

A QUALITATIVE COMPARISON OF NCAA COACH INTENDED AND ATHLETE  
PERCEPTION OF MOTIVATIONAL BEHAVIOR

by

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Fairfax, VA

A Qualitative Comparison of NCAA Coach Intended and Athlete Perception of  
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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Science at George Mason University

by

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## **Dedication**

This is dedicated first and foremost to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who deserves every moment of honor and glory. And to my incredible parents, Andy and Cynthia, who sacrificed so much for my education, my sister, Jill, who encouraged me as a friend and roommate during my entire thesis process, and my amazing boyfriend, John, who was more supportive than I could have ever hoped or imagined.

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## **Abstract**

### **A QUALITATIVE COMPARISON OF NCAA COACH INTENDED AND ATHLETE PERCEPTION OF MOTIVATIONAL BEHAVIOR**

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George Mason University, 2017

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This research study evaluated coaching behavior at the NCAA Division I mid-major level. It used phenomenology to describe coaches' experiences as they motivated athletes, and athletes' experiences as they interpreted their coaches' motivational behavior. Four coaches and eight athletes participated in this study from team sports in the Mid-Atlantic region. The research evaluated real, lived experiences to better comprehend how coaches can use their behavior to develop intrinsic motivation among their athletes, improve performance, and help their athletes maintain a healthy balance between their academic, athletic, and personal lives. Results indicated coaches' and athletes' perceptions were similar in areas of positive feedback and recognition, relatedness and connectedness, and instruction. Their perceptions varied concerning negative feedback and indicated there may be strategies for coaches to administer more effective feedback to their athletes.



## Chapter I

Coaching behavior is shown to influence athlete motivation and is ultimately connected to athlete performance (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This happens through the coaches' ability to support their athletes' sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, in accordance with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). When coaches use tones, actions, and words to support these three components, they create environments that encourage intrinsic motivation among their athletes (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Buning, 2016; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Intrinsic motivation, in turn, is demonstrated to positively affect athletes' game performance (Buning, 2016; Choi, Cho, & Huh, 2013; Frederick & Morrison, 1999; Gillet, Vallerand, Amoura, & Baldes, 2010; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

However, not all coaches are aware of how their behavior affects their athletes' motivation (Buning, 2016). Even if a coach is aware of his own behavior, his athletes may misconstrue the intent behind the behavior, if it is delivered in a controlling manner (Buning, 2016). This makes it more difficult for athletes to be intrinsically motivated (Buning, 2016; Mageau & Vallerand 2003), and can negatively impact their performance during competition (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Gillet, et al., 2010; Joessar, Hein, & Hagger, 2012). This is a problem for coaches competing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) at the Division I (DI) level, since many athletic directors measure

coaches' success according to the results of competition (Holmes, 2011). It is important, then, to fully understand what coaches say and do to influence athletes' motivation so they can help improve their athletes' performance and experience greater success in competition.

The purpose of this study was to understand how coaches at the mid-major DI level influence their players' intrinsic motivation through behavior, and how accurately their behavior is interpreted. It relates to many other studies conducted on NCAA coaches, coaching behavior, and athlete motivation and used Self-Determination Theory to further interpret coaching behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

### **Self-Determination Theory**

In order to fully grasp the significant influence coaches have on their athletes' motivation, this research study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This theory states that humans have three main needs concerning their motivation – competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Competence refers to individuals' need to feel and experience mastery of a skill (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Mastery in this sense does not always refer to becoming an expert on the subject at hand, but rather possessing enough ability to be experienced and control outcomes of tasks within the subject. Autonomy refers to an individuals' need to have a sense of control over what tasks they should complete, and how to complete them (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It is important for the individual to feel they have a choice in their own lives, or experience autonomy. Lastly, relatedness refers to an individuals' need to be connected to other people and things around them (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Depending on how well these three

needs are met on an individual level, a person will possess varying amounts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and will experience self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-determined extrinsic motivators are defined as tasks an individual chooses to do, not because they enjoy those specific tasks, but because it helps them perform better at a task which they are intrinsically motivated to complete (Gillet et al., 2010). Generally, the more a person possesses intrinsic and self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation, the better they will perform at the task at hand (Gillet et al., 2010).

This extremely brief description of SDT serves as a rudimentary introduction to the theory and will be explained in greater detail during Chapter II of this research study. It should illustrate how an athlete's motivation can be influenced toward an internal desire to participate in their sport, or an external reason for competing in their sport. Research demonstrates that coaches hold the ability to influence their athletes' motivation in either direction, and their behavior can predict whether or not their athletes are highly intrinsically or extrinsically motivated (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). What a coach says and does affects their athletes and initiates a response (Alexandra, Stefanos, & Vassilis 2015; Mazer, Barnes, Grevious, & Boger 2013). The type of response from the athlete is dependent upon their perception of the coach's words and actions (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Joessar et al., 2012; Zucchetti, Candela, Rabaglietti, & Marzari, 2013). It would be extremely helpful for coaches to better understand their own personal strategy in using specific words and actions to try to motivate their players, and what their athletes interpret as motivational. Likewise, it would be helpful for athletes to get a better

understanding of what they perceive and its accuracy according to their coaches' intentions.

### **NCAA Background**

In addition to understanding SDT, it is vital to comprehend the work environment DI coaches find themselves in within the NCAA today. Since SDT applies to coaches as well, they also need to feel a sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). The amount of pressure coaches face to win, budgetary amount and structure, and length of their coaching contract have the power to influence coach motivation through those senses. Since athletics administrators determine those factors, they can play a significant role in how their coaches' needs are met (or not met) and impact coach motivation (Alcaez et al., 2015; Hijalm, Kenttä, Hassménan, & Gustafsson, 2007). This concept is especially important when trying to understand the position of NCAA coaches and their decision-making process.

The NCAA reports statistics on its growth annually, and has shown a drastic increase in sports sponsorships, and teams added (Irick, 2016). Since the 1997-98 competition year, the total number of athletes (men's and women's sports) increased by 153,384 across the Division I, II, and III levels. In Division I alone, men's and women's sports showed an increase of 1,007 participants between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 competition years (Irick, 2016). This trend is influenced by a number of factors including increased revenue at universities and increases in member institutions. Collegiate sports have become increasingly popular to watch on television and are often accessible online and through social media outlets (Walker & Roberts, 2016). Athletics is now a massive

influencer for schools in building fans, generating interest, and demand among prospective high school students (Chressanthis & Grimes, 1993; Perez, 2012, Sheehan, 2017; Sigelman, Bookheimer, & Bookheimer, 1983).

The popularity of collegiate athletics is highlighted by the growth of the NCAA postseason tournaments. For example, in basketball, where there is a chance for any team to win, the NCAA tournament has seen incredible increases in the number of teams competing, revenue generated, media attention, and fan involvement (Walker & Roberts, 2016). From the mere eight teams that competed in 1939 to the 68 teams that now compete annually, the men's basketball tournament may be one of the most dramatic examples of post-season growth the NCAA has to offer (Walker & Roberts, 2016). The tournament competes at such a national level that the opportunity for even small schools to garner name recognition has increased exponentially (Walker & Roberts, 2016).

The NCAA is so large there are even distinctions within DI concerning the level of athletic play. Schools are unofficially assigned to categories of "mid-major" or "power-five" athletics programs. Officially within the NCAA, there are sub-divisions of DI based on the level at which the school's football team competes, called the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) (Sheehan, 2017). Within the FBS, there are five conferences containing schools that demonstrate significant differences compared to all other DI programs (Sheehan, 2017). These conferences have larger budgets, annual revenues, student populations, and are premier locations for research (Sheehan, 2017). The schools in these five conferences traditionally compete at the highest levels of play across many sports, not only in football, and are often attractive locations for top-notch recruits

(Sheehan, 2017; Smith et al., 2016). Many of these schools have superior athletics facilities and can host larger numbers of fans, increasing their potential resources dramatically. This leaves mid-major programs at a severe disadvantage in terms of athletic recruitment, financial prosperity, media attention, and, ultimately, athletic team performance (Sheehan, 2017).

Due to the disadvantage of mid-major athletics program on the field of competition, each win they produce (especially against power-five conference schools) has a larger impact on the specific team, the overall athletics program, and the university (Perez, 2012). The number of wins athletics teams produce, particularly in high revenue sports like football and men's basketball, regular or post-season against a power-five program predicts enrollment growth by 0.051 and 0.18 percentage points respectively (Perez, 2012). Since winning is tied to enrollment growth, it is also tied to overall revenue produced by the school (Figone, 2012). Research demonstrates that higher winning percentages are significant predictors of donations to the athletics program (Sigelman, Bookheimer, & Bookheimer, 1983). This puts administrators and athletic directors in a position where they may feel a need to apply pressure to their coaches to produce more wins, and therefore, higher revenue. Athletic directors are, perhaps, the most susceptible to this train of thought when faced by fans, alumni, students, and potential donors who actively pursue winning programs (Pierce, Johnson, Krohn, & Judge, 2017).

Ultimately, athletics teams' success is measured by the number of wins produced, or overall team performance. The NCAA is one of the largest governing bodies of

collegiate athletics in the United States (Holmes, 2011). With popularity in collegiate sports growing, and a heightened stage of performance for schools, it only makes sense that administrators and coaches could begin to define success in terms of wins produced as well. Therefore, team and individual performance is often of the utmost importance to administrators, coaches, and students (Pierce et al., 2017; Sheehan, 2017; Walker & Roberts, 2016).

Athletics administrators may seek to use their athletics programs' performance to leverage increased media attention and generate larger revenue for their schools, causing them to change the length of coaching contracts, budgets, or apply more pressure to coaches for performance (Pierce et al., 2017; Sheehan, 2017; Sigelman et al., 1983; Walker & Roberts, 2016). These changes impact coach motivation and therefore coach behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Coach behavior, in turn, impacts athlete motivation and, ultimately, game performance (Alcaraz, Viladrich, Torregrosa, & Ramis, 2013; Baric & Bucik, 2009; Buning, 2016; Deci & Ryan, 1985, Joessar et al., 2012; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Rocchi, Peletier, & Couture, 2015).

### **Significance**

This research is significant because it analyzed coaching behavior through real life experiences of coaches and athletes. Although other quantitative studies may apply more generally to the population of DI mid-major coaches, this study evaluated details of the coach/athlete relationship and how that impacts athlete perceptions of their coaches' behavior. This is the first approach taken like this and was necessary so coaches could

better understand how to use their words and actions to maximize their influence on their athletes, while maintaining prioritizing their athletes' personal life goals and health.

This research is also important due to the annual growth within NCAA Division I. More teams and athletes are joining DI each year (Irick, 2016), making the experiences of coaches and athletes all the more vital to understand. As the total number of NCAA participants increases, more people are interacting within this environment and it is important to address their experiences and attempt to make them more effective and positive. Understanding them at a higher level would also make mid-major programs more competitive – benefitting the school's resources on multiple levels and boosting enrollments and school pride (Sigelmen, Bookheimer, & Bookheimer, 1983). Coaches who understand the significance of the results of this study will begin to stand out from their competitors and their teams will begin to show performance results.

The only way coaches will be effective in influencing their athletes' motivation and game performance is by understanding their own behavioral tendencies and how those tendencies impact their athletes (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Buning, 2016; Gillet, et al. 2010). Past research shows that implementing coaching interventions in youth sports programs has a positive effect on athletes' intrinsic motivation (Langan, Blake, Toner, & Lonsdale 2015). Intrinsic motivation is shown to impact task performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This implies it is possible for coaches of DI athletes, to find and implement their own coaching strategies to maximize the effects of their behavior on their athletes' motivation and performance, while still encouraging their overall success in academics and their personal lives.



## **Gaps in the Literature**

Due to the importance of coach behavior on motivation, a significant amount of research has been conducted to discover behaviors, motivational factors, environments, and many other elements that contribute to improved performance. Much of that research included mixed-methods or quantitative designs. Few researchers utilized a qualitative design when evaluating coaching behavior and athlete motivation. There are several that exist, however, they primarily focus on one perspective or another (Gearity, 2012; Goose & Winter, 2012). For example, one qualitative study examined “bad” coaches according to athletes’ perspectives (Gearity, 2012). Another quantitative study looked at coaches’ perspectives and athletes’ perspectives and attempted to cross-evaluate the data (Smith et al., 2016). However, this study did not use a qualitative approach to extract why certain coaching behavior influenced athletes a certain way or was perceived in a specific manner. There is a specific gap in the literature where there should be qualitative data to explain coaches’ motivational behavior and their athletes’ perceptions. This information will be extremely valuable to administrators, coaches, and athletes as they attempt to be as competitive as possible at the NCAA DI mid-major level.

For this reason, the intent of this study was to understand how collegiate coaches perceive their own behavior, in comparison to their athletes’ perception of the behavior. This will help coaches determine how effective their current efforts are, and identify what behavioral tactics truly motivate their athletes by comparing actual coach behavior and athlete perception.

The research questions that were used to direct this study were:

1. How do mid-major DI athletes perceive their coaches' motivational behavior in comparison to their coaches' intentions?
2. How do mid-major DI coaches perceive their use of behavior to intentionally influence their athletes' intrinsic motivation?
3. What do mid-major DI athletes perceive to be motivational behavior from their coach?

## **Chapter II**

This chapter describes Self-Determination Theory and explains how the coach-athlete relationship is framed within SDT (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Moreover, it describes what past researchers learned about the coach-athlete relationship, coaching behavior, and the coaching environment and the impact they can have on athletes' motivation. Specifically, researchers found certain behaviors that either supported or undermined athletes' senses of competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Alcaraz et al., 2015; Baric & Bucik, 2009; Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thogersen-Ntoumani, 2009; Beikiari, Stefanos, & Vassilis, 2015, Buning, 2016; Choi et al., 2013; Gearity, 2012; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This played a role in the format and methodology for the present study. It was important to understand what researchers already learned concerning this topic, to build the foundation and direction for this study. It helped the researcher and co-researchers examine how coaches impact their student-athletes' motivation.

### **Self-Determination Theory**

As discussed briefly in Chapter I, SDT is a theory presented by Deci and Ryan (1985) to explain why people behave in certain ways. At its core, SDT explains that people need a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in order to experience self-determination and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Competence is a

person's sense of mastery concerning a given task, or how accomplished they feel they are at the task (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It revolves around the positive feedback the individual receives when they complete the task and influences their motivation for doing the task out of pure enjoyment and skill (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Autonomy is centered on a person's sense of control of the task. For example, an environment where a person that is restricted or controlled by someone or something else is not autonomy-supportive. According to Deci and Ryan (1985) people need to feel like they are at least somewhat in control of how and when they complete their tasks. Finally, relatedness refers to a person's desire and need to be in contact with their environment and interact with other people (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In athletics, this often refers to interacting with coaches and teammates, especially when it involves giving and receiving feedback (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

In addition to these three, central needs, people experience two different kinds of motivation – intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation refers to a desire to complete a task based on an internal enjoyment or pleasure for the task itself. When someone is intrinsically motivated, they do not need anything outside of themselves to instigate a desire for the task (Deci & Ryan, 1985). They often feel competent and confident, and enjoy what they are doing (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Conversely, extrinsic motivation refers to a sense of obligation or motivation for something outside of a person's own desires and enjoyment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to Deci and Ryan (1980), "The reward for extrinsic behavior is clearly separable from the behavior and its affect. Here the perceived locus of causality is

external; that is, some extrinsic reward is perceived to be the impetus for the behavior” (p. 39).

There are two other forms of motivation that are important to understand within SDT: amotivation and self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Amotivation is similar to a complete lack of motivation. The individual does not feel the task aligns with their internal goals (Alcaraz et al., 2015). Although there are beliefs and attitudes that accompany the state of amotivation, they stem from non-action or non-activity and a motivation to do nothing (Deci & Ryan, 1980). However, when someone experiences self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation, they are externally motivated to complete the task at hand and it will help them become better at a task they are intrinsically motivated to complete (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The extrinsic motivator, in this case, is internalized by the individual, and makes them self-determined and therefore positive (Alcaraz et al, 2015; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Specifically, this type of extrinsic motivation aligns with the individual’s core values, even though they do not particularly enjoy the task for the task itself (Alcaraz et al, 2015). A practical example of this in NCAA athletics is a student-athlete intrinsically motivated to compete in their sport, but not motivated in the same way to achieve good grades in their academic classes. The NCAA has requirements for student-athletes to achieve certain levels of academic success, as determined by grades and GPA, in order to be eligible to compete (“NCAA”, 2017). If the student-athlete doesn’t meet those requirements, they cannot play and sometimes cannot practice (“NCAA”, 2017). However, if the student-athlete chooses to pursue good grades in class, because they retain the internal desire to play their sport, it is

considered a self-determined form of extrinsic motivation, and has positive connotations for motivation and performance (Alcaraz et al., 2015; Deci & Ryan, 1985).

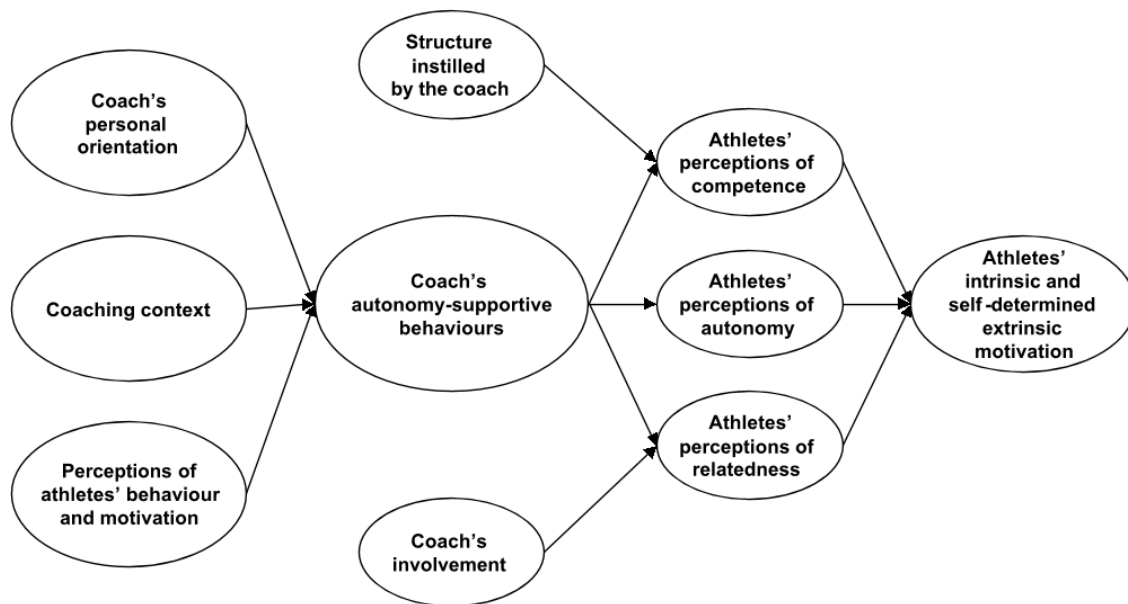
Intrinsic motivation and self-determination are positive experiences and have been shown to impact task performance in significant ways (Goose & Winter, 2012; Jang, 2008; Matosic, Cox, & Amorose, 2013; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Smith et al., 2016). Intrinsic motivation is a result of the three basic needs – competence, autonomy, and relatedness – being met in the individual (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It has significant positive influences on the psychological health and well-being of coaches and athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Extrinsic motivation has also been shown to influence task performance, but in a negative way – except in situations of self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation (Cremades, Flournoy, & Gomez, 2012; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Medic, Mack, Wilson, & Starkes, 2007). Non-self-determined extrinsic motivators are actions in which the individual does not see value and is not motivated to accomplish on their own.

