereotypes we would expect to see a difference in the way men and women experience and understand cohesion. All of the women in the study



suggested that gender differences do exist in perceptions of team cohesion. In fact, all of the women perceived a difference in the way women and men experience cohesion before the question addressing gender differences in the interview guide was asked. Within the context of responses to other questions, each woman alluded to a noticeable difference in the way men and women participate in same-sex interactions and relationships. Each participant made some reference to stereotypical female behavior and in turn implied that men and women are different in their experiences of cohesion within the context of sport. One athlete stated,

I've decided that in my whole life, no matter what I've been doing -- class, school, sports, home, family -- women talk about each other; that's just what they do, its fun for them. Like I do it too, I am not even going to lie, but I'm not as nasty about it, some girls are really nasty about it, but I think on my team, I think a lot of girls talk about each other because it's a way that they can bond with other people.

(Melissa)

Another athlete suggested that female athletes deal with conflict differently than male athletes do and this, in turn, influences women's and men's perceptions of cohesion. She said,

Female athletes (laughs), they don't really know how to handle peer-to-peer criticism and male athletes, they don't care about peer-to-peer criticism ...male athletes know how to handle that criticism but there's a lot of individual stuff going around you can even see it in the NBA, people, you know, wanna do this and wanna do it my way, don't want to listen to coaches, you know, that's how it

is in college too. And, female athletes, half of them know how to handle criticism and half of them don't, but they all know that they need each other to win. (April)

Another athlete indicated that she thought that male and female athletes build cohesion differently. She discussed the use of initiation rituals as a form of bonding and how the rituals used by male and female athletes differ. Specifically, she said,

I think that the male and female bonding I think is different and I think that, like I don't have any brothers, but based on like my guy friends in terms of what they do, of like team bonding and stuff, like that it's different because I know like the [men's team on campus] their team bonding or team initiation and the things that they do and, like girls, like our team would never do that, we didn't even have an initiation because that sophomores would have been initiating the freshman and it's not like we had enough seniors to really be doing, so our team never really had to experience that but I mean stuff that the other girls have talked about is nothing like that, like I know [other women's team at university] had to do stupid silly stuff, so I think that part is a lot different because I think they do a lot more horrific things than most girls would ever think to do. So, that male bonding experience is different than just talking and stuff like that. We go up to [team retreat] and have our girls talk and we all spill secrets but that's like our bonding. (Nicole)

Another athlete also indicated that the way male and female athletes build cohesion is different, she said,

I think female athletes like to sit down and talk and get to know each other better and that's how they form cohesion. I think male athletes would think that's really silly and would form cohesion by playing and like if you get a sweet dunk or something I don't know, then they're cool and that's how they form cohesion like through actions. (Jennifer)

Several of the athletes also indicated that the relationship between cohesion and performance may not be as strong with male athletes as it is with female athletes.

Specifically, one athlete suggested,

I think guys can be cohesive on a court and not really be close off the court, like they could pretty much hate each other off the court and be cohesive on the court. Whereas girls I think have to have some sort of friendship off the court otherwise it's hard for them to really flow on the court. (Summer)

### *Facilitators of Cohesion*

In addition to defining or describing team cohesion, each of the participants were asked to identify what they thought influenced a team's cohesion. All of the participants described experiences they had that enhanced the cohesion of a team on which they were a member. This theme illustrates specifically the aspects of sport that the women perceived to positively influence cohesion and includes the subthemes: time together, friendship, respect, sacrifice, positivity and congruency.

*Time together.* As a collegiate athlete you spend a great deal of time with your teammates (e.g., in the locker room, in the training room, at practice, in the hotel on away trips, etc). All of the participants found this time together to facilitate relationships and in

turn enhance cohesion among teammates. One athlete agreed and indicated that she thought the time the athletes on her team spend together had everything to do with why they are cohesive. She stated,

I think we have a really strong relationship with our team just because of how long our season is and how long we're together all throughout the summer regardless if people come back the first session of summer or the second session, you know, we get a lot of team community and stuff like that. (April)

Another athlete suggested that it's hard not to form relationships with individuals you spend so much time with, she said,

I mean, you know, in the Fall you see them everyday for at least like four or five hours a day, like you're with them all the time so I think here you need to bond with those people. (Rachel)

*Friendship.* The time together and close proximity required of collegiate athletic team members makes it all but impossible not to develop friendships with fellow teammates. The bond that is cohesion is furthered by feelings of attachment and connection with teammates. All of the athletes suggested that their teammates were also their friends.

My best friends are on the team and outside of volleyball we go to the movies or go to the mall and it's not just like two or three people it's pretty much like the whole team. (Erin)

Several of the athletes, alluded to a kinship deeper than simply friendship and closer to a kinship, similar to a familial connection. One athlete stated, "you just know each other so

much better when you're around each other all the time, it's like having 12 or 13 sisters" (Summer). She went on to talk about the caring relationships built between teammates that are often a result of facing challenges together. Specifically she said,

I think of...well obviously you know you guys all get along and it's very positive, you have good chemistry on the court but it also makes me think of like the feeling that you have after you finish a hard workout together. And everyone's just like yeah we got through like there's usually a lot of love like after you finish...after you finish like a really hard workout together. (Summer)

Another athlete also likened her relationship with her teammates to that of family. She stated,

I'm 800 miles away from my house and so basically my teammates are kind of my family because you know we're all in the same boat, we didn't get to go home on Thanksgiving and so we all went to a restaurant together and we all cried, but you know we were all there together so it's like, I think that you form a better bond because you have to because they're like the only people who are there to support you, I mean you have your phone but like it's not the same when you need a hug. (Rachel)

Although all of the athletes identified their teammates as friends, one athlete was inclined to qualify her proclamation of friendship with all of her teammates,

My roommate is my friend because, you know, she's my roommate first of all, we know each other, we share stuff, you know, we do that. But as far as like just a teammate, I mean they're my friends also, but more of like a best friend and a

friend type. (April)

*Respect.* While the women in the study all identified friendship among team members as an important facilitator of team cohesion, most of the women admitted that, to be successful, at the bare minimum team members must have respect for one another.

I think part of team cohesion is just being able to be social with everybody, I think that that plays a role in it but if you can have a common respect when you're on the court and when you're in the weight room then I think that that's really important too. (Sandra)

Another athlete saw respect as the first step in building relationships between teammates, she said,

I think the number one thing is respect, you have to respect somebody or you're just not gonna see eye to eye with them, you have to give that person respect so that they'll give you respect. (Monica)

*Sacrifice.* Collegiate athletes make sacrifices everyday to be part of an institutionalized athletic team. The sacrifice extends beyond time to personal interests. Once the athlete becomes part of the team and bonds with other team members she is more willing to put aside her personal interests and focus on what is best for the team. Most of the women in the study felt that they were more willing to sacrifice for women that they were closely connected to than for those they were not, and that their personal sacrifice would foster cohesion and, in turn, success. One athlete felt that sacrifice is something that is present on cohesive teams and not seen on teams that are not cohesive. She stated,

A cohesive team would have goals set out and everyone would be on the same page with how to get there. They would, certain people would make sacrifices, um, you know put aside what they personally wanted to make the team better. A non-cohesive team would be off doing whatever they wanted just because they wanted to and probably wouldn't care what the other people thought no matter what, no matter who it hurt or how. (Jennifer)

Several athletes acknowledged that seeing teammates put the interests of the team before their own personal interests would facilitate cohesion. One athlete in particular said,

If you're a good person and you want to see the other person do even better than you, which I think a lot of our teammates have that, you know, "I want to see you succeed, I want to see our team succeed" and putting others before yourself, putting your teammates before yourself, so, I think that really helps with cohesion as well. (Erin)

Another athlete suggested that she would never consider not sacrificing for the betterment of the team. She stated,

I know that there's a lot of stuff that I'm always working on as an individual but still in the long run I look at it for the team. Because I know I'm always looking to improve my hitting stats but I am not ever gonna do it to where I jeopardize anything for the team or a win for the team. (Summer)