According to SDT, the ultimate goal of any individual is to achieve a level of complete intrinsic motivation or combination of intrinsic motivation and self-determined extrinsic motivation, because it meets all three basic human needs and improves task performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985). However, intrinsic motivation does not always happen naturally for every person in all tasks. To explain the progression from amotivation to intrinsic motivation, SDT labels different levels of extrinsic motivation: external regulation, introjection, identification, and integration (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan (1985) explain these levels as external, somewhat external, somewhat

internal, and internal, respectively. It is possible for someone to move through these levels of extrinsic motivation until they reach intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

### **Coach–Athlete Relationship Model**

For the purposes of this research study, the levels of motivation in SDT illustrate how coaching behavior holds an influence over athletes' performance. Since intrinsic and self-determined forms of motivation are shown to improve performance (Goose & Winter, 2012; Jang, 2008; Matosic et al., 2013; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Smith et al., 2016), coaches under pressure to improve team performance should want to know more about how they can impact it through motivation. The more athletes function on an intrinsic level versus extrinsic level, the better their team will compete. To further illustrate how coaches can influence their athletes' motivation, Mageau and Vallerand (2003) developed a motivational model in the SDT framework of the coach–athlete relationship.



*Figure 1:* Motivational model of the coach – athlete relationship. This figure illustrates the relationship between coaching behavior and athlete motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

This model illustrates several factors that influence coaching behavior: the coach’s personal motivational tendencies, the environment or context the coach is in, and the coach’s perceptions of their athletes’ behavior and motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). These factors determine how a coach behaves around their athletes and why they say certain things to their athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Moving forward in Figure 1, the model addresses the athletes’ three needs according to SDT – competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The coach’s autonomy-supportive behavior impacts all three needs and is the only influencer of athletes’ perception of autonomy (Mageau &



Vallerand, 2003). This highlights how important it is for coaches to understand and use their behavior wisely with athletes (Buning 2016), especially concerning the use of autonomy-supportive behaviors. It also emphasizes the need for administrators to comprehend the type of environment they create for their coaches (Alcaraz et al., 2015; Hijalm et al., 2007).

Additionally, there are two other factors influencing athletes' three basic needs: the structure created by the coach, and the coach's involvement (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). These are separated from coach's autonomy-supportive behavior to specifically address athletes' needs for competence and relatedness, as well as differences in actions from the coach to support those specific needs (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). A list of behaviors for these categories is discussed in association with the model as well (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

Ultimately, the coach's behavior and support of athletes' three, basic needs, impacts their intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation, matching the framework of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Mageau and Vallerand (2003) go on to evaluate specific behaviors that fall into the autonomy-supportive category, especially as they relate to coaching and SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For example, coaches should be involved in their student-athletes' lives (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Involvement from the coach encourages a sense of relatedness in the athlete and boosts their intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). It shows that the coach cares about the general well-being of the athlete and not strictly about their performance, therefore improving the relationship between the two. This is confirmed

through a survey of Korean collegiate athletes, which indicated the relationship players have with their coaches relates to their individual psychological needs, such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Choi, Cho, & Huh, 2013). This survey found that when coaches took the time to have individual relationships with their players and truly invested in them as people, their athletes had greater senses of relatedness and autonomy (Choi, Cho, & Huh, 2013). As a result, athletes expressed high levels of respect for their coaches, reporting that they “liked” and “trusted” their coaches much more than their counterparts, who competed in controlling environments (Choi, Cho, Huh, 2013). Social connectivity is crucial to optimum psychological functioning and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). It encourages teammates to feel connected to each other and their coach, and builds trust among the entire team (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

According to Buning (2016), many collegiate coaches are unaware of how their athletes perceive their behavior, and some do not understand how their actions directly impact intrinsic motivation. When this is the case, coaches rely on their natural tones and actions to communicate support and motivation to their athletes by chance. This means they may not consider the fact that their actions may not be perceived the same way they are intended (Buning, 2016). Additionally, if coaches use controlling and/or verbally aggressive behavior to communicate with their athletes, athletes will quickly become extrinsically motivated (Alexandra et al., 2015; Mazer et al., 2013). Even if the coach is attempting to motivate their athletes, they may have an extremely detrimental effect on the overall performance of their team (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Mazer et al., 2013). It is important to better understand what athletes perceive from their coach, and not solely

coach intent. The main purpose of this study is to better understand the relationship between NCAA DI collegiate coaches and how they perceive their own behavior, in comparison to their athletes' perception of the behavior. Athletes who perceive autonomy-supportive behavior from their coaches produce more overall team wins than those who do not (Smith et al., 2016). However, there is a discrepancy between coaches' intentions of specifically positive coaching environments and what athletes actually perceived. This study sought to address that discrepancy through qualitative research and analysis to fully extract some of the reasons why coaches and athletes perceive coaching behavior in a specific way, and provide implications for coaches at the DI mid-major level.

### **The Coach-Athlete Relationship**

Figure 1 clearly indicates that coaches have a significant effect on athlete intrinsic motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), and it has been used in quantitative studies, further indicating coaches' effects (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Gillet et al., 2010; Joessar et al., 2012). Before addressing the methodology for the present study, it is important to understand how Mageau and Vallerand's (2003) model has already been used.

In a study conducted to test whether coach autonomy-supportive behavior promoted athlete self-determined motivation towards their sport, researchers found that coaches who supported the autonomy of their athletes promoted sport motivation and specific game performance motivation, which translated to improved performance (Gillet et al., 2010). This information is important because it shows how critical it is for coaches to support their athletes' autonomy. It impacts their self-determined motivation,

supporting the model presented by Mageau and Vallerand (2003), and ties together other important implications such as game motivation and game performance (Gillet et al., 2010). A questionnaire was issued to 101 French, judo athletes (Gillet et al., 2010). These athletes ranged from 14 to 43 years old and were asked to answer questions on a scale of one to eight regarding their perception of autonomy support from their coach, their motivation concerning their sport, and their motivation concerning the tournament they were competing in (Gillet et al., 2010). Researchers also took into account the national ranking of each participant as an objective performance measure (Gillet et al., 2010). This study affirms the present research and lends credibility to Mageau and Vallerand's model (Gillet et al., 2010). In addition, it demonstrates the entire chain of impact, from coach behavior, to athlete motivation, to improved game performance.

Another research study used Mageau and Vallerand's model to evaluate motivational differences in athletes who were coached by people who had different motivational and leadership profiles (Baric & Bucik, 2009). The model was used to help define two different coaching strategies involving behavior (Baric & Bucik, 2009). The study found that coaches generally follow one of two leadership styles: one that is highly centered on athletes or one that is mainly centered on winning (Baric & Bucik, 2009). The coaches who focused on their athletes spent more time fulfilling their basic needs according to SDT (Baric & Bucik, 2009). They helped their athletes focus on the task at hand much more effectively than the alternate group of coaches. Not only did athletes learn more about the process of their sport from these coaches, but they also performed at a higher level because they were encouraged to enjoy their sport and cooperate together

(Baric & Bucik, 2009). Meanwhile, the coaches who were solely focused on winning increased their athletes' extrinsic motivation (Baric & Bucik, 2009). However, according to the study, coaches who take an athlete-centered approach are not typical. In fact, out of the 51 coaches who responded to the questionnaire, many possessed similar traits to athlete-centered leadership, but most of them also shared tendencies of a win-focused leadership style (Baric & Bucik, 2009). This implies that many coaches are unaware of their behavioral tendencies or find themselves in a win-centered environment. It's important to fully understand the details behind coaches' behavior with their athletes and what their athletes perceive so they can be more effective.

In addition, Joessar, Hein, and Hagger (2012) found that, over the course of one year, young athletes with coaches who supported their autonomy experienced more consistent intrinsic motivation rates and were still participating in their sport at the end of the study. The study concluded that this information demonstrates how critical supportive behavior from coaches can be, particularly in young athletes. Although college coaches work with an older age group, their athletes face a variety of life decisions that can influence their desire to participate in their sport (Hartman, 2014; Medic et al., 2007). Researchers conducted this longitudinal study with 362 young athletes by issuing questionnaires at the beginning and conclusion of the year (Joessar et al., 2012). Not only did the study demonstrate how important it is for coaches to use autonomy-supportive behavior with their athletes to boost intrinsic motivation, it also showed that coaches who used autonomy-supportive behavior had players who experienced all three of the basic needs according to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Joessar et al., 2012). Even modest levels of

autonomy-support had positive influences on the athletes who participated in this study (Joessar, et al., 2012).

These three studies demonstrate that Mageau and Vallerand's model is reliable and that coaches clearly benefit their athletes' intrinsic motivation when they use behavior in accordance with SDT (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Gillet et al., 2010; Joessar et al., 2012). Specifically, autonomy-supportive behavior impacts athletes needs in a significant way (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Gillet et al., 2010; Joessar et al., 2012). Coaches who take an athlete-centered approach to their behavior produce more motivated athletes who perform at a higher level (Baric & Bucik, 2009). And athletes who play for coaches with autonomy-supportive behavior stay in their sport over time (Joessar et al., 2012). However, these types of coaches are not currently typical (Baric & Bucik, 2009). This creates a need for more awareness among coaches about their behavior and how they can specifically impact their athletes.

This information is confirmed in a study conducted by Buning (2016) on female, collegiate, softball coaches and players. This quantitative study sought to examine the relationship between coach expectations and athlete perceptions of coaching behavior (Buning, 2016). However, Buning (2016) discovered that not all coaches were aware of their behavior towards their athletes, or how their expectations influenced their outward actions. In addition, Buning (2016) discovered that athletes were not always completely accurate in their perceptions of their coach. Instead, athletes perceived negative or positive behavior from their coach in accordance with scholarship status (Buning, 2016). During this study, 20 coaches and 148 athletes responded to a questionnaire concerning

coach expectations, perceived coaching behavior, and motivation (Buning, 2016). At the conclusion of this study, Buning (2016) herself recommends further research and more detailed data so coaches can deepen their understanding of how to motivate their athletes. She recommends coach education in this department so they can maximize their behavior influence on an individual level (Buning, 2016).

So, then, it is important to describe more about what other researchers found out about coaching behavior and how it influenced intrinsic motivation. And, specifically, where precisely more information concerning both are necessary.

### **Coaching Behavior**

Fortunately, since motivation in athletics is such an important and interesting topic, many people have researched topics related to this one, providing a strong foundation for the present study. Particularly since the majority of the research currently published involved quantitative measures, it gives a large amount of general information to explain the context of coaching behavior, what influences it, and how coaches can help their administrators understand exactly what athletes need to perform. According to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), it is critical that athletes have a sense of autonomy in order for them to experience intrinsic motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This means that coaches should give their athletes a certain degree of choice within the structure they create for the team (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Giving student-athletes even a small amount of choice in their activities boosts their intrinsic motivation (Buning, 2016; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Reeve & Jang, 2008). Here I examine what research is published specifically on coaching behavior and how it has impacted athletes thus far.

First, I begin with broader research on autonomy-supportive behavior from teachers in classrooms because there is rich literature to draw from and applies to the physical classrooms coaches have at practice.

First, regarding autonomy-supportive behavior in general, one such study focused on teachers' behavior in the classroom (Reeve & Jang, 2006). This study found a few specific instructional behaviors by teachers that positively correlated with student perceptions of autonomy support (Reeve & Jang, 2006). They also found specific behaviors that correlated negatively with student perceptions of autonomy (Reeve & Jang, 2006). The behaviors that correlated positively with student perceptions were: time spent listening to students, being responsive to students' questions, communicating perspective-taking statements, to name a few (Reeve & Jang, 2006). Meanwhile, the kinds of behaviors with a negative correlation to students' perception of autonomy included: criticism, praise as a contingent reward, and making "should" or "got to" statements (Reeve & Jang, 2006). This gives a list of behaviors for coaches to identify among themselves – both on the positive side and negative side. An important note from this study is that teachers cannot "give" their students a sense of autonomy, they can only create a supportive environment for autonomy (Reeve & Jang, 2006). The more teachers build relationships with their students, the more opportunity for their students to experience autonomy in the context of that behavior (Reeve & Jang, 2006). The study included 72 pairs of teachers enrolled in a teaching program and randomly assigned them to a teacher/student role. Students learned how to solve a puzzle and all participants were issued a post-study questionnaire. The teachers who nurtured their students' needs



through the autonomy-supportive behavior demonstrated what specific actions influence motivation and in what ways (Reeve & Jang, 2006). This information was helpful in the present study because it gave an outline of specific behaviors that build or thwart autonomy in the classroom.

Jang (2008) continued research in this vein and attempted to further understand externally provided rationales. According to Jang, “An externally provided rationale is a verbal explanation as to why putting forth effort during an activity is a useful and worthwhile thing to do” (p. 802). In a sense, it is like self-determined extrinsic motivation, where the individual is internalizing an external reason for completing their task (Deci & Ryan, 1980). Jang found that giving students a rationale successfully promoted effective learning activities among the 136 undergraduate students who participated in the study (Jang, 2008). The condition on the external rationale was that it had to be delivered in an autonomy-supportive manner (Jang, 2008). If the student perceived a controlling manner or tone from the person providing the rationale, the effects were negative (Jang, 2008). The rationale promoted engagement and relates to the individual’s need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Jang, 2008). When students were given a rationale, they could internalize the information, and connect with the task they were being asked to do, rather than simply being told what and how to do the task and not understanding the “why” behind the task (Jang, 2008). Coaches should take this information into account when they communicate with their players. Explaining the “why” of a task helps the athlete connect a potentially undesirable task to something they may be very motivated to accomplish (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). It will ultimately

benefit the athlete's understanding of what is happening, give them increased knowledge of how their coach functions, and deepen their relationship with their coach (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This is a great example of why players should be given information, particularly for uninteresting tasks that they may think are unreasonable.

What about studies focused on coaching behavior and athletics? There were two studies conducted in the past concerning coaching behavior and how it influenced athletes. These studies are similar, such that they both evaluated the effects of verbal aggression on athlete motivation (Alexandra et al., 2015; Mazer et al., 2013). The first study examined verbal aggression in coaches as a personality trait (Alexandra et al., 2015). Verbal aggression is defined as “a personality trait which urges a person to attack the self-concepts of interlocutor in order to cause psychological pain” (p. 96) and includes use of profanity, ridicule, and teasing (Alexandra et al., 2015). Verbal aggression was found to negatively impact intrinsic motivation among athletes and positively impact amotivation and external regulation (Alexandra et al., 2015). Verbal communication between coaches and athletes is important. Even if cases of verbal aggression are not extreme, it can impact the relationship between the coach and athlete, performance, and motivation (Alexandra et al., 2015). This study issued a questionnaire to 180 basketball players during a training session and results indicated a significant impact on motivation when verbal aggression was present (Alexandra et al., 2015). It illustrates how a coach's personal orientation can obstruct their athletes' sense of autonomy and relatedness, therefore negatively impacting intrinsic motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

The second study also concluded that verbal aggression negatively impacts athlete intrinsic motivation (Mazer et al., 2013). However, this research went a bit further. Researchers recruited participation from 130 undergraduate student-athletes who responded to a 16-item measure on motivation and coach credibility (Mazer et al., 2013). Results indicated that verbal aggression not only impacted athlete motivation, but also affected coach credibility. Coaches who use verbal aggression discredit themselves as reliable sources of information and make it difficult for their leadership to be effective (Mazer et al., 2013). Regardless of whether the coach was a veteran and well-respected in their sport, athletes perceived their coaches to be discredited. These studies are significant because it involves a level of respect for the athlete. Although it is not specifically listed in Mageau and Vallerand's model, all three SDT needs logically involve a certain amount of respect. Coaches will want to make sure they are communicating in a positive way with their athletes so they do not discredit their actions later.

One other influence on athlete intrinsic motivation and the relationship between athlete and coach is whether or not the athlete is on an athletic scholarship (Medic, et al., 2007). Universities who participate in the NCAA are permitted to pay the tuition of their athlete while they compete for the school. However, there are many regulations concerning those scholarships and how many are at a team's disposal ("NCAA", 2017). Scholarships are a form of extrinsic motivation and affect the athlete's motivation accordingly (Bartholomew et al., 2009; Cremades et al., 2012; Hartman, 2014; Matosic et al., 2013; Medic, Mack, Wilson, & Starkes, 2007). Whether or not an athlete receives an athletic scholarship, and how much the scholarship is, can influence the athlete's

perception of their coach (Hartman, 2014). A larger scholarship sum implies greater performance expectations, and can be perceived as controlling behavior from the coach, which would impact the athlete's sense of autonomy (Hartman, 2014; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This is something to keep in mind as the present study progresses, and will be useful information during interviews with mid-major coaches and athletes.

Even considering all of this, one study conducted by Langan, Blake, Toner, and Lonsdale (2015), shows that coach education and a coaching intervention are possible, once the right tools are in place. After issuing experimental strategies for providing support to athletes on different teams, researchers noticed a decrease in athlete burnout and significant increases in athlete motivation (Langan et al., 2015). Six different football coaches participated and proved that it is feasible to implement a coaching intervention strategy that works. These coaches saw their athletes change from a "have to" mental approach to playing their sport, to a "get to" or "want to" mentality (Langan et al., 2015). Coaches showed that, with an intervention in place, they can help athletes eliminate any obligatory feelings towards their sport and decrease extrinsic motivation. This is encouraging news because, once a detailed and specific approach is identified for NCAA DI mid-major programs, it is reasonable to expect an education program among coaches at this level to be effective and show results in athlete motivation and performance (Langan et al., 2015).

Communication is key to helping athletes build intrinsic motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). While some coaches may find verbal aggression an obvious trait to avoid, not all coaches are aware that controlling tones and body language are also on the

“Don’t Do” list (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Reeve & Jang, 2008). Both teachers and coaches who are perceived as controlling influence extrinsic motivation among their students/athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). The model and article presented by Mageau and Vallerand (2003) explain coaches who give feedback in a controlling manner and/or tone encourage their athletes to perceive them as controlling in nature. This will eliminate their sense of autonomy, ultimately influencing their intrinsic motivation negatively (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Verbal feedback, training, and instruction are necessary components of education and athletics (Buning, 2016; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Reeve & Jang, 2008; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). However, it is imperative that coaches understand how their word choice and tone effect their athletes.

Another way autonomy-supportive behavior can be applied to athletics is through athlete self-talk. Researchers found that coaching behavior influences what athletes think and how they talk to themselves (Zourbanos, Hatzigeorgiadis, Tsiakaras, Chroni & Theodorakis, 2010). This impacts athletes’ sense of autonomy and, especially, their sense of competence within sport (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). These results are the combination of three different, joint studies involving 548 athletes from various sports. Two measures were used – one for self-talk and one for coaching behavior (Zourbanos et al., 2010). The results of this study are significant because it addresses a core need according to SDT, and develops a thought process within the athlete that can dictate their confidence (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand; Zourbanos et al., 2010). It is especially critical for coaches to understand that what they do and say affects what their athletes think about themselves and influences how they talk to themselves.

The environment coaches create for their athletes is important to consider as well. One study evaluated features of the motivational environment in athletics (Smith, et al., 2016). The results indicated that coaches are more aware of their intentions to support athlete autonomy than athletes' perceptions of autonomy-supportive behavior from their coach (Smith et al., 2016). This means that, although coaches are not always aware of their behavioral strategies, they are more aware of their intentions than their athletes, or think they are more aware of their behavior than they are. Both athletes and coaches generally perceived positive and autonomy-supportive environments similarly and the study revealed a positive relationship between coaches who perceived themselves as supportive and athletes' intrinsic motivation (Smith et al., 2016). Therefore, the effort coaches put forth to support their athletes' autonomy may not have been perceived by the athlete, but produced at least some results nonetheless. A total of 74 coaches and 882 athletes from four European countries participated in this study (Smith et al., 2016). Recordings of each coach were coded according to a specific rating system to acquire the data (Smith et al., 2016). After examining the motivational environment and relationship between coaches and athletes, the researchers concluded that, like the teachers from Reeve and Jang's study, what coaches say and do has an impact on their athletes – including their game performance (Smith et al., 2016). This is a greater case for building awareness of behavioral strategies used among coaches. Those coaches who perceived themselves as autonomy-supportive in this study had better performance results from their athletes (Smith et al., 2016). It would behoove other coaches to understand similar things about themselves.

Another study examined the effects of coach leadership on player performance (Bormann, Schulte-Coerne, Diebig, & Rowold, 2016). Researchers concluded that coaches who create structure for their team and communicate goals to their players improve individual performance and sometimes team performance as well (Bormann et al., 2016). This is important because it addresses an element beyond just the impactful autonomy-supportive behavior coaches can provide to their athletes. Structure is one area that influences athletes' sense of competence (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). By giving athletes specific goals and vision for the team, coaches impact individual athlete motivation, which correlates to improved performance (Bormann et al., 2016). Researchers of this study included 336 players and 30 coaches, using measures for transformational leadership (focus on team goals vs. individual goals), win orientation, and player and team performance (Bormann et al., 2016). The coaches who communicated team goals with their players helped boost their intrinsic motivation by building an environment friendly to self-determination (Bormann et al., 2016).

Finally, there is one qualitative study that should be used as a foundation for the present research as well. Gearity (2012) interviewed 16 current or former athletes who played at the collegiate, professional or semi-professional level. His interviews examined coaches' shortcomings as described by their former athletes (Gearity, 2012). These athletes were asked to describe poor coaches they worked with in the past, and their descriptions yielded four main themes among coaching behavior: poor teaching, no teaching, no individualized teaching, or unknowledgeable of the sport (Gearity, 2012). These are rather focused on the coaches' teaching ability. Coaches should be aware not

only of how they interact with their athletes, their body language and tone, etc., but also what they are doing to instruct their athletes. Something as simple as working with players one on one instead of in groups would have made an impact on some of the athletes Gearity (2012) interviewed. It ties to the environment coaches create for their team and how they portray themselves when they interact with their players. They need to be aware of what their coaching behavior is doing to their effectiveness as a coach.

### **The Coaching Environment**

Finally, it is important to trace the model from Mageau and Vallerand (2003) back to the coaching environment since this predicts coaching behavior. The environment coaches find themselves in will influence their personal motivation and their behavior among their athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Several factors play into this: coaches' personal motivation orientation, the amount of stress they face and how much emphasis their administrators place on winning, and the way their administrators support coaches' autonomy (Alcaraz, et al., 2015; Frederick & Morrison, 1999; Hijalm et al., 2007; Rocchi et al., 2013). NCAA coaches often experience high turnover rates and their coaching contracts are often no longer than five years (Holmes, 2011). It is not uncommon for coaches to face great scrutiny when they are being evaluated for a new position (Pierce et al., 2017). Once they have signed their contracts, some sports allow a short window for performance and will discontinue the remainder of the coaching contract if administrators are unsatisfied with team performance (Holmes, 2011). This creates a high stakes environment for coaches, causing stress and often encouraging coaches to win at all costs (Holmes, 2011).



Researchers have started to examine this situation; one such instance is a research study conducted to test a model that predicted teachers' autonomy and behavior when administrators failed to support their needs according to SDT (Rocchi et al., 2013). A model developed in the academic realm predicted teaching behavior when administrators specifically failed to support teacher autonomy – requiring excessive administrative tasks that were often completed after hours by teachers (Rocchi et al., 2013). When this occurred, teachers were significantly less autonomy supportive in their own classrooms and less intrinsically motivated towards their work tasks. The researchers of this particular study attempted to use the model to predict coaching behavior in a similar manner (Rocchi et al., 2013). Administrators in athletic departments can make similar demands of coaches and include certain expectations concerning game performance (Holmes, 2011; Rocchi et al., 2013). When this occurred, results from the model demonstrated that pressure from above (at the administrator level) and pressure from below (expectations from players) correctly predicted autonomy-supportive behavior from the coach (Rocchi et al., 2013). Mageau and Vallerand's model addresses the fact that players have an influence on their coach. This is something that should be acknowledged. However, the key element to note is the pressure from above – or how administrators impact coach motivation through their behavior, and creation of a specific kind of environment for the coach (Rocchi et al., 2013). This is important because administrators can either help set their teams up for success or thwart it by supporting their coaches' autonomy or restricting it. According to the academic model, it involves

more than just performance results, but involves the requirement of excessive amounts of tasks or mundane tasks (Rocchi et al., 2013).

When coaches begin to experience an environment where they feel they are ill-prepared to accomplish everything they are being asked to do, they face burnout (Hijalm et al. 2007). A study examining elite soccer coaches discovered that financial reasons can be an instigator of coach burnout, as well as lacking the appropriate number of staff members (Hijalm et al., 2007). This is particularly a factor to consider at the mid-major, NCAA DI level, where resources are scant in comparison to larger, power-five schools (Holmes, 2011). For this particular study, 47 top-level soccer coaches were surveyed and although they were not coaching college, they were each coaching at an elite level where certain results were expected (Hijalm et al., 2007). The data show that burnout is a real concern for coaches who are not receiving the appropriate amount of support from their administrators. Coaches who exhibited burnout symptoms had not received full training, were under paid, were asked to spend long hours at practices, and/or were not considered full time and were not given a full staff (Hijalm et al., 2013). This made it extremely difficult for the coaches to succeed or feel supported by their respective administrative staff, in addition to predicting their behavior (Hijalm et al., 2013).

These factors impact coaches' intrinsic motivation in a negative way and positively influence amotivation (Alcaraz et al., 2015). Intrinsic motivation is key and will help boost coaches' psychological health, well-being, and sense of personal accomplishment (McLean, Mallett, & Newcombe, 2012). Researchers went on to specifically evaluate coaches' levels of stress and the impact it had on their motivation. It

turns out that when administrators are not meeting their coaches' SDT needs, they thwart their coaches' motivation (Alcaraz et al., 2015). According to Mageau and Vallerand (2003), this, in turn, thwarts the environment coaches create for athletes and impacts their behavior towards the athletes. Overall this causes athletes to lack intrinsic motivation and self-determination and affects performance negatively (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Rocchi et al., 2013).

In addition, coaching style relates to decision-making among college coaches (Frederick & Morrison, 1999). Researchers found that coaches, for the most part, do not wind up as coaches by accident. Instead, most of them become coaches because they enjoy their sport or have been involved in it for many years already (Frederick & Morrison, 1999). This means that, of the 139 NCAA coaches who participated in the study, the majority of them possessed intrinsic motivation for their jobs (Frederick & Morrison, 1999). Some coaches did experience a change in their motivation based on environmental causes, but more coaches than not entered their coaching position for their enjoyment of the sport and act of coaching (Frederick & Morrison, 1999). Moreover, the study revealed that coaching style is related to decision-making. This means that when coaches are motivated intrinsically, they make decisions differently than when they are extrinsically motivated (Frederick & Morrison, 1999). This is significant because it creates variability for athletes' environment. Since coaches are major forces in creating the environment in which their athletes compete, it is important for coaches to understand that their own, personal motivation will play a role in their environment creation and behavior (Frederick & Morrison). Researchers discovered this information by measuring

coaching personality, coach motivation, and coach decision-making style, and identifying five different categories of motivation (Frederick & Morrison, 1999). Their results played a role in the development of research questions for this study and will play a role in the implications of coach education deriving from this study.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, there are clearly coaches who are unaware of what their behavior does to their athletes' intrinsic motivation (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Buning, 2016; Gearity, 2012; Langan et al., 2015; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Smith et al., 2016; Zourbanos et al., 2010). However, results of studies where coaches demonstrate some awareness or coaching interventions are tested suggest that it is reasonable to expect coaches can and will learn about their behavior and can use it in a more effective manner (Borman et al., 2016; Langan et al., 2015; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). So, then, the next question to address is how did the present study gather the detail necessary to better understand how coaches use their behavior and what their athletes perceive from them?

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Questions**

The main intent for this study was to better understand how coaches at the mid-major DI level influence their players' motivation through behavior and how accurately their behavior is interpreted. Therefore, the research questions guiding this study first sought to define motivational behavior from both perspectives. They focused on the experiences and individual definitions from coaches and athletes. Secondly, the research questions sought to compare those definitions and experiences to discover how accurately athletes perceived their coaches' behavior in accordance with their coaches' intentions.

The three research questions guiding this study were:

1. How do mid-major DI athletes perceive their coaches' motivational behavior in comparison to their coaches' intentions?
2. How do mid-major DI coaches perceive their use of behavior to intentionally influence their athletes' intrinsic motivation?
3. What do mid-major DI athletes perceive to be motivational behavior from their coach?

These questions sought to understand the relationship between coach and athlete better by dissecting the athletes' perceptions of their coach's motivational behavior. Specifically, these questions addressed what coaches do to influence their athletes'

motivation and how intentional these actions are. The questions focused this study on the comparison of coach-intention and athlete-perception.

The first research question encompasses the study as a whole and was meant to direct the entire process since the ultimate goal of the study was to better understand the comparison. It sought to engage the research participants through descriptions of their actual experiences. During the study, however, this question did not have a complete answer until the end, after all transcription, coding, and analysis were finished. The other two were pursued at length during the interview process and had preliminary answers once transcription was complete. The last two research questions were directed at either coach or athlete and meant to help define the first question. They generated detailed data of coach and athlete experiences to begin analyzing the relationship between them so their experiences could be fully described and compared during this study.

These research questions went through a process of editing and review. Initially the research questions guiding this study specifically addressed the types of environments coaches and athletes operated in, as well as their relationship and definitions of motivational behavior. However, given the structure of this study, encompassing all of those concepts would have made this study extremely broad. This would not allow detailed descriptions of coach and athlete experiences, and would have required collection of a broader array of data (e.g., observations, interviews with administrators and staff members). These aspects are outside the scope of the present study, but would be beneficial and should be done by another researcher(s) in the future. For those reasons, the number of research questions was decreased and edited to focus specifically on

coach-intended motivational behavior, athlete perception of that behavior, and a direct comparison of the two through the lens of their relationship. This permitted the study to address detailed experiences and even compare specific instances of behavior for a more in-depth understanding of the mid-major competitive scene.

### **Purpose**

The ultimate goal of this study was to better understand coaches' behavior to motivate their athletes intrinsically and athletes' perceptions of that at the mid-major NCAA DI level. In order to do that, it was necessary to define and describe athletes' individual experiences of their coaches' behavior. It also helped to begin with an understanding of what athletes mean when they discuss "motivation." For the purpose of comparison, it was necessary to ask their coach a similar question – both broadly, in the context of the team, and specifically, in the context of the individual athlete. After that, it was important to ask coaches to describe their experience using behavior to motivate their athletes and explain specific instances they experienced of successful and unsuccessful attempts.

Although there are different forms of motivation among athletes, and some coaches may or may not be aware of their motivational strategies, the point of conducting this study was to further understand how mid-major programs and coaches can impact their athletes' motivation. By contrasting individual athlete interpretations of their coaches' behavior and the coaches' strategy behind the behavior, this study gleaned important information for mid-major participants. Regardless of the results produced, this study proposed to better understand athlete perception of motivational coaching behavior,

through the lens of the coach-athlete relationship as illustrated in Figure 1 (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Figure 1 functions as a visual representation of the impact coaches' personal motivational tendencies and coaching environment have on their behavior with their athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). The most impactful behavior coaches can use is autonomy-supportive behavior, which impacts athletes' sense of competence, autonomy-support, and relatedness (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Athletes' perceptions of those three needs then impacts their overall sense of intrinsic and self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). When athletes perceived their coach's behavior accurately, understanding was created for other mid-major coaches on things that worked well at their level of competition for motivating athletes. Conversely, when athletes and coaches were on two different motivational pages, it helped coaches build a better strategy – whether they have one already or not – to help create and instigate motivation where there may be little or none. This will help coaches maximize their efforts, build awareness among all parties involved at the mid-major level, and begin to identify how accurately athletes perceive their coaches.

Primarily, this research describes and explains mid-major athletes' perceptions better in comparison to coaches' motivational strategy and behaviors. To do so, this study searched for previously posited predictors of athlete motivation and general information on athlete perceptions, organizing different kinds of athlete motivation in an attempt to bracket it according to phenomenological methods (Moustakas, 1994). This study took past research, analyzed it and sifted through results to find out how coaches' motivations and strategies are generally affected by the environment they work in. This set the stage



for data collection, coding, and analysis which was meant to draw out specifics which were missing from past research, for the ultimate purpose of giving coaches, athletes, and administrators at the NCAA mid-major level an idea of how to better motivate their teams for high performance results, while providing a high quality and healthy student-athlete experience.

The reason behind choosing a phenomenological approach for this study was to highlight coaches' and athletes' lived experiences. It is a very specific approach to qualitative research that places emphasis on describing real experiences and reviewing them methodically for emerging definitions and psychological explanations, when possible (Moustakas, 1994). Given these criteria, what better way to draw out an understanding of the reasons surrounding athletes' perception of their coaches' motivational behavior? This data collection process yielded rich descriptions of actual motivational behavior experienced by both groups of participants and guided the researcher to fully understand the meaning and implication of the data through methodical review. It is an ideal qualitative methodology for a study such as this to fully collect and understand lived experiences from two different angles.

Phenomenological research encourages the primary researcher to use her own personal background to further define and discuss the concepts of the research question, purpose and overall study (Moustakas, 1994). It allows for the fact that many researchers are working with content they are personally invested in and care about, creating a situation where their personal history with the topic will fuel their passion for the subject and their interpretation of the results (Moustakas, 1994). As the primary researcher, part

of my methodology and personal motivation in conducting this study was my personal and professional experience at the NCAA mid-major level.

I played softball for many years, ultimately being recruited to compete at a Division I athletics program in the Mid-Atlantic region for team sports. Due to my academic performance I was awarded an academic scholarship upon my entrance into the school, but not an athletic scholarship due to the limited funding available to the athletics program. However, as I competed during my athletic career, I earned an athletic scholarship as well. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have competed for all four years of my eligibility, although, during that time I noticed that not all my teammates shared my passion for our sport. Their attention was drawn away from the team in many ways. For example, through their perception of coach dislike, or professional job or internship opportunities, relationships, or lack of playing time and therefore lack of interest. It especially intrigued me, as a player, to see how my coaches' comments and behavior influenced my teammates' motivation, and even my own.

After graduating, I had an opportunity to return to the program as a Division I coach, and although my tenure as a Division I coach has concluded, I still work with pre-college athletes. I noticed, particularly during my years as a coach at the mid-major program, that what I said and did impacted our team. In addition, some of the things my fellow coworkers said and did also greatly impacted the team, and often individual players. When I had the opportunity to work with coaches at other mid-major programs, I was struck by how they talked about their teams and how those teams subsequently performed. Often their players sought to play *for* their coaches. Their athletes wanted to

play well and perform well because they cared about the time and effort their coaches put into making them better athletes, students, and ultimately, young women. I began to experience a fraction of this as well, and noticed that I could begin to create situations where my athletes were extremely motivated to perform, or, extremely unmotivated to perform.

My curiosity did not subside though, which was part of my ultimate desire to pursue a graduate degree in Educational Psychology and focus on athletics and motivation. After several years of research and writing, the result is this study. I was curious to understand how the phenomenon of athletes' intrinsic motivation is so greatly influenced by their coach's behavior and words, and the experiences of athletes who either have extremely positive or negative experiences within this context.

## **Methodology**

This study is qualitative and followed a phenomenological methodology. Phenomenology is meant to collect participants' feelings and experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This methodology focuses on lived experiences and allows for participant time talking with the interviewer and time analyzing that talk to capture those vivid descriptions and let the experience speak for itself (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers who use this methodology often look for suggestions of directionality (Goose & Winter, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of the methodology is about understanding and describing experiences, ultimately, in relation to other experiences and psychological theory when possible. It seeks to describe the essence of the experience and translate it to what it reveals.