*Congruency.* Common goals, similar attitudes and beliefs, shared ideals and covenants to live by unite athletes. This type of consensus and harmonious commitment from team members creates a congruency that is essential to team cohesion. According to

one athlete, this congruency can be found in “The love for volleyball, the ambition to win, the competitiveness,...and the best part is playing to fight for something together” (Sharon). There is a special closeness that accompanies working toward a common goal, or sharing a common ambition, or as one athlete put it, fighting a “common enemy”,

That was kind of our common enemy at the beginning and then, we knew we were good last year and then we didn’t make it to the NCAAs, so that was more of something to push us, so you know, we need to get into the NCAAs we need to do something good. (Erin)

Another athlete described the action of a team coming together and uniting to accomplish a common goal, she said,

That everything would uh, just like blend in one whole, I mean that’s what team cohesion is like a whole team working for one goal and to win and so when you see this it don’t feel like the six individuals in the game and you see like one whole team fighting for one goal, to win the game. (Sharon)

Yet another athlete discussed the way in which a common goal can bring individuals together, when without that goal, they may not have achieved congruency,

We had this bond that we all wanted to get to the certain thing and we were going to do whatever we could to get there, like, we all wanted to get to the state championships so we had a common goal and we had all these different people, different personalities, but a common goal, so that really helped the cohesion because there were different...it felt like 5 million different people but we all had a common goal (Melissa)



*Positivity.* One specific attitude that can be a powerful tool used to foster alliances among teammates is positivity. Developing and maintaining a positive attitude and a positive perception regarding sport and life and sharing that positivity with teammates can allow athletes to build connections that may not be possible if they are surrounded by negativity. The athletes involved in this study felt that a positive attitude would facilitate cohesion among teammates while a negative attitude would hinder cohesion among teammates. One athlete suggested that once a team adopts a positive attitude, then team cohesion just comes naturally. She said,

But the lack of cohesion, if you have a lot of non-coachable people everybody who just wants to do it their way, people who don't wanna work hard and who talk back, just a negative attitude, negative attitudes aren't good for any person, in any sport, in anything. So, you know once you have positive attitudes and everybody is willing to work 100% then you won't have to worry about how well your team's gonna get along. (April)

Several of the other athletes indicated that staying positive can help a team through adversity. She described a cohesive team like this,

You know if someone makes a mistake, it's like "ok, let's get the next one" you know and not kind of like "you should've gotten that" and they get excited when they do things really, really well and they help each other through the tough times and just, as far as behaviors like high-fives and smiles and stuff like that, when people do things good and you know encouraging faces when people aren't doing as well. (April)

### *Threats to Cohesion*

Just as teams can bond together, so they can be torn apart. The athletes in this study were asked to discuss their experiences of cohesion, both positive and negative. The questions were phrased to elicit responses about those things that might influence a team's cohesion or lack of cohesion. As a result, a third theme that emerged from the interviews was threats to cohesion. This theme dealt with the athletes' perceptions of aspects of sport that may be detrimental to a team's cohesion. Subthemes included: time together, conflict, and change.

*Time together.* Although all of the athletes suggested that time together facilitates cohesion, they also acknowledged that sometimes too much of a good thing is not necessarily a good thing. Many of the participants indicated that the significant amount of time they spent with their teammates could be detrimental to team cohesion. One athlete stated,

I live with two of my teammates and we are great friends but sometimes we don't even hang out together you know...so I think we definitely need to go do our own thing and that helps us.(Monica)

Another athlete immediately acknowledged the double edged sword that time together does for team cohesion. She said,

I think that it can work in a positive and a negative way, because I know there are times that because we are around each other so much it's like we need a break. Which I mean in that case on our off days we won't hang out with each other

we'll just, you know, take the day off. (Summer)

*Conflict.* Team conflict is viewed as the antithesis of cohesion. Although some types of conflict may be positively related to some facets of cohesion, for the most part, conflict is seen as detrimental to a team's cohesion. With that said, it is no shock that most of the women on the team mentioned conflict as a characteristics of a team that is not cohesive and saw conflict as harmful to a team's cohesion. Specifically, when asked to describe a team without cohesion, one athlete stated,