For the purposes of the present study, using a phenomenological approach recorded participants' experiences and drew out the meaning of the relationship between coach and player while highlighting motivational factors. Moustakas' methodology fit well with this study because the main purpose was to analyze and effectively describe coaches' behavioral strategies to influence their players' motivation (1994). Not only did phenomenology allow for extensive description of coach and player experience, it provided the researcher with framework to code and analyze the qualitative data to fully interpret the interactions between the two groups. By focusing on their lived experiences, this research study better describes how and why coach behavior influences athletes in specific ways and how to improve the motivational environment on mid-major athletics programs within NCAA Division I.

Although phenomenology provides a focus on experience, it emphasizes it almost to the extreme, according to Moustakas (1994). For example, focusing only on the object instead of the method would force this study to rely almost exclusively on coach and athlete experiences alone. While heavy emphasis should be placed on their experiences, there is a significant amount of research done on coach and athlete motivation already. It would be remiss to ignore that research and an extreme limitation of this study not to use it as a foundation for data collection and analysis. However, with that being the only exception, Moustakas' methodology for phenomenology was an outstanding way to draw more meaning from coach and athlete descriptions of their experiences concerning motivation. Particularly, it identified nuances at the mid-major level that might not be present at the power-five level of competition.

## **Analysis**

The first step taken after coach and athlete interviews were completed was to fully transcribe the interviews so they could be analyzed. Then, the researcher read through the transcriptions slowly and carefully from start to finish, according to phenomenological procedure (Moustakas, 1994). Once that was complete, the researcher read the same content again, this time coding the content for transitions in meaning. After these transitions were coded, the researcher had material to work with and could extract information. Coding the transitions in meaning gives the researcher:

A series of meaning units or constituents. The researcher then eliminates redundancies and clarifies or elaborates to himself the meaning of the units he just constituted by relating them to each other and to the sense of the whole. The researcher reflects on the given units, still expressed essentially in the concrete language of the subject, and comes up with the essence of that situation for the subject. Each unit is systematically interrogated for what it reveals. The researcher transforms each unit, when relevant, into the language of psychological science. (p. 83)

After data collection was complete and everything was transcribed and coded, the researcher analyzed the data by comparing the similarities between the units drawn out by coding. When the units were too similar, they were merged to eliminate redundancy. In addition, an explanation was written of the remaining meanings in the context of the entire interview. Next using the same words the participants used during the interview, a summary was written for each item. Those summaries were used to connect data points

and write explanations in psychological terms, which were ultimately used to write the final result - the description and comparison of athletes' perceptions of their coaches' motivational behavior. Based on those units, a psychological definition or synthesis was extracted and recorded. The resulting synthesis was sent to all participants for their review and check for accuracy. All participants were contacted for synthesis review, according to the same methods as their recruitment for their participation in the study. When their responses were received, their input dictated any changes that needed to be made in the synthesis. Any changes to the synthesis are discussed during Chapters IV and V of this thesis, as well as the reasoning behind them.

The researcher used all syntheses, in conjunction with the bracketed data and transcripts, for analysis of the first research question, which addresses the study as a whole and compares perceptions of coaches and athletes for accuracy. According to phenomenological methods, the synthesis is meant to represent the essence of the experience(s) and can never be truly exhausted (Moore, 1967; Moustakas, 1994). However, through the multiple, detailed steps of phenomenology, a researcher can derive knowledge of human experience, as is done in this research study (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Sample - Participants**

The participants for this study were four NCAA Division I coaches and eight athletes who play for them. The reason for working with coaches and athletes at the NCAA Division I level was due to the benefits universities, coaches, and athletes stand to gain from improved performance. Division I is considered the highest level of athletic competition in the United States before professional play. As such, it can hold significant

impacts on those who are involved in it. Often the coaches and players involved in these programs have played their sport for years and are highly invested in competing for various reasons. Yet their motivation levels also vary greatly, as demonstrated by past research (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Buning, 2016; Frederick & Morrison, 1999; Gearity, 2012; Goose & Winter, 2012; Sigelman & Bookheimer, 1983). Mid-major programs tend to experience higher turnover among their rosters, and their recruits experience motivation differently than those at the power-five level (Sheehan, 2017). It is necessary, then, to focus solely on this level of competition to fully understand why athletes and coaches experience motivational behavior the way they do.

All participants competed at NCAA Division I universities located within the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. By focusing on the Mid-Atlantic region, there are a number of Division I athletics programs who have similar recruiting strategies and tendencies. This ideally decreased variance caused by geographical location of the athletic program (for example, athletes motivated by weather or other geographical features).

In addition, participants from individual sports were eliminated, since this created a unique type of variance among participants. Each coach and student group was recruited on a voluntary basis from a team sport, after approval from the IRB was received. Although there are similarities between coaches and athletes from individual sports and team sports, the primary focus of this study was team sports. With team sports, coaches interact with more players than the one on one relationship that may be found in individual sports within the NCAA. This was beneficial to the study since it is more

likely that the athletes have perspectives on coach interaction with themselves, and with multiple teammates. However, pairing one coach with multiple athletes allowed the most detailed understanding of specific motivational events between coach and athlete.

The researcher compiled a comprehensive list of all mid-major DI schools within the Mid-Atlantic region. This list was rather large, so a shorter list of schools was compiled based on narrower geographical requirements, meaning schools within a 100-mile radius of Washington, D.C. The coaches who worked at these institutions were to be contacted first, with additional coaches to be contacted as needed from the comprehensive list of schools. After IRB approval was received (see Appendix A), the researcher contacted coaches who met the narrow geographical sampling criteria and requested their participation in the study. When a positive response was received, the researcher contacted each individual IRB office at the university to seek their additional permission to move forward with the research study. When their approval was given, interviews were scheduled with coaches. An overwhelming number of coaches wished to participate in this study, which allowed the researcher to narrow the sample size further. Three coach and athlete groups were a part of the same institution, while one was from a second institution. The second institution represented a very similar school profile as the first, based on school size, academic reputation, and school population. These universities offered similar team sports including, but not limited to: baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, lacrosse, rowing, and volleyball. Both men's and women's sports coaches were included in the sample.



Coaches were contacted first through an initial email explaining more background information for the study. Once an informal agreement was received from the coach, potential athlete participants were identified by the coach and based on the coach's perception of their motivational profiles. After these potential student-athlete participants were identified, the researcher contacted them through an initial email explaining more background information on the study and requesting their participation. All student-athlete participants were between the ages of 18 and 23 years and listed as a "currently active" member of the team's roster. No participants received any tangible benefits from participating in the study. Although intangible benefits included learning of the results of the study, as they apply to the sample, after all data were analyzed and reported.

The location of the interview was decided according to a couple criteria. First, the participant's convenience was taken into account. Second, the location was professional in nature and free of all potential intimidation factors. This means that the location was outside of the field of athletic competition, without a chance of another member of the athletics program staff overhearing the conversation.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

The measure used for this study was a list of open-ended interview questions, which are presented in Appendices B and C. Phenomenology takes a long interview approach and is relatively informal compared to other methods of qualitative studies (Moustakas, 1994). However, it permits the primary researcher to write a list of interview questions to generate conversation during the interview and "evoke a comprehensive account of the person's experiences..." (Moustakas, 1994, p. 11).

There was one list of questions for coaches, and a separate list for student-athletes. Although the questions on each list were paired when possible, they were worded slightly differently so that the perspective matched the appropriate interviewee. In addition, the written interview questions were bracketed according to the phenomenological approach. In order to carry out phenomenological methods properly, the researcher should expect to ask questions of the interviewee that are not included on any pre-determined lists (Moustakas, 1994). This allows the interviewee to express, and the researcher to understand, the uniqueness of the experience in detail (Moustakas, 1994). Since this is the case, the researcher did ask a number of questions during interviews specific to the interviewees' experiences. These questions are not included in Appendices B or C.

For both lists of questions, the first four questions addressed some basic background information about the participant. Specifically, these questions addressed the number of years the participant had been coaching or competing, their current environment, an overview of their connection to the coach or athletes, and a fundamental description of motivation as defined by the participant. These questions were included to better understand key factors that may impact the participant's behavior and/or perception of behavior as it relates to motivation. In particular, the question concerning the participants' definition of motivation helped create a foundation to better understand how the individual interpreted motivation (Frederick & Morrison, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). The questions were worded vaguely so the participant could interpret them as he or she saw fit, and the researcher could ask more specific questions after an initial

response from the participant (Moustakas, 1994). These questions also functioned as a way to easily begin a conversation between the researcher and participant for the remainder of the interview (Goose & Winter, 2012; Moustakas, 1994).

The remainder of the questions for both coaches and athletes make up the majority of the pre-determined questions and relate more specifically to coaches' behavior in influencing motivation. These questions were selected based on information about the coach-athlete relationship as it is presented in Figure 1 and discussed by Mageau and Vallerand (2003). The information presented by Mageau and Vallerand (2003) describes a number of coach behaviors that help or hurt an athlete's autonomy-support. In addition, there are numerous descriptions of "good" and "bad" coach behaviors found in the literature, and are discussed in Chapter II (Alexandra, et al., 2015; Baric & Bucik, 2009; Buning, 2016; Frederick & Morrison, 1999; Gearity, 2012; Gillet et al., 2010; Goose & Winter, 2012; Joessar, et al., 2012; Matosic et al., 2013; Mazer et al., Smith et al., 2016; Zourbanos, et al., 2010; Zucchetti, et al., 2013). This information was useful in selecting and eliminating pre-determined interview questions, because it illuminated situations when coaching behavior may specifically impact athletes' motivation. Questions were chosen and sometimes reworded based on their ability to specifically ask the participant to describe experiences and interactions. The questions were written in a way to try to follow phenomenological methods, allow the participant to explain the experience in their own words, and especially describe what the experience is or was like (Moustakas, 1994).

## **Procedure**

Once IRB approval was received, recruitment of participants began. A list of coach contact information was created from the staff directories of the universities matching the criteria for the study. Specifically, the sampling strategy discussed above dictated which coaches were contacted first. Initially, coaches were sent a brief email requesting their participation in the study and explaining some of the details concerning the study. If a negative response from the coach was received, they were removed from all further communication. If a positive response was received from the coach, the researcher proceeded forward with the appropriate steps to schedule an interview and acquire the paired student-athlete participants. If the coach did not send a response, after one full week (seven days), a second email request was sent to the coach and a phone call made from the researcher to the coach. If no response was received after one week (seven days) after the second response was sent, coaches received a second telephone call from the researcher, in an attempt to make contact and receive a response. After the researcher made two attempts to contact the coach with no response, the researcher did not contact the coach again and proceeded to contact a different school, following the sampling strategy. Only a couple of schools were contacted as a second tier to the original schools and none of their coaches or athletes were able to be included in this research study.

Once an agreement was reached between the coach and the researcher, the researcher requested a recommendation from the coach concerning the paired student-athlete participants, and for contact information. Coaches were asked to identify two athletes based on their motivational characteristics as potential participants to be paired

with themselves for the research study. Once all contact information was received, three separate interviews were scheduled - one with the coach and two with the student-athletes. All interviews were scheduled to last approximately 30-45 minutes each, out of respect for the participants' time and alternative obligations. The interviews lasted approximately 40 minutes each, with some lasting over 60 minutes, depending upon the participant's schedule and desire to continue explaining their experiences.

When possible, the interviews for each group of participants were conducted on the same day. Audio was the primary content collected, with notes from the researcher during the conversation as well. No video materials were collected. Interviews were audio-recorded with a Samsung S6. After each set of interviews, the researcher conducted a brief assessment to determine if adjustments should be made for the remainder of the interviews. The researcher then transcribed the interviews for further analysis, making sure that all interview responses were anonymous. Upon completion of transcription, the interviews were analyzed through coding for definitions of motivation first. The second time through the data, interviews were coded for motivational behavior. Lastly, interviews were coded for any relationship information regarding player and coach interaction. Once coding was complete, the data were analyzed to compare definitions of intrinsic motivation for similarities and/or differences. In addition, the data were analyzed to compare relational implications between the coach and athlete, coach behavior, and athlete motivation. All interviewing, analysis, and coding were done by the researcher.

## **Data Analysis**

The following is a detailed approach to phenomenological methods of analysis as it relates to this study. Once a complete transcription of participants' interviews was created, it was important to read through the material and get an idea of the information as a whole. The researcher then read through the material a second time, this time more slowly and carefully, pulling out a list of terms or sentences to create units for analysis. The next step was horizontalization, or listing every relevant term or unit to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, a process of reduction and elimination took place after the researcher's second reading and extraction of units. Before a term or unit was eliminated, it was tested by two criteria:

1. Does this unit or term contain any specific moment of the participant's experience?
2. Is it important to separate this unit or term to understand it better?

If the answer to both of those criteria was "no", then the unit or term was eliminated. Any duplicate terms or units were eliminated on the sole criteria that it was identical to another unit or term. After this step was complete, a summary or definition was written using as much of the participants' own words as possible. These definitions, with their original unit/term labels, were clustered according to theme. Syntheses of the main themes were drafted and sent to each co-researcher (i.e., each participant) for validation (Moustakas, 1994). When participants' feedback was received about the syntheses, any necessary changes were made according to their words and experiences. Changes were checked according to the following criteria before being made:

1. Is the participant's experience completely and explicitly described in the transcription already?
2. Are the participant's experiences and words consistent between the transcription and the validation response?
3. Is the participant's response relevant to the study?

The changes are discussed as a part of the analysis portion of the study. An example of data bracketed and analyzed according to these steps can be found in Appendix D. Verbatim, anonymous examples are used from participants' transcribed interviews.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. Perhaps one of the largest limitations is the fact that the researcher was the only individual conducting the interviews, coding, and analyzing the data. This provides consistency throughout the material, but also includes any personal bias from the researcher. One way to combat this was to send all transcriptions of the interviews and syntheses to the interviewees for their review. If the interviewees wished to clarify any of their prior comments, they could help remove any confusion, discrepancy or bias that came through.

The researcher also attempted to decrease personal bias in the data analysis by using memo techniques to reflect on her own personal experiences as a former DI mid-major athlete and coach. These techniques helped the researcher identify areas of her own bias and understand her own personal tendencies while analyzing the data. Memoing took

place in the form of self-interviews and general note-taking, and occurred before, during, and after the data collection and analysis process.

Another limitation was the selection of the student-athlete participants. Since the participants were paired, the coaches made the recommendations on which athletes to approach, based on their motivational characteristics. Although the researcher had access to an active roster and could make requests or suggestions about athletes that would work well for the study, there was no way to guarantee that the sample would be perfectly grouped. Regardless of the pairing, the data collected gave insight into the coach and athlete relationship.

### **Implications**

The implications of this study are extensive. By focusing the sample size in such a concentrated way, administrators are able to take specifically applicable results to their universities and make better hiring decisions. Administrators may factor in behavioral items for coaches and athletes, and perhaps even support their coaches more by redefining success to include multiple aspects of coaching. They may also use this information to evaluate their current teams and inform their staff of how to best collaborate for the performance they want while supporting the coaches and athletes.

Coaches will be able to use this information to apply directly to themselves and their teams as well. Teams outside of the Mid-Atlantic region may also be able to use these methods and results to conduct their own studies for in-depth analysis. Perhaps they may even be able to use this study to simply help themselves be more aware of their own behavior during practice, travel, and competition. Coaches can also use the results of this



study to evaluate their intended behavior with the perceptions of their athletes, and make any adjustments as necessary.

Student-athletes will be able to use this information to better understand how their perceptions align with reality. It will help them better understand what their coaches may intend by their behavior, and clear up any confusing communication. Athletes will likely use this research mostly to understand that their desires and goals for their athletic career help motivate and enable their coaches to coach in a positive and healthy, performance-driven manner.

All three of these groups can take the information concerning relationships between coaches and athletes for use in the recruiting process. The relationship between an athlete and their coach typically begins prior to the student's entrance to their college ("NCAA", 2017). In fact, it often begins early in high school, and sometimes prior to high school. Given the importance noted on the relationship between coach and athlete, parents and their children can use this study in their decision-making process, and coaches can use this study to better plan and prepare for their future active rosters.

The NCAA could use this information as they continue to create and discuss future legislation for the body of collegiate athletics in the United States. Although the NCAA is not the only governing body of athletics, it is by far the largest and most competitive. This research may cause them to make changes to current legislation, or create new legislation that applies guidelines for practice and recruiting.

Finally, researchers can use this information as a building block for future research. Many surveys have already been done, and this may help focus research plans

as they continue to take place. Future researchers may also use this qualitative study to strategize the best research methodology for their research questions, and it may encourage more specific interviews to be done across the nation.

## Chapter IV

### Results

The primary purpose of this research study was to understand mid-major Division I coaches' experiences of how they influence their players' intrinsic motivation through behavior, and how similarly their behavior is interpreted by their athletes. The main research questions guiding this study were threefold:

1. How do mid-major DI athletes perceive their coaches' motivational behavior in comparison to their coaches' intentions?
2. How do mid-major DI coaches perceive their use of behavior to intentionally influence their athletes' intrinsic motivation?
3. What do mid-major DI athletes perceive to be motivational behavior from their coach?

As discussed by the literature, SDT is rooted in three, main influencers: autonomy-support, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Coaching motivation, as it relates to student-athlete motivation, is also deeply rooted in these three areas, with autonomy-support functioning as the lynchpin affecting athlete perceptions of all three areas, according to Mageau and Vallerand (2003). The results of this study agree with the model presented and gather specific examples of how athletes' perceptions of

their coach's behavior matched the coach's intent in many cases, but mismatched in others.

Throughout the interviews, athlete perceptions and coach intent of behavior was consistent in areas emphasizing high effort, continuous improvement and goal achievement, coach feedback, social connectedness and relatedness, and coach belief in players' abilities. The areas that produced dissimilar experiences were techniques used by the coach to specifically push or challenge athletes through negative feedback, and the intent behind athlete punishment. In addition, athletes who expressed higher levels of motivation, as defined by themselves and their coaches, also spoke of the frequency and comfort in approaching their coach on or off the field of play. During interviews, coaches often spoke from a perspective of trying to motivate and initiate effort for their athletes through their own actions. However, athlete perceptions and responses to those attempts differed at times. There were three main themes produced from data analysis: coaching behaviors that impact training motivation, coaching behaviors that impact competition motivation, and coaching behaviors that impact social connectedness and team cohesion. These themes became apparent as a result of the data analysis. Training motivation relates very closely to autonomy-supportive behavior and includes information from athletes and coaches concerning coach encouragement of effort and mastery of skill versus extrinsic motivators from the coach. Competition motivation represents coaches' and athletes' perceptions of competence and results-oriented actions among coach behavior. Lastly, social connectedness and team cohesion as impacted by coaching behaviors represents coaches' and athletes' perceptions of inclusiveness and an effort to

create an environment of community and relationship between coach and athlete. In some cases, it may represent more non-inclusiveness than inclusiveness (which would equate to perceptions of a lack of these behaviors from the coach).

As discussed earlier, the first research question encompasses the other two and directed the overall purpose of this research study. Given this information, the question, “How do mid-major Division I athletes perceive their coaches’ motivational behavior in comparison to their coaches’ intentions?” will be addressed last and lead directly into the discussion of the results in Chapter V. Meanwhile, the other two research questions lead us into the results from data collection.

### **Coaches’ perceptions of their own behavioral influence**

First, let’s look at the results pertaining to coaches’ own perceptions of their use of behavior to intentionally influence their athletes’ intrinsic motivation. All coaches who participated in this research study expressed the importance of athlete effort when it comes to training, motivation, and achievement “...*there’s only two things you can control and that’s your attitude and your effort,*” and, “*It’s not the result, it’s the level of attitude and effort that you give that matters,*” and “...*frankly, most of it is the other pieces that you’re teaching them – how to work hard for a goal even though you don’t know if you’re going to achieve that goal.*” Their methods to encourage individual athlete effort differed, however, although the intent in many cases was very similar. Coaches sought to develop and encourage consistent effort among their athletes so they performed at a higher level on the field of play and/or improved themselves as people through hard work towards a goal. For example, some coaches emphasized focus on the

process of getting better to their athletes, explaining that mistakes are a part of the process to success (on and off the field), and it takes time to achieve that success. *“And we talk about process a lot here. It’s not gonna happen overnight, this is a sport that takes years to master,”* and, *“I knew it’s a process. It doesn’t happen overnight. You guys need to keep racing harder. But every week we added something to our race plan.”* Coaches emphasized this verbally, strategically within the sport, and physically. They even, to a degree, quantified it so their athletes could think about it practically, *“We talk about two percent, every time you walk on the floor, two percent improvement only. Which may seem small, but over time, that two percent becomes pretty big.”*

However, some coaches recognized effort as critical to the production of success, but their attempts to produce it were different. For example, some coaches took a more aggressive approach by challenging their athletes, *“I’m gonna come and we’re watching film tomorrow on this. I texted her yesterday and it wasn’t a question of, ‘Hey, are we gonna watch film?’ It was like, ‘Okay, are we watching film Thursday or Friday?’”* and, *“...little bit tougher on her, when we start a new drill. With players, that helps the others realize that this is important.”* This contrasts with the process-oriented approach because, even though the focus is on effort and development, the environment created is less autonomy-supportive.

Coaches identified different behavior when working with athletes they considered to be very motivated or less motivated. The difference between their interactions with these two types of athletes can be termed “pushing their athletes” versus “protecting their athletes” or “push versus protect.” When discussing their behavior with lesser motivated

athletes, coaches recognized the need to push their athletes differently than those who are already highly intrinsically motivated, *“You need to constantly be behind them, pushing them saying, ‘Let’s go, let’s go, let’s go,’ and, ‘One of the big things is challenging them...pushing them to a higher level.’* Coach participants also noticed their personal reactions to their athletes could change depending on the level of effort produced by an individual or a team, *“Depending upon how I view their work ethic, will dictate my level of excitement or aggressiveness,”* which means sometimes coaches punish athletes who are not putting in their highest level of effort:

*“There are other days where I’ve kicked them out of the gym early...and I feel horrible about it. And it stays with me for a little while, but the message has been sent that it’s not the result, it’s the level of attitude and effort that you give that matters.”*

When discussing their behavior with highly motivated athletes, coaches described using different behavior, *“I’ve always said, like, great athletes need to be held back and protected.”* And:

*“...it’s making sure that she doesn’t climb so much inside just [the sport] that she enjoys the rest of her college experience. I think that’s the biggest piece, just talking to her, because [the sport] is so important. But at the end of the day, you’re not gonna make a living, probably with that. So, you know, I don’t want you to stop working, but I also want you to have time to stop and smell the roses.”*

One common perception coaches had of their own behavior concerned their use of explanations. The coaches described telling their athletes “the why” or sharing with the

athlete the purpose behind actions and/or words, *“I explain everything of what we’re doing day in and day out, so the task is with them. They never come to practice and do something that they don’t know why we’re doing it.”* Some discussed their perceived impact of explanations on athletes and how helping them understand the purpose of what they do is beneficial:

*“Asking them what they’re trying to get out of this, and why they are playing...is really important as you go forward, because then you can bring it back to why they say they’re there, it’s not coming from us.”*

Coaches perceived that, by explaining why they use a certain drill, or teaching their athletes to understand why they do certain things in their sport, athletes would access an internal drive.

Coaches perceived a need to be overly positive when communicating with their athletes. They understood positive feedback to be encouraging, but also used it because they purposefully understood their roles as coaches can sometimes appear more critical, *“If your name is coming through a megaphone, it’s usually because we want you to change something or adjust. And over time that can be very negative.”* This is due to the natural tendency of coaches to consistently point out ways to improve and several coaches discussed intentionally trying to be frequently positive, *“sometimes [coaches] gotta point out the good things equally if not more [than the bad things].”* Coaches understood their physical behavior to reflect positivity, too, when they pumped their fists in the air or gave their players high fives. Verbal praise was also a common behavior among coaches:



*“There are times when I will, at the end of a play, um, you know, yell a guy’s name out, and everybody immediately looks at me and I walk out on the court and I’m high-fiving ‘em going, ‘That’s the best play I’ve seen you make all day.’”*

*And:*

*“...there have been days in the past where I just pump my fists in the air, and can’t get enough and at the end of practice I’m energized, and I’m refocused and things are great.”*

All coach participants discussed moments where things “clicked” or when things fell into place for their team or one of their athletes. They perceived this to happen for several reasons, for those very process focused, they interpreted the “click” moment to be a result of the process. Others encountered an external factor, like a negative comment from another team, or a tragedy affecting team members, that impacted team performance. Experiencing those times was extremely motivational for coaches, *“Once they get something, they work really hard towards a goal and then they achieve it, watching them and the expression, and the kind of joy that they feel...is inspirational.”* There are several ways coaches tried to instigate a “click” moment by getting their players to believe in themselves and their abilities. One method is by giving athletes proof of their improvement over time. One coach created a graph over a six-week training period for athletes and tracked their progress until, at the end of the six weeks, the coach showed his athletes their first week and last week, with huge improvements shown. Coaches also use verbal expression of belief in their players, *“I believe in you*

*guys, you guys have shown...you guys have done the work, your body is prepared, it's ready for this."*

Finally, one other thing coaches perceived about their own behavior concerned their relationships and connectedness to their athletes. Many of them intentionally sought out times to speak to players about their lives, *"I try to make sure I'm out where all the girls converge 15 or 20 minutes before the workout. And I really try not to talk anything about [competing]...and I kinda get a feel for how the girls are doing."* Another coach specifically scheduled "Ten Minute Meetings" with his team to discuss anything at all, and included his coaching staff in a rotation so all players and coaches grew comfortable communicating with each other. Several coaches mentioned how important communication is to building relationships with their players and the motivation of the team. Furthermore, coaches made an effort to share things from their own personal lives, in moderation, and perceived it added to their level of approachability with the athletes, *"I started bringing my daughters around a little bit more so they saw my personality and I just actually became a human."* Coaches tried to create an environment that demonstrated care for athletes as individuals, while still maintaining a level of professionalism and distance from athletes' social lives. Coaches discussed a very distinct line between being their athletes' friend versus being their coach. Coaches wanted to be a resource for their athletes and know about their personal lives, but were not interested in getting involved in their athletes' daily social lives:

*"...in general, my statement to them is that I am your head coach, not your bro.*

*Um, I'm not, you know, gonna give you the shaka at practice and drink beers and*

*do all those things. My job is to create a safe environment where they can thrive and get better and learn life skills, and, and when they're done with it all, uh, and they graduate, at that point our relationship as friends takes on that new role."*

And:

*"But they are able to come to me and contact me, uh, for things outside of [our sport]. Obviously not their social life, that I really, for lack of a better term, I don't want anything to do with that. Ah, I don't believe that's my place. But as far as the academics are concerned or, you know, if there's something with a family issue, they know that my door, it's an open-door policy."*

So, while coaches specifically sought out instances to connect and relate to their athletes, there was a limit to what they felt was appropriate, given their position of authority.

The main difference among coaches' perceptions of their behavior is primarily through their intentional methodology to impact athletes' effort and internal drive. They expressed altering their behavior slightly according to athletes' different personalities, but discussed their focus and intent in the same manner. Since the purpose of their different actions is the same – to motivate their athletes – it's time to evaluate the athletes' perceptions of their coaches' behavior to set up the comparison between the two.

### **Athlete perceptions of their coach's behavior**

Next, it is necessary to address the question, what do mid-major Division I athletes perceive to be motivational behavior from their coach? The data pertaining to this question sets up the final research question and the comparison between coaches' perceptions and athletes' perceptions, which was the main purpose of the research study.

Athletes expressed a variety of athletic backgrounds – from being extremely extrinsically motivated through recognition and competitive results, to nearly solely focused on the process of getting better and improving. Their responses to what motivated them on an individual level were incredibly diverse.

When asked about their own motivation and what it means to be motivated, athletes expressed a hunger. They verbalized that hunger in different ways, for example, *“Being motivated looks like pushing yourself in the weight room doing more weight than you think you can, but you're still trying. You're trying to increase reps or increase the weight,”* and, *“I feel like I'm most motivated when I get recognized for what I do, and then it motivates me to keep at it,”* or, *“Honestly, it's like, all in my head, like I have to do it.”* This information gives context to how athletes view actions from their coach. It demonstrates there are at least several filters which athletes use to interpret coaching behavior. It also begins to differentiate intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among athletes.

All athletes experienced increased motivation when they noticed their teammates giving high effort. Many of the athletes spoke of their teammates' effort and persistence as motivational:

*“But then she's been, there's been little things that have been still giving her [physical] trouble. But she, even in the fall when we had our run test. She did all of them and she did great...So, it just like, has always impressed me that she can motivate me that much when she's gotta, it's probably a lot harder for her.”*

And:

*“...he sprinted over, dove, got a touch on it, but smacked his face on a pole. And still he's got a huge scar on his face right now. It looked like he knocked himself out... We didn't even win the point, but the fact that he went for it, sacrificed his body for it, that's what's motivating to me.”*

These examples serve as further illustration for how important high effort is to athletes' experiences of intrinsic motivation.

There were three, specific behaviors and/or environments athletes perceived from their coaches: those which were process-oriented and encouraged mistakes as a part of the learning process, those which used both positive and negative coach feedback to instruct and motivate, and those which emphasized extrinsic rewards and/or recognition. All athletes spoke to their connectedness within the team and how motivating it was to be a part of a group working hard together to achieve their collective goals.

The first behavior athletes perceived as motivational, the process-oriented environment, emphasized just how much can be learned through making mistakes. These are not to be confused with environments where making a mistake is acceptable. Instead they are inevitable, and beneficial when used as a learning moment, *“He came in with the mindset, ‘I don't care if you miss 20 of these balls, if you keep hitting them, and hitting them hard, eventually you're gonna become great and they're all gonna go in.’”* Not very many athletes expressed working in an environment where they felt safe to make mistakes, but one athlete described it like this, *“And he would motivate us, he would say, ‘Doesn't matter if you win, you just give it your best.’”* Other athletes spoke of verbal praise when they spent time working on bringing weak areas of their game to a higher

level, *“last week he called me out in front of the team and said that I wasn’t scoring a lot of goals, but I was like, working really hard. And that’s...something I’ve been trying really hard to work on... So, I just appreciated that he noticed something that we both knew I needed to work on.”*

Athletes also identified their coach’s use of positive and negative feedback to be motivational in some cases. Several athletes talked about perceiving confidence from their coach in performance situations, which they interpreted as motivational. They believed their coach’s confidence and trust in them to get the job done, and connected it with a desire to work hard and perform:

*“And he tells me, ‘You have the potential to be All-American, one of the top [players]in the country.’ And I believe it in the back of my head and I get extremely motivated, 'cause I just want to work that much harder to see if I can actually make it come to fruition.”*

Even in practice situations that implicated they would see playing time or during game simulations during practice, athletes sensed motivation:

*“I’d say [he showed confidence in me] when I first started getting better, when he put me on the A side I really felt, I felt the confidence. It was like, ‘Wow! I actually made it. I’m actually here on the A side because I’ve been on the B side for forever, before I actually made it there.”*

And:

*“...he’ll write up a play for me to, just for me to be the finisher. Or catch and shoot at the end, and I’m like, ‘Okay, he has confidence in me to catch this ball*

*and make the play and take the shot and score.' So, it's just things like that, where out of everyone on the team, he can see everyone's individual abilities and he picks mine out for this specific role and puts me in that."*

Athletes could easily verbalize moments when their coaches demonstrated confidence in them and described how it motivated them.

In contrast to this information, several athletes discussed interactions with their coaches which they perceived to include negative feedback, punishment, and/or criticism from their coach when they made a mistake. According to the athletes, sometimes their coaches reacted to different kinds of mistakes based on the type of mistake made. For example:

*"If he yells at us or is frustrated, it's because he knows you can do that or he expects you to do that. It's when an easy play is messed up or a lack of communication happens, that's when he gets frustrated."*

This was often the case when a simple, routine play was mishandled. Athletes perceived frustration from their coaches in those situations and experienced negative feedback in those moments. When coaches reacted very strongly in what athletes perceived to be minor situations, their internal reaction was one of un-motivation:

*"Me, personally...I was going through the motions. I wasn't doing anything wrong, I wasn't doing anything right, and so she yells to me in front of, like screams, in front of everyone...and it doesn't affect you only that day. It kind of affects you, a comment in front of everyone that makes you think, it makes you think about your whole career. That's just kind of like a damaging comment."*

In situations like that, athletes expressed embarrassment due to the delivery and timing of the comments, and the message the content communicated, too. Even if it is meant to instigate motivation from the athlete, it provoked a certain kind of response from the athlete at the time and sometimes over the course of a long time:

*“...it became a running joke that it was just a roast session of me and this other guy. ‘Cause it was me, come at me, come at this other guy, this other [player], me, this other [player], me, this other [player], throw in another guy, back to me, back to this other [player], me, me again, and that's what it felt like. And it, it was kind of hard to deal with at that time.”*

Other times athletes perceived open and honest negative feedback from their coach and expressed fueled motivation because of it:

*“And it came down to me and one other girl to fill that last spot, so he called us both into his office, one at a time. And he ended up picking the other girl and just said, ‘Oh, the numbers worked out better and we don't want this to deter you, but we are [picking the other girl].’ ...[during a workout] a week after he made his decision and one of [my teammates] came up to me, but right before we started and was like, ‘Use this to show him why he's wrong.’ And the whole time [that] fueled me to do well on it...and it might have even motivated me more in a different way, ‘cause then it felt like I had something to prove and like someone to prove wrong.”*

The primary difference between athletes' motivational responses to negative feedback from their coach appeared to be the overall message or delivery from the coach,



meaning the coach's communication of the athlete's level of control in making a change and impact future negative feedback. This can be thought of in terms of "controllable" or "uncontrollable" situations from the athletes' perspectives. A more detailed analysis of this result will be discussed in Chapter V.

The third specific coaching behavior athletes perceived involved extrinsic rewards and recognition. When their coach gave them positive feedback, especially relating to their work ethic and effort, athletes expressed their eagerness to keep working and improving:

*"he'll give me advice and I'll set my mind to trying to do exactly what he just told me. And I think he recognizes that, so when he does recognize that you did just what he told you, he gets like, really excited. And like, gets you excited about what you're doing."*

Another athlete described his coach's use of a compete-o-meter to recognize his team's level of energy:

*"And it's a half-circle and it's got a bar and the lowest is like, "You're Asleep," and it goes, "Okay," "Good," "Average," "Great." And then it's "Semper-Fi." Just like the Marine Corps. And when that happens, that means our compete-o-meter's at an all-time high. And when I'm motivated is when [my coach] would say we're at a Semper-Fi mode."*

Not only could this athlete describe the meter in detail, he also used specific instances of how his coach used it to recognize individual athlete effort:

*“I think the first time he used it was last year. We were in practice and I dislocated my finger. And we had a lot of people on the team who were kinda babying out of practice. If something was hurt they would literally just be sitting and they wouldn't practice. I dislocated my finger, it was like sideways backwards. And went to the trainer, got it taped up, came back in and played. And [my coach] was like, that was Semper-Fi.”*

Several athletes expressed instances like this, where their coach recognized their individual effort, and they felt even more driven to continue working hard and giving their best effort. Athletes felt recognized and validated in their efforts when coaches acknowledged the athletes' work, “...he pulled me to the side and he's like, ‘We found a little bit of scholarship money we can give you, because we want to reward you for the good work you've done.’” One athlete recognized his own work and sought out his coach's recognition in a nostalgic manner, but still found it motivational:

*“I'd told [my coach] that it was one year today that he assign - that he moved me to [a new position]. And it was like, to see where I started to where I'd come, now being one of the top guys in the gym, he was like, ‘See man, I told you there would be something up.’”*

Athletes went on to describe the impact of those actions on their relationships with the coaches, “I felt especially connected to him at that point, too.”

In addition, some athletes mentioned how much their coach's communication played a role in their motivation and comfort level. Although these comments were not unanimous, a number of athletes expressed how much communication with their coach is

important to them and encouraged or discouraged their senses of relatedness, “*I guess any distrust would kind of be, not on the field at all. It wouldn’t be game situations or anything it would just be other, like, communication barriers.*” And, “*...just having communication with the coach is really important [to experience connection],*” and:

*“[My coach’s] door is always open. If I literally just want to go talk about something, it’s normally [sport] related or future career-path related...it’s always open. With [my other coach], I could do that, but I never really felt comfortable doing it, I guess.”*

### **Comparison of coach and athlete perceptions**

Here the perceptions of athletes and coaches are compared, addressing the final research question: how do mid-major Division I athletes perceive their coaches’ motivational behavior in comparison to their coaches’ intentions? The results from the data indicated coaches and athletes had similar perceptions of motivational behavior as it relates to the importance of effort and positive feedback or coaches expressing confidence in their players’ abilities. One minor difference in experiences of positive feedback was just how significantly coach recognition of the athlete impacted athlete motivation. While coaches used recognition to motivate athletes, athletes found recognition to be especially motivating, and discussed just how much it impacted their intrinsic motivation when the coach used recognition to reward effort.