On non-cohesive teams I think there are a lot conflicts between the players and everybody is fighting and the things which happen off the court affect the game on the court and if a team is fighting on the court with each other, well then they won't be able to play well together on the court and that's when you are going to lose. (Sharon)

Another athlete referred to a situation where two women on the team had similar personalities and as a result were trying to fulfill the same informal role which led to conflict and in turn hurt the team's cohesion. This athlete also alluded to the notion that most of the conflict on the team began off the court and was brought onto the court. She said,

I remember one time I think it was my sophomore year...where [teammate] had to be the center of attention and it's just her personality and she has great stories, but when [another teammate] came as a freshman and she had the exact same personality and so they were battling and we had to remind them that it was okay for both of them to be like that 'cause there were so many people you know. So

that was not very good because they were screaming at each other. I didn't know a lot of the problems because like I said I wasn't really involved that much with going out and that's where a lot of the problems happened. (Jennifer)

*Change.* Change implies movement or transition. It is often difficult for groups to undergo change. According to the athletes in this study change was perceived to damage team cohesion and hinder the development of cohesion. Most of the athletes identified a time in their career when they experienced a great amount of cohesion, but when they encountered change, that cohesion was diminished. More specifically, these women acknowledged the entry of new team members as type of change that may, at least at first, be damaging to the team's overall cohesion. One athlete stated,

It was a lot different last year, like, as far as on the court, we had a lot of freshman, we had about six freshman, most of us played and we had a transfer who started and it just like everybody was new to each other and we didn't really know how to respond to our team captains and it was just I don't know, it was just, you know how teams are in their rebuilding years and that's where we were at and it was just hard to get the hang of things as far as being a freshman and new people, getting used to new people and people that's been here. And, off the court it was just like freshmen over here and people who knew each other from the year before, they were over there. And this year everybody is back and everybody knew each other and it was just much easier for us to bond easier and faster. (April)

Another athlete suggested that change and transition bring the unknown and that much of team cohesion is based on knowing your teammates. She illustrated this when she said,

She was a great leader but we weren't as cohesive just because there were eight new freshman coming in and there were I think six other girls, so I mean the freshman totally out numbered the upper classmen and although everything was organized it was just like "I don't know you" and so it was kind of hard on the court. (Erin)

### *Consequences of Cohesion*

The athletes in this study were asked to speak about their experience of cohesion and how the way they relate to and interact with their teammates, influences them as a person and as an athlete. Thus, the fourth and final theme that arose from the data was consequences of cohesion. This theme dealt with aspects of sport and life that the athletes felt team cohesion positively impacted. Subthemes included: positive experience of sport, athlete as person, and cohesion-performance reciprocity.

*Positive experience of sport.* The benefits of participation in sport are many. In the case of team sport, sport offers the opportunity to interact with others. The question is, do those interactions influence the experience of sport? All of the athletes in the study indicated that their experience of team cohesion positively influenced their experience of sport. Specifically, sport is made more enjoyable by interactions with others and the relationships forged through sport. One athlete suggested that the cohesion on her team allowed her to continue to enjoy playing a game that she loves. In fact, if she did not have the support of her teammates she might no longer enjoy a sport that she has grown to love. She stated,

Well it makes it much better because if everybody was looking at me badly on the

court then I would have like no desire to play anymore with this team and I won't be able to enjoy it at all and since they're all so nice and I love playing volleyball, it's so great to play volleyball for me, my team makes me want more for myself and believe that I can really do it in games. I think the team makes me find the maximum of all my strengths and power into the game. (Sharon)

Another athlete implied that her experience of team cohesion added to her athletic quality of life and eased the transition from high school to college athletics. She said,

Well, if I went to [university] from [home state] just on my own I probably would have had like two friends the whole time just because of my personality, like I'm very shy and everything. But coming into a team like this, well you kind of like just have fourteen or fifteen people that you can go to automatically because they are your teammates because of what that word means in itself and you know that you have those friends and they might not be close friends but it's somebody you can rely on. (Jennifer)