Differing opinions were presented concerning negative feedback and criticism and the effect they have on motivation – from both coaches and athletes. Both groups, however, agreed too much negative feedback has a detrimental effect on motivation.

Some coaches used negative feedback to motivate their athletes, and some athletes were more motivated by negative feedback while other athletes were less motivated by it.

Coaches who utilized verbal praise and recognition, even though they are classified as extrinsic motivators, were able to connect and boost motivation more than those who struggled to communicate those things to their athletes. Communication was key in creating connection between athletes and coaches, and initiating a level of comfort and relationship.

Verbatim quotes from participant transcripts are used throughout this chapter to illustrate the detail of coach and athlete experiences. In addition, there is a comparison summary of verbatim quotes compiled in Appendix E.

Both coaches and athletes emphasized the importance of effort, *“I would say [effort] is the most important thing. I think he recognizes who has the potential and skill and who doesn’t. But I think he believes that everybody has the ability to put the same amount of effort in.”* And, *“...the message has been sent that it’s not the result, it’s the level of attitude and effort that you give that matters,”* or, *“That’s one of the things, our coach says, ‘The only thing you can truly control in the gym is your attitude and effort.’”*

Similarly, coaches and athletes expressed the necessity of positive feedback in relation to motivation, strategically evaluating the best ways to give positive feedback, *“It’s kind of a, we did great on this, now we gotta work on this. It’s not the word ‘but’ it’s the word ‘now.’”* And, *“...he’s pretty much coaching me on how to coach others. It’s more like, ‘You gotta be positive to this guy’ or ‘You gotta go tell this team this.’”* And, *“I’m impacted when it’s something positive where he makes a positive comment or*

*something about me, then I'll be like, 'Oh yeah, I want to keep this up.'*” Some coaches understood positivity to be necessary more often, using negative feedback less often, as illustrated earlier in this chapter.

Athletes agreed with that mentality, and expressed how much positive feedback means to them, *“Just telling me, 'That's good work, man, that's good stuff.' And I'm like, 'Appreciate it a lot.'”* Specifically, athletes found recognition of their hard work and high effort to be extremely motivational and spoke about the impact that type of positive feedback from their coach had on them:

*“...last week he called me out in front of the team and said that I wasn't scoring a lot of goals, but I was like, working really hard. And that's...something I've been trying really hard to work on... So, I just appreciated that he noticed something that we both knew I needed to work on.”*

Coaches understood instruction and explanation to be beneficial to motivation, *“I think the big thing is talking to them, communicating with them. And making sure they understand what's expected of them.”* And, *“We try to create an environment here where we're learning and growing at the same time.”* Meanwhile athletes responded strongly to any recognition of their effort and athletic prowess, for example, *“When he'll just say, like, 'Good job, I saw you working hard today.' That is motivating, too.”* And, *“...when he's like, 'Man, we're good. We could go up against the best teams in the country.’”*

Many coaches understood the importance in using praise and speaking confidence to their athletes.

However, coaches and athletes did not always communicate the same perceptions concerning negative feedback. In some cases, coaches understood their intent to be positive, but understood their delivery could be construed as negative, as illustrated during the coach results earlier in this chapter. This is also corroborated by another example, with a description of how one coach tries to reverse negative impacts on athlete intrinsic motivation:

*“Pointing that out and trying to raise that level so that he understands that it’s not just us being picky and critical, and mean or negative, whatever the term is you want to use, it’s that, ‘They actually see something in me.’ and allowing him to see it as well.”*

And:

*“One of the players...little bit tougher on her, when we start a new drill. With players, that helps the others realize that this is important. ‘If that person is being pushed by the coaches, then, heck well this must be important, so I’m gonna do this really well also.’ But then following up with that player immediately after practice and like, ‘Oh do you understand why we’re doing this, or why I’m doing this? It’s for these reasons.’ And I think that makes it easiest. And in the moment, they don’t always understand it.”*

And:

*“...there are other choices they make where I’m gonna put my arm around them and I’m gonna put my foot square in their butt and say, ‘Hey, that’s not acceptable and we’ve got to do a better job of recognizing an opportunity to make*

*a better decision.’ Some are more stern than others, others are softer than others.”*

However, some athletes responded positively to negative feedback, expressing heightened motivation and effort, while others responded negatively portraying a hopelessness or helplessness and decreased overall motivation. A comparison is presented earlier in this chapter, with supplemental examples here:

*“...that's one of the things I've learned the past two years, especially with [my coach]...just to accept criticism. Criticism for the most part, it's not bad at all. It's one of those things where you just have to take it and understand that you need to, you need to do this in order to be successful.”*

And:

*“Or, ‘You’re doing something, like you might have done that one thing right, but everything else was wrong.’ So, it’s just you know, if I make a good play and [score], and then she comes and tells me, ‘Okay, that was fine, but it was in the wrong situation and you weren’t moving your feet.’ And that’s just kind of things where you in your head where like, ‘Oh, that was great.’ Then immediately switch roles, like, “No, it wasn’t.””*

Even when those situations arose and coaches fully explained their intentions to the athletes, the athletes did not always perceive those sentiments, *“I enjoy constant feedback, but at the same time when you’re on me 24/7, in like a negative way, it doesn’t help me.”* And:

*“He might be going a different way. I think if he had done it on a more personal level, where it wasn't everyone [on the field], and he's just targeting me, and instead he brought me inside one day and just showed me these things. Then it might have come across better to me.”*

The comparison between coach and athlete perceptions of coach behavior in general revealed many more experiences related to training motivation compared to competition motivation or experiences of relatedness, and this may be due in part to the ratio between practice time spent and competition time spent. Many of the experiences communicated during data collection expressed similar perceptions of coaching behavior, with some differences, particularly concerning negative feedback or criticism. What may be most interesting is coach perception of their use of verbal praise and encouragement or communication of confidence in athletic performance and how that compared to athlete perception of the same information. For example, almost all athletes who participated in the study easily expressed specific experiences when their coach recognized their efforts in some form or another. Almost all coaches also identified experiences when they encouraged and recognized their athletes for their work.

### **Emergent Results**

There are a couple additional results that came out of the data analysis for this research study which present potential future areas of research. These additional results are worth noting as emergent results because they add context to this research study and better describe the unique experiences of participants. These results include coach and



athletes' experiences of similar motivational constructs or similar personal motivational tendencies, and the role teammates play in athletes' intrinsic motivation.

First, let's discuss one consistent point of similarity between coaches and athletes that addresses a finding that is supplemental to the three research questions for this study, but provides interesting context concerning the remainder of the discussion for the study. One thing that remained relatively consistent between coach and athlete was the tone set by the coach was often mirrored by their own athletes. For example, one coach was driven by personal motivation to "prove people wrong." He spoke of a time when he was motivated as a coach:

*"However, near last year, a university said something about us, that we didn't like. And I heard about it, basically they said that we were afraid to race them because they beat us. And that's motivation for me because I know that wasn't true."*

He went on to tell how his team wound up facing this opponent and how driven they were to beat the opponent because of what was said. This example from the coach's perceptions alone demonstrates the impact a coach's behavior can have on performance, at least for one event. However, there are a couple other pieces of information that corroborate this particular example.

This coach also spoke of an interaction with one athlete in particular, and an attempt to motivate her,

*"...there's a girl on our team now who's from Long Island. And she's very proud about Long Island...she was starting to fatigue, it was [during a workout], she*

*was really tired...and so I just walked over to her, and I said, "Is this how Long Island girls [compete]? Is this what I should expect?" Not knowing what kind of response I'd get from her. And I know, I realized that might upset her, because I know I'm taking a shot against her. And if I criticize her about Long Island [athletes], she's not going to like that. So, now she's going to want to prove me wrong."*

This mentality and attitude was then reflected in an athlete interview. This athlete spoke about her reaction to a time when her coach had to make a tough decision and she did not quite make the top group of athletes, despite working very hard: *"I still worked the same and put in effort the same. And it might have even motivated me more in a different way, 'cause then it felt like I had something to prove and, like, someone to prove wrong."*

Another emergent result is the role teammates play in athletes' intrinsic motivation. There are several instances, which were mentioned earlier in this chapter, where participants for this study identified their teammates' impacting their motivation: *"...[during a workout] a week after he made his decision and one of [my teammates] came up to me, but right before we started and was like, 'Use this to show him why he's wrong.' And the whole time [that] fueled me to do well on it."* And, *"...We didn't even win the point, but the fact that [my teammate] went for it, sacrificed his body for it, that's what's motivating to me,"* or, *"So, it just like, has always impressed me that she can motivate me that much when she's gotta, it's probably a lot harder for her."* Teammates clearly play a role in each other's motivation. This is critical

information for coaches to know, if they don't already, because if a coach can have an impact on one athlete's intrinsic motivation, it could impact other players on his team. This could help coaches improve team intrinsic motivation more effectively and efficiently.

## Chapter V

### Discussion

According to Self-Determination Theory, there are three main areas of influence on an individual's motivation – their sense of autonomy, their sense of competence, and their sense of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This theory, as reflected in the athletic world and demonstrated by Mageau and Vallerand's (2003) model, shows how coaching behavior can impact athletes' perceptions of those needs. This research study was conducted to evaluate coach and athlete perceptions of coaching behavior and compare them to gain a better understanding of how coaches try to intrinsically motivate their athletes. This study fills a gap in the existing research as it addressed both coach and athlete perceptions of coach behavior through qualitative phenomenological methods. It sought to answer the following questions: How do mid-major Division I athletes perceive their coaches' motivational behavior in comparison to their coaches' intentions? How do mid-major Division I coaches perceive their use of behavior to intentionally influence their athletes' intrinsic motivation? What do mid-major Division I athletes perceive to be motivational behavior from their coach? The results indicated coaches' and athletes' perceptions of motivational behavior were similar in areas of effort, positive feedback, and instruction. However, their perceptions primarily differed on negative feedback and its impact on motivation. Most coaches and athletes expressed perceptions of behavior

that tied to training motivation through autonomy-supportive behavior. Perceptions of relatedness correlated to more experiences of connectedness between athletes, coaches, and teammates. Perceptions of competition motivation tied to more experiences of extrinsic motivation and motivation for performance.

The model presented by Mageau and Vallerand (2003) indicates autonomy-supportive to be most influential in athletes' perceptions of their three motivational needs. For the purposes of this study, coach and athlete perceptions supported this model's structure. Although no coaches or student-athletes specifically labeled any of their perceptions as autonomy-supportive, competence, or relatedness, a number of their descriptions fit into one of those three categories, especially as they are described in other literature (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Bartholomew et al., 2009; Bekiari, Stefanos, & Vassilis, 2015; Buning, 2016; Choi, Cho, & Huh, 2013; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Mazer et al., 2013; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Rocchi et al., 2013). There are some differences between coaches' perceptions of their own intent to help, teach, and motivate their athletes, in comparison to athletes' descriptions of their perceptions of extrinsic and/or controlling behavior from their coach. Virtually all athletes perceived their coaches cared for them and intended the best for them, however some of their descriptions of coaching behavior demonstrated extrinsic and/or controlling behavior. However, these cases were not as many as those coaches and athletes whose perceptions agreed upon the intrinsic motivational environment and support of the three basic needs for motivation.

As revealed in Chapter IV, coaches and athletes had similar perceptions of high effort as it correlates with intrinsic motivation, process-oriented environments, positive feedback from the coach – especially coach recognition and confidence in athlete ability, social connectedness, and personal motivation tendencies. Their perspectives differed primarily regarding negative feedback from the coach. A table summary of the key comparison points for each of these areas can be found in Appendix F.

### **High Effort**

It became apparent early during the data collection period just how unique each individual's motivation is, and the degree to which athletes' perceptions of their coaches' behavior influences it. For example, several athletes used similar phrases and expressed similar roots to their personal motivation when compared to their individual coaches. For example, there are many unique definitions for motivation, especially when interviewing individuals one-on-one as in this research study. And although not one of the participants had the exact same definition as another, there was a significant underlying theme: effort. Whether or not the participant spoke from individual or internal motivation, playing for teammates or enjoying the time spent in sport, every single participant expressed the fact that each sport requires a certain level of hard work and intentionality. Effort was described as key from both coach and athlete perspectives, *"It's everything...And if you don't have motivation, the desire to work hard really goes away, especially in our sport."*

Coaches have the ability to harness what an athlete cares about intrinsically to help improve athletic performance and effort. The athlete's level of effort is something that is impacted by many factors, but ultimately controlled within each individual athlete

(Gillet et al., 2010; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Waldron & Krane, 2005), which is one reason why the present research study is so valuable to coaches – so they can better understand how to encourage all their athletes to give their best effort out of intrinsic motivation. In fact, many coaches and athletes who participated in this research study talked about effort as one of the basic requirements of motivation. Effort is something everyone has the ability to contribute, even if there are other factors influencing how much best effort truly is on a daily basis (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Gillet et al., 2010; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Waldron & Krane, 2005), *“I think he believes that everybody has the ability to put the same amount of effort in.”* And, *“That’s one of the things, our coach says, ‘The only thing you can truly control in the gym is your attitude and effort.’”* Coaches may not even need to instruct the athlete on a physical skill to improve in order to help athletes increase effort. Instead they can connect the athlete’s performance to his or her level of effort and intrinsic desire. This is a very practical way to harness intrinsic and self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation to help athletes improve their effort (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

### **Process-Oriented Environment**

Some coaches and athletes described competing in process-oriented environments, or environments where the coach feels it’s okay for athletes to make mistakes. The idea behind this type of environment is to encourage aggressiveness, improvement, and effort from athletes. Coaches fully understood that mistakes are a part of the learning process and used this information to try to improve their athletes’ motivation. For example, some coaches verbally acknowledged their acceptance of

mistakes made by their team, so long as the team was giving full effort. This freed up their athletes to perform without fear of their coach becoming angry or frustrated at them. It also built athletes' senses of autonomy-support and competence since effort is something easily and fully controlled by the individual (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

In situations where the coach was less process-oriented in their instruction with athletes, mistakes were taken more seriously by both athlete and coach. Specifically, these environments were more focused on performance results, and coaches reacted strongly in good and bad situations during practices and games. Athletes knew this about their coach and at times expressed fear of doing the wrong thing because they may be the recipient of verbal aggression from their coach. In terms of the model presented by Mageau and Vallerand (2003), this could be described as controlling behavior from the coach. In addition, it supports Figure 1 since the coach's use of non-autonomy-supportive behavior with their athletes impacts more than athletes' sense of autonomy, it also impacts their competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Ultimately, having a detrimental influence on athletes' intrinsic and self-determined forms of extrinsic motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

### **Positive Feedback**

As discussed in Chapter IV, coach and athlete perception of positive feedback was similar, with athletes' motivation greatly increasing with coach recognition of athlete effort and athletic ability. The affirmation athletes received from their coaches helps them access an increased internal drive (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).



This internal drive is good for coaches and athletes because it connects to the “hunger” athletes discussed when they talked about what it means to be motivated. This is very positive for performance implications and general athlete well-being and experience in their sport (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Furthermore, the confidence coaches expressed in their athletes’ skill impacted the overall sense of competence among their athletes.

Coaches looking for a way to maximize their influence on intrinsic motivation in their athletes should take serious note of their use of positive feedback. Chapter IV communicates that coaches valued positive feedback and used it to help their athletes. However, the detailed descriptions athletes used when discussing moments of recognition and confidence from their coach create a strong case that not all coaches know how far their positive feedback goes in impacting their athletes. Coaches may want to strategically implement more opportunities for their athletes to receive such feedback from them. If not for improved intrinsic motivation, then for the improved social connection, trust, and communication it establishes with the athlete (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

### **Negative Feedback**

Not all coach feedback improved athlete motivation, though. Coaches and athletes’ perceptions of feedback can differ. The primary difference between athletes’ and coaches’ perceptions of coaching behavior in this research study centered on negative feedback. All coaches who employed negative feedback understood a ratio of positive to negative feedback must be unbalanced in favor of the positive end of the spectrum. However, some coaches intentionally used negative feedback as a means to motivate

their athletes. The following examples are presented in Chapter IV and included again here for quick reference during discussion:

*“One of the players...little bit tougher on her, when we start a new drill. With players, that helps the others realize that this is important. ‘If that person is being punished by the coaches, then, heck well this must be important, so I’m gonna do this really well also.’ But then following up with that player immediately after practice and like, ‘Oh, do you understand why we’re doing this, or why I’m doing this? It’s for these reasons.’*

And:

*“...there are other choices they make where I’m gonna put my arm around them and I’m gonna put my foot square in their butt and say, ‘Hey, that’s not acceptable and we’ve got to do a better job of recognizing an opportunity to make a better decision.’”*

Both coaches perceived their own strictness, and both coaches perceived their own intent to help the athlete understand why they are being strict. This should, according to the literature, build perceptions of autonomy-support within the athlete (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). However, even though their athletes understood their coaches’ intent and worked to understand the instructional aspects of what their coach said to them, not all of these athletes perceived everything as their coaches intended them to perceive.

These two examples show two different instances of criticism and/or negative feedback from coaches whose intent is to teach and motivate their athletes. They perceive

their own effort to make that a reality, by explaining to their athletes the logic behind the feedback (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Reeve & Jang, 2006). However, their athletes interpreted differently. In one case, the athletes experienced frustration, and in the other, the athlete experienced pressure but was open to criticism because of the success that would come afterward. There are many factors that play into an athlete's perceptions (Hartman, 2014; Medic et al., 2007). However, one important factor, according to Mageau and Vallerand, is autonomy-supportive behavior, which is defined in part as "avoiding controlling feedback" (2003). Controlling feedback is said to include types of behavior including overt control, criticism and controlling statements, and tangible rewards for interesting tasks (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). What is most interesting about the comparison between these two situations, their perceptions, and their athletes' perceptions, is perhaps best exemplified in how the coaches and athletes talk about criticism. One coach explains that he challenges one player in an attempt to push that player and all of his other players, because it is important for all players to understand the importance of the task. This implies the coach uses these techniques whether or not those individual players' behavior in the task is acceptable or not. This is an example of an "uncontrollable" situation for the athlete, or one which they may feel helpless or hopeless to impact with any action on their own.

However, when compared to the other situation, the coach discusses the criticism and negative feedback a little differently. His statement portrays that the athlete made a mistake or judgment error of some kind, and he connects with the athlete using a "we" phrase and focusing on future opportunities to make decisions (Mageau & Vallerand,

2003; Reeve & Jang, 2006). This is a clear-cut example of the coach “providing choice within specific rules and limits” in addition to building connectedness and relatedness with the athlete, which happens to be another part of the definition of autonomy-supportive behavior (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). It’s similar to the first example of coaching behavior that instigated this portion of the discussion because both demonstrate the coaches’ ways of leaving the choice with the athlete. One coach gave their athlete negative or critical feedback something they can change and control on their own, opening the door for them to be more open to feedback of all types, while one coach did not (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Reeve & Jang, 2006). This information is important for coaches to distinguish because it impacts athletes’ intrinsic motivation through their perceptions of autonomy-support from the coach (Joessar et al., 2012; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

### **Social Connection**

The last area where coach and athlete perceptions overlapped was in their sense of relatedness and connection to each other. Some athletes perceived strong connections with their coaches, while others did not perceive very close connections with their coaches outside of the practice environment. Coaches all perceived their own efforts to get to know their athletes as individuals, but this looked different depending on the coach. Some coaches took a personal interest in their athletes’ lives in terms of academics, athletics, and physical and mental health. However, nearly all of them relayed an open door to their athletes should any of them need help with things in their personal/social lives, but did not specifically seek their athletes out to ask them about that information.

This information supports the literature concerning relatedness between athletes and coaches (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Smith et al., 2016). Based on the comparison between coach and athlete perceptions, coaches were able accurately communicate their interest in their athletes as people, keeping their best interests in mind. One athlete said it this way:

*“[My coach]’s door is always open. If I literally just want to go talk about something it’s normally always [sport] related or future career-path related. Those are the two times we really talk, but it’s always open... They’re also great resources, if something happens, to go to and we can trust them and confide in them 100%.”*

This allowed coaches to build their level of connectedness to their athletes, and demonstrated autonomy-support to the athlete as they made their own decisions in their personal lives (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1994; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Smith et al., 2016). It also allowed their athletes to develop team cohesion and connectedness among each other. This is good for athletes’ self-determined extrinsic motivation, too, since many athletes talked about playing and competing for each other. When their coaches recognized teammates as people who put in high effort, it gave them motivation to compete for them because of the effort they were putting in.

### **Emergent Conclusions**

Also presented in Chapter IV are similarities between coaching motivational tendencies and athlete motivational tendencies, with an interesting connection between them. From Figure 1, we know coach environment and personal motivational tendencies

impact coach interaction with their athletes (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This is clearly demonstrated in the example between the coach and his interaction with the athlete from Long Island. Next, we know from Figure 1 that coach interaction with their athletes impacts their overall senses of competence, autonomy-support, and relatedness (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). We know those senses dictate how much intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation athletes have (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Throughout the example between coach and Long Island athlete in Chapter IV, the coach was able to help his athlete attain levels of self-determined extrinsic motivation through situations like this (Gillet et al., 2010; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). The fact that the coach pinpointed an area athletes can control on their own is also important to note.

This is an actual demonstration of how Mageau and Vallerand's (2003) model works in a coach-athlete relationship. The coach's personal orientation impacted his use of autonomy-supportive behavior (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This influenced his athletes' perceptions of all three of their motivational needs, which in turn impacted their levels of intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation (Gillet et al., 2010; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). It's important information for coaches to understand because their own motivation – how they talk and act about it – will rub off on their athletes and, over time, they will start to reflect the things their coaches tell them and model for them.

### **Implications**

The implications for this research study are significant. For the field of research, the discussion concerning the coach-athlete relationship has changed in several ways. The model presented by Mageau and Vallerand (2003) has additional support, a qualitative

comparison of coach and athlete perceptions of coach behavior exists, and a number of additional topics to research have been identified.

As presented in Figure 1, the model by Mageau and Vallerand (2003) had a number of quantitative studies which tested its accuracy and demonstrated it to be reliable (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Gillet et al., 2010; Joessar et al., 2012). Now this qualitative study adds evidence and support to the model that was before unavailable. In addition, it provides practical, detailed examples of the connection between coaches and athletes from start to finish (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Specifically, the example of coach personal motivational tendencies down to the level of environment and athlete personal motivation in Chapter IV of this study is an excellent example of how the model works in reality.

Secondly, the field of research surrounding this topic is forever changed because this is the first phenomenological qualitative study to evaluate both coach and athlete perceptions of coaching behavior and its impact on athlete intrinsic motivation. This study changes the discussion on this topic because not only is a study with both perspectives feasible, but it illustrates how much more detail can be extracted from a behavioral example through comparison of experiences. When researchers study this topic in the future, they no longer need to speculate the kind of information they are missing by focusing on one population. They will now have a specific idea of some of the ways coaches and athletes are connected and understanding each other well, and some ways they are misunderstanding the results of each other's actions. It is also the first phenomenological qualitative study of athletics to be focused on the mid-major DI level

in this way. Many studies include mid-major programs, without focusing on them, or focus solely on power-five or multiple divisions within the NCAA.

Finally, there are a number of areas the research community can pursue for the next studies on this topic. For example, the emergent result of coach and athlete personal motivational similarities is a brand-new door into a new world of research. Is it possible coaches recruit athletes who already have similar motivational tendencies as themselves to their programs? Or are athletes mostly impacted by their environment and interaction with their coach after they start competing for the program, developing similar motivational tendencies as their coach over time? When a coach takes over a program after another coach leaves, how does the coach's motivational tendencies compare to the athletes' tendencies? Is it more likely the coach will be impacted by their new program? Or will the athletes be impacted by their new coach? And how long does it take to develop those similar motivational tendencies?

These are merely a handful of questions that could be pursued next in this topic area. Perhaps the most important area to be researched next would be the implementation of a coaching intervention at the mid-major level, or the production of an instructional resource for coaches. This would have more immediate practical implications for mid-major coaches and would be useful to the research community as well.

In terms of practical application, this research study has a couple of points for administrators, coaches, and athletes to take away as well. Administrators can use the results of this study to develop instructional resources or tutorials for their coaches as they deem necessary for training purposes for their coaches. In addition, they may want



to research and implement a coaching intervention, which have been demonstrated to be effective (Langan et al., 2015). This means that for administrators wanting to improve their coaches' impact on athletes' intrinsic motivation, an intervention could help train coaches with practical experience rather than only instruction.

Coaches can certainly use the results from this study to implement new and updated coaching strategies. For example, they may wish to use more opportunities for positive feedback, specifically opportunities for athletes to experience athletic success in practice, and opportunities for recognition of their athletes' work. Or, they may change their communication delivery of negative feedback from "uncontrollable" to "controllable" to help improve their athletes' intrinsic motivation. They might even begin connecting on a more personal level with their athletes, if they don't already. The information in Chapters IV and V of this study are perhaps most valuable to coaches for that reason – it gives them a starting point to understand their impact on their athletes and practical experiences to help them change their behavior.

Finally, athletes can use the results of this study to better understand their coaches' intentions as they interact with them. They might even use these results to better understand their own perceptions of their coaches' behavior. They may be able to identify when their coach means to be autonomy-supportive, but is miscommunicating, or they may be able to help motivate their teammates through their own deeper understanding of coach behavior.

## **Limitations**

One major limitation for this study is just how anonymous the data are. The researcher thoroughly anonymized the data in an attempt to protect the identity of coaches and athletes and prevent any damaging information being published about any participants. General participant information is reported in Chapter III, however this is a small consolation compared to the specific demographic information a much larger study would be able to provide. Given the size and parameters of the present study, it was not possible to give much detail about the school, sport, participant, and sport verbiage out of respect for the participants. This would best be addressed in future, larger studies. The size of this study also limits the interpretations and conclusions to very similar athletics programs. The information is extremely valuable for those programs, however it would not necessarily accurately compare to programs across the United States, of different sizes, and associated with various school profiles. Again, a larger study would vastly improve and/or eliminate this limitation.

## **Conclusion**

For the most part, athletes and coaches expressed similar perceptions concerning coaching behavior and how it correlates to motivation. Generally, coaches and athletes perceived motivation as a demonstration of effort in some form or another. Coaches perceived a need to provide positive feedback to and recognition of their athletes. Similarly, athletes perceived their own need for positive feedback and recognition from their coach as it pertains to their motivation. These results are presented throughout Chapter IV and are significant to this research study because of how strongly athletes and

coaches perceived it. When a coach uses positive feedback with an athlete and/or recognizes their level of effort, it ties to the athlete's sense of competence and is shown to increase their intrinsic motivation for their sport (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). So, when coaches pump their fists in the air after a good play or pauses practice to take a moment and recognize an athlete who may not be playing well but is putting in the effort, those actions have significant impact on the athletes' intrinsic motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Reeve & Jang, 2006). Not only is this demonstrated time and again in past research, but also in the present study.

In summary, there are a couple specific implications for coaches as they make an effort to help improve their athletes' motivation and performance while maintaining their support for their athletes' personal lives. Based on this comparison, athletes perceived their coaches' intentions in everything their coach did and said to them. However, their perceptions of how it impacted their motivation differed on one key area, and was consistent in other key areas. The primary difference between coach and athlete perceptions was found in the area of negative feedback. Athletes perceived their coach's good intentions, but in cases where the coach voiced criticism in areas the athlete either could not control or had little influence, it was perceived to have a detrimental impact on athlete motivation. When coaches gave negative feedback or criticism to athletes in areas where they had control or change, it was perceived to benefit motivation, especially in cases when the coach used methods of relatedness and autonomy-support to communicate with the athlete. This is particularly useful for coaches who employ negative feedback often in their coaching and instructional methods, since they will want

to use this information to make sure their full intent is coming through in their interactions with the athletes so as not to deter them. Coaches and athletes both perceived the necessity of positive feedback on motivation, which is also useful to coaches as they interact with their athletes because it's already one way some coaches are able to influence their athletes' motivation positively. One very impactful way coaches are able to do this is through their use of recognition. In small ways and large, coaches who acknowledge their athletes' efforts and skill leaves a lasting impression on their players. It's a great way for coaches to invest in their athletes' motivation long-term. Lastly, when coaches make an effort to connect on a personal level with their athletes, it helps them perceive their coaches' intent to look out for them and understand they have the athlete's best outcome in mind. It builds relatedness and connectedness with their players. However, those coaches who also show restraint in probing into their players' social lives also build their athletes' perceptions of autonomy-support from their coach. It gives their team the ability to develop relationships with themselves, boosting team cohesion and unity, which should benefit athlete performance in athletics and academics, and improve their overall collegiate experience and mental health.

## Appendix A



### Office of Research Development, Integrity, and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030  
Phone: 703-993-5445, Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: September 28, 2017

TO: Angela Miller  
FROM: George Mason University IRB

Project Title: [1116807-1] A Qualitative Comparison of Coach Intention and Athlete Perception of Motivational Behavior

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS  
DECISION DATE: September 28, 2017

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be submitted to the IRB office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Karen Motsinger at 703-993-4208 or kmotsing@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of five years, or as described in your submission, after the completion of the project.

Please note that department or other approvals may also be required to conduct your research.

GMU IRB Standard Operating Procedures can be found here: [http://oria.gmu.edu/1031-2/?\\_ga=1.12722615.1443740248.1411130601](http://oria.gmu.edu/1031-2/?_ga=1.12722615.1443740248.1411130601)

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.

## Appendix B

### Coach Questions

1. Background information
  - a. How many years have you been coaching?
  - b. Describe your work environment.
  - c. Describe your relationship or connection with these players.
  - d. Walk me through what it means for your team to be motivated.
2. Motivation
  - a. Walk me through a time that was particularly motivational for you as a coach.
  - b. Describe a time when you feel you connected especially well with your players.
    - i. Do you ever feel disconnected from your players?
  - c. Walk me through a time when you felt things were going especially well with your team.
  - d. Walk me through a time when you felt things were not going well at all with your team.
  - e. Do you feel your interactions with players 1 & 2 impact their behavior?
    - i. Why or why not?
  - f. Tell me what it's like to work with players 1 & 2.
  - g. Tell me what it's like to motivate players 1 & 2.
  - h. Describe your typical interaction with your team on and off the field.
  - i. Describe your typical interaction with players 1 & 2 (if different).
  - j. Explain what it's like to coach a team at the NCAA mid-major level. (Baric & Bucik, 2009)
  - k. Explain what it's like to run a practice at the NCAA mid-major level. (Baric & Bucik, 2009)
  - l. Explain how important effort is to you (Smith, et al.,)
  - m. Walk me through the most important aspects of your job (Frederick & Morrison, 1999; Joessar et al., 2012).
  - n. Walk me through what it's like to instruct your players (Reeve & Jang, 2006).
  - o. Walk me through a time you demonstrated confidence in players 1 and 2 (Zourbanos et al., 2010).

- p. Walk me through a time you feel your team especially trusted / distrusted you.
- q. Explain what it takes to stimulate athletes at this level (Mazer, et al., 2013).
- r. Walk me through a time your athletes felt pressured to perform (Alcaraz et al., 2015).

## Appendix C

Athlete Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Background information<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. How many years have you been playing your sport?</li><li>b. Describe your practice environment.</li><li>c. Describe your relationship or connection with your coach.</li><li>d. Walk me through what it means for your team to be motivated.</li></ol></li><li>2. Motivation<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Walk me through a time that was particularly motivational for you as an athlete.</li><li>b. Describe a time when you feel you connected well with your coach.<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Do you ever feel disconnected from your coach?</li></ol></li><li>c. Walk me through a time when you felt things were going especially well with your coach.</li><li>d. Walk me through a time when you felt things were not going well at all with your coach.</li><li>e. Do you think you are impacted by your coach's behavior?<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Why or why not?</li></ol></li><li>f. Tell me what it's like to work with your coach.</li><li>g. Tell me what it's like to be motivated by your coach.</li><li>h. Describe your typical interaction with your coach.</li><li>i. Explain what it's like to compete on an NCAA mid-major team.</li><li>j. Explain what it's like to participate in a practice at the NCAA mid-major level. (Baric &amp; Bucik, 2009)</li><li>k. Explain how important effort is to your coach (Smith, et al.)</li><li>l. Walk me through the most important aspects of your coach's job (Frederick &amp; Morrison, 1999; Joessar et al., 2012).</li><li>m. Walk me through what it's like to be instructed by your coach (Reeve &amp; Jang, 2006).</li><li>n. Walk me through a time your coach demonstrated confidence in you (Zourbanos et al., 2010).</li><li>o. Was there ever a time your coach un-motivated you? Can you describe it?</li><li>p. Walk me through a time you especially trusted/distrusted your coach (Zucchetti et al., 2013).</li></ol></li></ol>



- q. Walk me through a time you felt pressured to perform (Alcaraz et al., 2015).
- r. Walk me through a time you had a say in what you do when participating in your sport (Matosic et al., 2014).

## Appendix D

Raw Data Themes	Higher Order Themes	General Themes
Treats players differently depending upon their ability to work, make changes, learn, grow, and interact.	Techniques used by coach that involve ego-involvement and discipline.	
Discipline impacts what players do.		
Allows athletes to make mistakes and figure things out on their own without reactions from coach.	Techniques used by coach to encourage mastery of skill.	
This process to master this sport takes years.		
Gained experience means making mistakes and not always feeling good about performance.		
Coach emphasis on perpetual dissatisfaction, and improvement every day.		
Process is more important than end result.		
The process of hard work results in performance.	Techniques used to encourage task-involvement, effort and improvement.	
Gives athletes ownership of personal goals vs. talking down to them.		
Asks athletes how they want to be perceived when they are on the road/in the gym.		
Looks at what athletes do to make themselves better.		
Coaching staff discusses individual goal setting with athletes.		
Performance results are great, but growth of the program and athletes figuring out how to be successful, work hard, and see fruits to their labor is most important.		
Building from a tough year to help the team this year.		
Coach recognizes athletes' ability to control attitude and effort daily.	Coaching factors that impact training motivation.	

2% improvement each practice adds up to a big amount over time.		
Athletes work ethic dictates excited or aggressive response from coach.		
Punishment for lack of attitude and effort instead of performance results		
Athletes of all ages should play as many sports as possible to learn work ethic, strategies, and teamwork.		
Tells athletes they're doing it right, just keep trusting the process		
Encouragement impacts what players do.		
Praise impacts what players do.		
Coach yells player's name and high five's them, with verbal praise, in front of everyone.		
Coach pumps fists in the air to positively recognize player performance.		
Coach verbally recognizes player's work ethic.		
Coach emphasis on pointing out the good things among athletes.	Coach provided positive feedback.	
Coach attempts to create order within chaos.		
Each practice focuses on something new. Finding new ways to work on similar drills, putting the focus on new thoughts and ideas.		
Instructs athletes on differences between getting to work the next day, and playing to their potential, playing better.		
Informs athletes when things just don't work out, to dust themselves off, and get to work tomorrow.		
Informs athletes when unacceptable decision is made.		
Committed to improvement as athlete and person.		
Discusses group goals with athletes regularly.		
Discusses the bigger picture of program with athletes.		
Promises athletes' parents they're positive members of society and community.		
Emphasis on infallibility and the fact that mistakes will happen.	Techniques used by coach to instruct athletes.	

Teaches athletes to compete at a high level.		
Pushing impacts what players do.		
Positive instruction, with emphasis on making progress through use of "now."		
It's easy to teach intrinsically motivated athletes.		
It's less consistent and more difficult to teach athletes without a go get 'em attitude.		
Coach/athlete meetings happen regularly and include instruction.		
Coach/athlete interactions are rougher and more distant.		
Team doesn't have to take down the nets if they win a drill.	Techniques involving extrinsic rewards.	
Team gets a choice of where to eat if they win a drill.		
Coach possesses ability to allow extrinsic motivation through scholarship, but is limited in that ability.		
Athletes enjoy sport when they are free to make mistakes and learn from them	Coach experiences & perceptions of interest and enjoyment.	
Enjoys differences year to year.		
Athletes play out of their love for the game vs. extrinsic motivation.		
Coach encourages fun, non-sport, games every once in a while.		
Coach enjoys working with players who have fun.		
Incorporate ideas from coaching staff and players.	Techniques used by coach to create environment for athletes.	
Coach seeks to figure out why flat environment exists, when it does, and solve it at the next practice.		
Opportunity for athletes to discuss among themselves.		
Creates a safe environment for athletes to thrive and learn life skills.		
It's okay to make mistakes, fall down, make bad decisions - those are the real, life lessons.		
Changed team culture to more physical play.		
Learning and growing simultaneous.		