*Athlete as person.* Seeing the student-athlete as more than just an athlete has become a goal of collegiate athletics within the last ten years. The knowledge of the benefits of sport participation allows us to see that there is more to learn from participation in athletics than how to pass a volleyball. The women in this study recognized the impact that team cohesion had on them as athletes and as persons. One woman felt she learned a great deal about life through her close relationships with her teammates, she said,

Outside of volleyball in like real life situations I think it's good to deal with

different people and different personalities and different backgrounds and different religions and people from different countries and stuff like that and I think it's good to meet all these people and be able to call them your friends and call them your teammates because you know you've been through a lot with them and I think dealing with a lot of different people is a good social and life experience. (Nicole)

Another athlete illustrated the idea of athlete as person when she described her experience of cohesion. She stated,

It's more than that you end up having to learn to deal with different people, to deal with issues, to deal with confrontation, deal with all these different things so you bond with people on a much higher level but I can't really explain it, it's like a life lessons type of level and, um, you just...it's so hard to explain...you're more of like, uh, you have to help people through things more like real issues and it's not just about making a joke and then like you're best friends with somebody like in middle school. (Melissa)

*Cohesion-performance reciprocity.* All of the participants identified a relationship between team cohesion and performance. In addition, most of the athletes indicated that this relationship was reciprocal. This theme described the athletes' experience of the reciprocal nature of the cohesion-performance relationship. Sport today is more outcome oriented than ever. With that said, it is not surprising that when asked to describe a time when they remember their team as being very cohesive, most of the athletes referred to a match in which their team was successful. When asked to speak

more about the relationship between cohesion and success, one of the athletes said,

I think for the most part I mean whatever sport you're playing, whatever team sport you're playing and whatever you're doing on the court or on the field or whatever, I think to be the best and to perform the best you all have to be on the same page and, you know, have pretty good team cohesion because if you don't then I don't think you're gonna play good and I don't think you're gonna have the heart to do well. You do have a bunch of very good individuals, like I think our [men's sport at university] has a bunch of really good individuals but they play as individuals and I don't think they have good team cohesion and I think that's why they're not that good. (Nicole)

Another athlete simply said,

Remember you asked me what a cohesive team would look like on the court? I think that's what any ideal team would look like and if you're together and if you're cohesive then it's gonna be like that and the better you guys are together, the better you're gonna perform. (Jennifer)

When asked to delineate between a cohesive team and a team that is not cohesive, one athlete simply said, "Well, they [cohesive teams] win more games." She continued on to describe the cohesion-success relationship as reciprocal. When asked to describe the "cohesion" on her current team she responded,

I mean it's been getting better every semester. I mean the more we win, the more we practice the more we succeed the better it gets. (Summer)



# Appendix H

## Tables and Figures

Table 1

Description of Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Class	Years Playing Team Sports	Years Playing Volleyball at University
Erin	19	White	American	Junior	9	3
April	19	Black	American	Sophomore	10	2
Summer	20	White	American	Junior	15	2
Jennifer	22	White	American	Senior	12	4
Sharon	19	White	Bulgarian	Freshman	8	1
Sandra	19	White	American	Freshman	9	1
Melissa	22	White	American	Senior	10	4
Nicole	20	White	American	Sophomore	16	2
Rachel	20	White	American	Sophomore	15	2
Monica	21	White	American	Junior	14	3

Table 2

*Major Themes and Subthemes*

<i>Major Theme</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>
Constituents of Cohesion	Unity Universality Gender
Facilitators of Cohesion	Time together Friendship Respect Sacrifice Congruency Positivity
Threats to Cohesion	Time together Conflict Change
Consequences of Cohesion	Experience of Sport Athlete as Person Cohesion-Performance Reciprocity