It's okay to be aggressive.		
Creates atmosphere of family.		
Statement, "I am your head coach, not your bro."		
Statement, "I'm not gonna give you the shaka at practice and drink beers and do all those things."		
Team involvement in socially responsible activities encourages sense of ownership.		
Coaching staff consists of head coach, 1 part-time, and 1 volunteer coach.		
Coach/team established themselves, should not be taken lightly.	Coach experiences focused on performance.	Coaching behaviors that impact competition motivation.
Coach/team won conference championship, first time in 28 years.		
Performance results when things start to click (environment/instruction changes).		
Received high performance ranking. How to play like a champion, who's already been there and done that.		
Athletes associate trust in the process/coach with getting the job done.		
Team decisions outside sport influence overall team process.	Behaviors and decisions causing pressure and/or tension.	
Coach perceives athletes associate distrust with his trust in players to work hard.		
Coach/athlete friend relationship takes new role after graduation.	Coach strategies to provide social support to athletes.	Coaching behaviors that impact social connectedness and team cohesion.
Helps athletes become grown men, learn responsibility, and work hard.		
Emphasizes growth through program.		
External factors (friends, family) play a role in coach behavior.		
Coach/athlete working relationship is same thing as parent/kid.		
Gets to know players individually to reach and talk to them in/out of practice.	Techniques used by coach to demonstrate relatedness and support.	

## Appendix E

Similar Perceptions	
High Effort	
Coach Perceptions	Athlete Perceptions
<p><i>"...there's only two things you can control and that's your attitude and your effort."</i></p>	<p><i>"Being motivated looks like pushing yourself in the weight room doing more weight than you think you can, but you're still trying. You're trying to increase reps or increase the weight."</i></p>
<p><i>"It's not the result, it's the level of attitude and effort that you give that matters."</i></p>	<p><i>"I would say [effort] is the most important thing. I think he recognizes who has the potential and skill and who doesn't. But I think he believes that everybody has the ability to put the same amount of effort in."</i></p>
<p><i>"...frankly, most of it is the other pieces that you're teaching them – how to work hard for a goal even though you don't know if you're going to achieve that goal."</i></p>	<p><i>"That's one of the things, our coach says, 'The only thing you can truly control in the gym is your attitude and effort.'"</i></p>
<p><i>"It's everything...And if you don't have motivation, the desire to work hard really goes away, especially in our sport."</i></p>	<p><i>"I think he believes that everybody has the ability to put the same amount of effort in."</i></p> <p><i>"And it's a half-circle and it's got a bar and the lowest is like, "You're Asleep," and it goes, "Okay," "Good," "Average," "Great." And then it's "Semper-Fi." Just like the Marine Corps. And when that happens, that means our compete-o-meter's at an all-time high. And when I'm motivated is when [my coach] would say we're at a Semper-Fi mode."</i></p>
Process-Oriented Environment	
Coach Perceptions	Athlete Perceptions

<i>“And we talk about process a lot here. It’s not gonna happen overnight, this is a sport that takes years to master.”</i>	<i>“He came in with the mindset, ‘I don’t care if you miss 20 of these balls, if you keep hitting them, and hitting them hard, eventually you’re gonna become great and they’re all gonna go in.’”</i>
<i>“We try to create an environment here where we’re learning and growing at the same time.”</i>	<i>“And he would motivate us, he would say, ‘Doesn’t matter if you win, you just give it your best.’”</i>
<i>“And I knew it’s a process. It doesn’t happen overnight. You guys need to keep racing harder. But every week we added something to our race plan.”</i>	
<i>“We talk about two percent, every time you walk on the floor, two percent improvement only. Which may seem small, but over time, that two percent becomes pretty big.”</i>	
<b>Positive Feedback</b>	
<b>Coach Perceptions</b>	<b>Athlete Perceptions</b>
<i>“...sometimes [coaches] gotta point out the good things equally if not more [than the bad things].”</i>	<i>“I feel like I’m most motivated when I get recognized for what I do, and then it motivates me to keep at it.”</i>
<i>“There are times when I will, at the end of a play, um, you know, yell a guy’s name out, and everybody immediately looks at me and I walk out on the court and I’m high-fiving ‘em going, ‘That’s the best play I’ve seen you make all day.’”</i>	<i>“...last week he called me out in front of the team and said that I wasn’t scoring a lot of goals, but I was like, working really hard. And that’s...something I’ve been trying really hard to work on...So, I just appreciated that he noticed something that we both knew I needed to work on.”</i>
<i>“I believe in you guys, you guys have shown...you guys have done the work, your body is prepared, it’s ready for this.”</i>	<i>“And he tells me, ‘You have the potential to be All-American, one of the top [players] in the country.’ And I believe it in the back of my head and I get extremely motivated, ‘cause I just want to work that much harder to see if I can actually make it come to fruition.”</i>
<i>“It’s kind of a, we did great on this, now we gotta work on this. It’s not the word ‘but’ it’s the word ‘now.’”</i>	<i>“I’d say [he showed confidence in me] when I first started getting better, when he put me on the A side I really felt, I felt the confidence. It was like, ‘Wow! I actually made it.’ I’m actually here on the A side because I’ve been on the B</i>

	<p><i>side for forever, before I actually made it there.”</i></p>
<p><i>“...there have been days in the past where I just pump my fists in the air, and can't get enough and at the end of practice I'm energized, and I'm refocused and things are great.”</i></p>	<p><i>“...he'll write up a play for me to, just for me to be the finisher. Or catch and shoot at the end, and I'm like, 'Okay, he has confidence in me to catch this ball and make the play and take the shot and score.' So, it's just things like that, where out of everyone on the team, he can see everyone's individual abilities and he picks mine out of this specific role and puts me in that.”</i></p> <p><i>“...he'll give me advice and I'll set my mind to trying to do exactly what he just told me. And I think he recognizes that, so when he does recognize that you did just what he told you, he gets like, really excited. And like, gets you excited about what you're doing.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think the first time he used it was last year. We were in practice and I dislocated my finger. And we had a lot of people on the team who were kinda babying out of practice. If something was hurt they would literally just be sitting and they wouldn't practice. I dislocated my finger, it was like sideways backwards. And went to the trainer, got it taped up, came back in and played. And [my coach] was like, that was Semper-Fi.”</i></p> <p><i>“...he pulled me to the side and he's like, 'We found a little bit of scholarship money we can give you, because we want to reward you for the good work you've done.’”</i></p> <p><i>“I'd told [my coach] that it was one year today that he assign - that he moved me to [a new position]. And it was like, to see where I started to where I'd come, now being one of the top guys in the gym, he was like, 'See man, I told you there would be something up.’”</i></p>



	<p><i>"...he's pretty much coaching me on how to coach others. It's more like, 'You gotta be positive to this guy' or 'You gotta go tell this team this.'"</i></p> <p><i>"I'm impacted when it's something positive where he makes a positive comment or something about me, then I'll be like, 'Oh yeah, I want to keep this up.'"</i></p> <p><i>"Just telling me, 'That's good work, man, that's good stuff.' And I'm like, 'Appreciate it a lot.'"</i></p> <p><i>"When he'll just say, like, "Good job, I saw you working hard today." That is motivating, too."</i></p> <p><i>"...when he's like, 'Man, we're good. We could go up against the best teams in the country.'"</i></p>
<b>Social Connection</b>	
<b>Coach Perceptions</b>	<b>Athlete Perceptions</b>
<i>"I try to make sure I'm out where all the girls converge 15 or 20 minutes before the workout. And I really try not to talk anything about [competing] ...and I kinda get a feel for how the girls are doing."</i>	<i>"I guess any distrust would kind of be, not on the field at all. It wouldn't be game situations or anything it would just be other, like, communication barriers."</i>
<i>"I started bringing my daughters around a little bit more so they saw my personality and I just actually became a human."</i>	<i>"...just having communication with the coach is really important [to experience connection],"</i>
<i>"...in general, my statement to them is that I am your head coach, not your bro. Um, I'm not, you know, gonna give you the shaka at practice and drink beers and do all those things. My job is to create a safe environment where they can thrive and get better and learn life skills, and, and when they're done with it all, uh, and they graduate, at that point our relationship as friends takes on that new role."</i>	<i>"[My coach's] door is always open. If I literally just want to go talk about something, it's normally [sport] related or future career-path related...it's always open. With [my other coach], I could do that, but I never really felt comfortable doing it, I guess."</i>
<i>"But they are able to come to me and contact me, uh, for the things outside of [our sport]. Obviously not their social</i>	<i>"They're also great resources, if something happens, to go to and we can trust them and confide in them 100%."</i>

<i>life, that I really, for lack of a better term, I don't want anything to do with that. Ah, I don't believe that's my place. But as far as the academics are concerned or, you know, if there's something with a family issue, they know that my door, it's an open-door policy."</i>	
<i>"I think the big thing is talking to them, communicating with them. And making sure they understand what's expected of them."</i>	
<b>Different Perceptions</b>	
<b>Negative Feedback</b>	
<b>Coach Perceptions</b>	<b>Athlete Perceptions</b>
<i>"I'm gonna come and we're watching film tomorrow on this. I texted her yesterday and it wasn't a question of, 'Hey, are we gonna watch film?' It was like, 'Okay, are we watching film Thursday or Friday?'"</i>	<i>"If he yells at us or is frustrated, it's because he knows you can do that or he expects you to do that. It's when an easy play is messed up or a lack of communication happens, that's when he gets frustrated."</i>
<i>"...little bit tougher on her, when we start a new drill. With players, that helps the others realize that this is important."</i>	<i>"Me, personally...I was going through the motions. I wasn't doing anything wrong. I wasn't doing anything right, and so she yells to me in front of, like screams, in front of everyone...and it doesn't affect you only that day. It kind of affects you, a comment in front of everyone that makes you think, it makes you think about your whole career. That's just kind of like a damaging comment."</i>
<i>"You need to constantly be behind them, pushing them saying, 'Let's go, let's go, let's go,'"</i>	<i>"...it became a running joke that it was just a roast session of me and this other guy. 'Cause it was me, come at me, come at this other guy, this other [player], me, this other [player], me, this other [player], throw in another guy, back to me, back to this other [player], me, me again, and that's what it felt like. And it, it was kind of hard to deal with at that time."</i>
<i>"One of the big things is challenging them...pushing them to a higher level."</i>	<i>"And it came down to me and one other girl to fill that last spot, so he called us</i>

	<p><i>both into his office, one at a time. And he ended up picking the other girl and just said, ‘Oh, the numbers worked out better and we don’t want this to deter you, but we are [picking the other girl].’</i></p> <p><i>...[during a workout] a week after he made his decision and one of [my teammates] came up to me, but right before we started and was like, ‘Use this to show him why he’s wrong.’ And the whole time [that] fueled me to do well on it... And it might have even motivated me more in a different way, ‘cause then it felt like I had something to prove and like someone to prove wrong.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Depending on how I view their work ethic, will dictate my level of excitement or aggressiveness.”</i></p>	<p><i>“...that's one of the things I've learned the past two years, especially with [my coach] ...just to accept criticism. Criticism for the most part, it's not bad at all. It's one of those things where you just have to take it and understand that you need to, you need to do this in order to be successful.”</i></p>
<p><i>“There are other days where I’ve kicked them out of the gym early...and I feel horrible about it. And it stays with me for a little while, but the message has been sent that it’s not the result, it’s the level of attitude and effort that you give that matters.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Or, ‘You’re doing something, like you might have done that one thing right, but everything else was wrong.’ So, it’s just you know, if I make a good play and [score], and then she comes and tells me, ‘Okay, that was fine, but it was in the wrong situation and you weren’t moving your feet.’ And that’s just kind of things where you in your head where like, ‘Oh, that was great.’ Then immediately switch roles, like, “No, it wasn’t.”</i></p>
<p><i>“...it’s making sure that she doesn’t climb so much inside just [the sport] that she enjoys the rest of her college experience. I think that’s the biggest piece, just talking to her, because [the sport] is so important. But at the end of the day, you’re not gonna make a living, probably with that. So, you know, I don’t want you</i></p>	<p><i>“I enjoy constant feedback, but at the same time when you’re on me 24/7, in like a negative way, it doesn’t help me.”</i></p>

<p><i>to stop working, but I also want you to have time to stop and smell the roses.”</i></p>	
<p><i>“If your name is coming through a megaphone, it’s usually because we want you to change something or adjust. And over time that can be very negative.”</i></p>	<p><i>“He might be going a different way. I think if he had done it on a more personal level, where it wasn't everyone [on the field], and he's just targeting me, and instead he brought me inside one day and just showed me these things. Then it might have come across better to me.”</i></p>
<p><i>“Pointing that out and trying to raise that level so that he understands that it’s not just us being picky and critical, and mean or negative, whatever the term is you want to use, it’s that, ‘They actually see something in me.’ and allowing him to see it as well.”</i></p>	
<p><i>“One of the players...little bit tougher on her, when we start a new drill. With players, that helps the others realize that this is important. ‘If that person is being pushed by the coaches, then, heck well this must be important, so I’m gonna do this really well also.’ But then following up with that player immediately after practice and like, ‘Oh do you understand why we’re doing this, or why I’m doing this? It’s for these reasons.’ And I think that makes it easiest. And in the moment, they don’t always understand it.”</i></p>	
<p><i>“...there are other choices they make where I'm gonna put my arm around them and I'm gonna put my foot square in their butt and say, ‘Hey, that's not acceptable and we've got to do a better job of recognizing an opportunity to make a better decision.’ Some are more stern than others, others are softer than others.”</i></p>	
<p><b>Emergent Results</b></p>	
<p><b>Role of Teammates</b></p>	
<p><b>Coaches Perceptions</b></p>	<p><b>Athlete Perceptions</b></p>
	<p><i>“But then she’s been, there’s been little things that have been still giving her [physical] trouble. But she, even in the fall when we had our run test. She did all of them and she did great...So, it just like, has always impressed me that she</i></p>

	<p>can motivate me that much when she's gotta, it's probably a lot harder for her.”</p> <p>“...he sprinted over, dove, got a touch on it, but smacked his face on a pole. And still he's got a huge scar on his face right now. It looked like he knocked himself out... We didn't even win the point, but the fact that he went for it, sacrificed his body for it, that's what's motivating to me.”</p>
<p>Teammates' High Effort</p>	
<p>Coaches Perceptions</p>	<p>Athlete Perceptions</p>
<p><i>“However, near last year, a university said something about us, that we didn't like. And I heard about it, basically they said that we were afraid to race them because they beat us. And that's motivation for me because I know that wasn't true.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I still worked the same and put in effort the same. And it might have even motivated me more in a different way, 'cause then it felt like I had something to prove and, like, someone to prove wrong.”</i></p>
<p><i>“...there's a girl on our team now who's from Long Island. And she's very proud about Long Island...she was starting to fatigue, it was [during a workout], she was really tired...and so I just walked over to her, and I said, “Is this how Long Island girls [compete]? Is this what I should expect?” Not knowing what kind of response I'd get from her. And I know, I realized that might upset her, because I know I'm taking a shot against her. And if I criticize her about Long Island [athletes], she's not going to like that. So, now she's going to want to prove me wrong.”</i></p>	

## Appendix F

Similarities	Differences
<p>High Effort:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both coaches and athletes described high effort as controllable.</li> <li>• Both coaches and athletes described high effort as highly correlated to intrinsic motivation.</li> </ul>	<p>Negative Feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some coaches tried to use negative feedback to motivate their athletes.</li> <li>• In some instances, coaches felt they could explain their negative feedback to athletes to compensate for any negative impact it may have had on athletes' motivation.</li> <li>• Some athletes responded positively to negative feedback from their coach and used it for motivation.</li> <li>• Negative feedback from the coach impacted some athletes' motivation negatively.</li> <li>• Coach delivery of the negative feedback influenced whether or not the athletes' motivation was impacted in a positive or negative way.</li> <li>• When coaches communicated negative feedback in a non-controlling manner, or explained how the athlete could control the situation themselves, the athlete was motivated by the negative feedback.</li> <li>• When coaches communicated negative feedback in a controlling manner, or delivered</li> </ul>
<p>Process-Oriented Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some coaches and athletes focused more on the process of improving instead of results.</li> <li>• According to coaches and athletes, high performance comes as a result of the learning process.</li> <li>• Coaches and athletes who were more process-oriented were less afraid of making mistakes.</li> </ul>	
<p>Positive Feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both coaches and athletes discussed verbal praise as a means of improving intrinsic motivation.</li> <li>• Both coaches and athletes discussed physical actions (high-fives, fist bumps, etc.) as a means of improving intrinsic motivation.</li> <li>• Coaches discussed expressing confidence in their athletes and team to encourage motivation.</li> <li>• Athletes discussed specific and significant instances of coach</li> </ul>	

<p>recognition that improved their intrinsic motivation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaches expressed confidence in their athletes' abilities, which athletes discussed as highly motivational.</li> </ul>	<p>the information in a way that the athlete felt the situation was out of their individual control, athletes' motivation was decreased.</p>
<p>Social Connection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both coaches and athletes recognized the importance of getting to know each other as individuals.</li> <li>• When coaches recognized their athletes' high effort, athletes felt more comfortable approaching their coaches.</li> </ul>	
<p>Emergent Results</p>	
<p>Personal Motivational Tendencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaches' personal motivational tendencies impact their interactions with their athletes (Mageau &amp; Vallerand, 2003).</li> <li>• Through their interactions with their athletes, coaches cultivate environments that are similar to their own motivational tendencies.</li> <li>• Athletes mirror their coaches' motivational tendencies.</li> <li>• Athletes encourage the environment created by their coaches among each other.</li> </ul> <p>Role of Teammates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teammates contributed to other athletes' motivation through their own use of high effort.</li> <li>• Teammates contributed to the environment created by the coach by mirroring their coach's personal motivational tendencies.</li> </ul>	

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## **Biography**

My educational career began many years ago when I was homeschooled from kindergarten through my senior year of high school in Pennsylvania. From the start of my academic career, my parents have always been supportive of my pursuits. They believed in me and taught me and prepared me for my undergraduate and now graduate studies. I was privileged to graduate with honors from high school through the Susquehanna Diploma Program in 2009. That same year, I went on to attend George Mason University, where I would earn my bachelor's degree in History and Events Management. Again, I consider myself blessed to have been an honors student during my undergraduate career and graduated Cum Laude with my class in 2013. While I completed my undergraduate degree, I competed for George Mason's NCAA Division I softball team, where I earned honors as an all-conference player in the CAA and team captain responsibilities. After I graduated and entered the workforce, I found myself back at George Mason, this time working as a coach for the softball team. It is because of my interest, as a player and a coach, in motivation that I decided to pursue my Master's degree and conduct this research study.