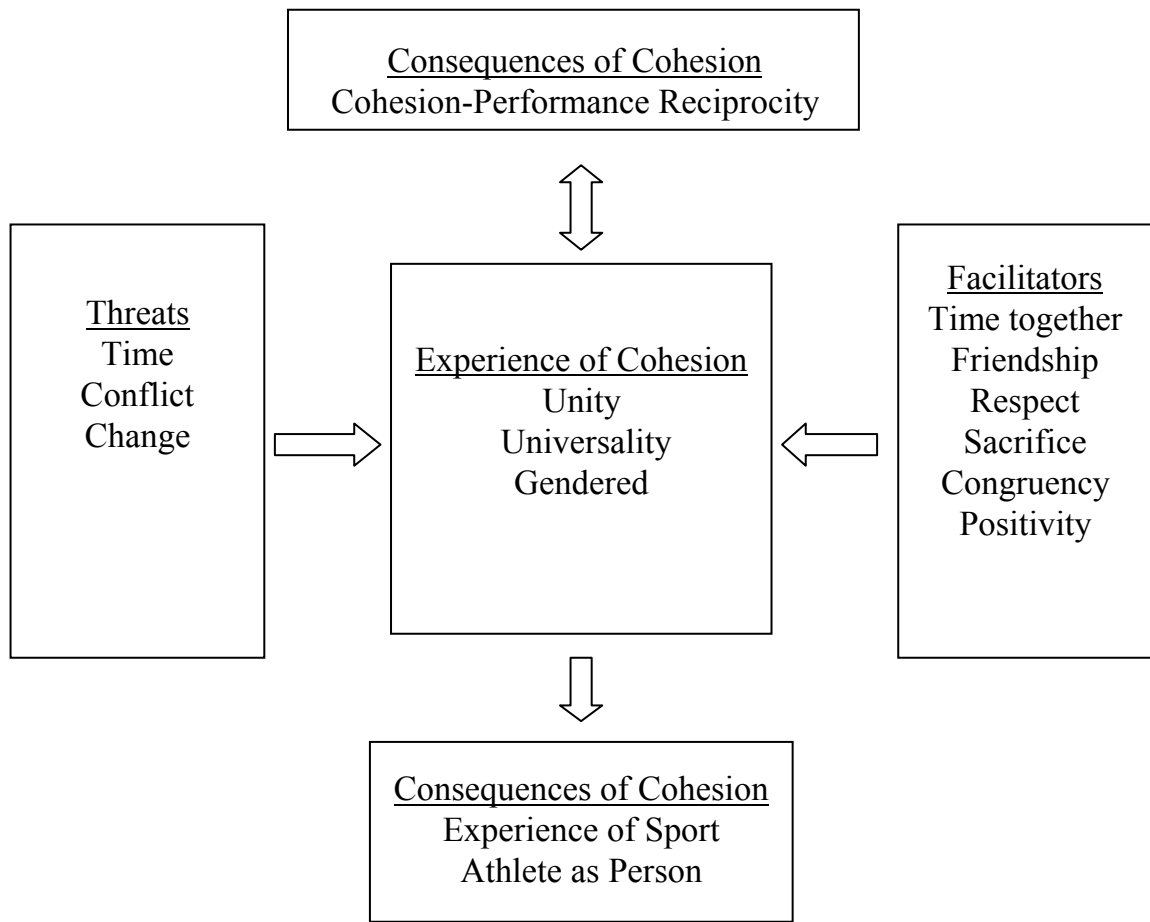


Figure 1. Proposed model of female athlete cohesion.

## **VITA**

Vanessa Shannon was born in Mission Viejo, CA on April 20, 1976. She graduated from El Toro High School in 1994 and earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in human performance and psychology from Rice University in 1999.

In 2002, Vanessa earned her Master of Science degree in kinesiology from Kansas State University, where she specialized in exercise and sport psychology. Her thesis was entitled, “The Relationship Between Physical Activity Group Cohesion and The Negative Social Impact of Arthritis”.

After completing her master’s degree, Vanessa began work on her doctorate in the exercise, sport, and leisure studies department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. While there, she taught physical activities, stress management and relaxation, co-taught an introduction to sport and exercise psychology class, and was a graduate assistant in sport psychology for the men’s athletic department. Her research focuses on group interactions in sport and how the team can influence individual athletes’ performance. Vanessa received her Doctor of Philosophy degree from the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences with an emphasis in sport psychology, in May, 2005.