ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE SPORT PARTICIPATION IN LIFE SKILL DEVELOPMENT:
COLLEGIATE ATHLETES’ PERSPECTIVES

by Scott W. Pierce

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding about whether the intercollegiate athletes feel they have learned life skills through intercollegiate sport participation, how they believe they have acquired these skills, and how they believe they are using, or can use, these life skills in other areas of life. Seven intercollegiate athletes were interviewed regarding their perspectives of the role of intercollegiate sport participation in life skill development. Through analysis of the data, two main sources were identified as being influential in the development of life skills in the intercollegiate athletic environment. These sources were seen to interact with the individual athletes and contribute to the experiential learning of life skills. Interestingly, learning life skills through resiliency in challenging situations was identified as being important in college sport. These life skills were then seen by athletes as being transferrable to other life domains.
THE ROLE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE SPORT PARTICIPATION IN LIFE SKILL DEVELOPMENT:
COLLEGIATE ATHLETES’ PERSPECTIVE

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Chapter 1
Introduction and Review of Literature

There is a common perception in society that “sport builds character.” This statement, although appearing simple, has different meanings for different people and is not as simple as it sounds (Gould & Carson, 2008; Vealey & Chase, in press). Sport can assist in the personal development of athletes by developing life skills in athletes of all ages (Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002), but the development and transfer of life skills from sport to other areas of life is not necessarily automatic (Danish et al., 2002; Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte & Jones, 2005). Although life skill development is an emerging area in the field of sport psychology, an understanding of what skills are learned, and how, when and why athletes’ learn and utilize the life skills has not been fully established. Coaches, parents, and organizations involved in the sporting environment claim to be assisting athletes in the development of life skills (Gould, Collins, Lauer & Chung, 2007). In addition, life skill development and youth sport intervention programs have proven to be effective sites for the children and youths involved to learn valuable life lessons and skills in conjunction with sport and exercise programs. The intervention programs focus on skills such as goal setting, interpersonal skills and personal responsibility. (see Petitpas et al., 2005 for review). However, athletes’ perceptions, experiences and the meaning they make of the relationship between sport participation and the development of life skills have received little attention. United States collegiate athletic programs and governing sporting bodies have begun assigning specific personnel with the task of developing life skills in collegiate athletes through academic classes and programs. Thus, the area of life skill development through sport appears to be currently receiving a great amount of attention in the collegiate sporting environment, specifically. However, evaluation of these structured experiences and specific experiences of collegiate sporting involvement has not been looked at in relation to life skill development of the athletes. By exploring collegiate athletes’ experiences of sport participation in relation to their life skill development, new insights could be gained about if and how collegiate sport involvement may serve as a context for personal development. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine collegiate athletes’ experiences of collegiate sport as a context for life skill development. Specifically of interest is if the athletes feel they have learned life skills through their collegiate sport participation, if so, how they believe they have acquired
these skills, and how they believe they are using, or can use, these life skills in other areas of life and if not, how they make sense of this.

In this chapter, relevant literature is reviewed that relates to life skill development in sport. First, an overview of the research on collegiate sport as a site for personal development is provided. Second, terms and definitions related to life skill development in sport are reviewed. Third, the connection between sport and character development is explored and related to the history of sport psychology as a research and practical field. Specifically, this section examines how the focus on human development evolved in sport psychology and describes the progressive emphasis on sport as a site for positive youth development. Fourth, an overview of youth sport and intervention programs focusing on the development of life skills through sport participation is provided. These programs place an emphasis on the transfer of skills from sport to other important life domains such as academics and social settings. Fifth, research that has examined the influence of coaches, parents, and peers, on the personal development of youth athletes is discussed. Finally, the chapter attempts to highlight the importance of examining life skill development from the perspectives of different individuals involved in the sporting environment. This will outline the importance of looking at the process from the perspective of the athletes. This emphasizes a need to further look at intercollegiate sport participation as a site for life skills development from the athletes’ own perceptions, thus examining a population whose experiences in of life skill development have not previously been investigated. Overall, this study attempts to extend the knowledge base of life skill development in sport by examining collegiate athletes’ experiences of collegiate sport as a context for life skill development. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding about whether the intercollegiate athletes feel they have learned life skills through intercollegiate sport participation, how they believe they have acquired these skills, and how they believe they are using, or can use, these life skills in other areas of life.

**Intercollegiate Sports as a Site for Personal Development**

According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), all student athletes must be amateurs. Furthermore, these individuals should motivated primarily by gaining an education and benefiting from the physical, mental, and social benefits that are obtained from participation as a college athlete (Sage, 1998). The statement highlights that personal development is the primary aim for athletes who participate in intercollegiate sport. Thus, in
theory, the intercollegiate sporting environment should offer an ideal location for the development of life skills in young adults. This idea, however, has been challenged in the critical sociological literature that defines college sport as a commercial business that has little to do with the educational aims and missions of the universities involved (Sage, 1998). Based on economic exploitation, dominance, power, and control, college athletics is viewed by Sage (1998) as an industry that manipulates and subordinates student-athlete. Critical sport sociologists see the rewards of financial support and prestige as exploitation. This remuneration creates power for the governing athletic bodies who take control of athletes’ time, freedom of speech and overall lives. “Big-time college sport” is organized in a way which ignores the personal and social needs of athletes who are mere laborers who generate income, not for themselves, but for the budgets of the universities and athletic departments that are being represented (Coakley, 1994; Sage, 1998).

Believing that college sport is rife with corruption, Benford (2007) examined the contemporary college sport reform movement. Through interviews, observation of the intercollegiate sporting environment and archival data, the primary focus of this study was to understand the problems that have been created over time and attempt to recreate the ‘Edutainment’ industry. ‘Edutainment’ refers to the university’s increasing involvement in the entertainment industry. Benford (2007) identified five major problems in college sport. It is believed that intercollegiate sport has become overly commercialized. Universities have become involved in the entertainment industry and have therefore negatively impacted on the academic culture. The integrity and standards of higher educational institutions has been debilitated from the increased commercialism. Athletes have been exploited and have become the victims. Athletes are seen to be treated like “eligibility mills” whose athletic eligibility is the only focus. Finally, non-athletes are also seen as victims who are forced to contribute financially to athletics. Benford (2007) highlights numerous issues in the intercollegiate athletic environment and believes that sport reformers must appeal to multiple audiences and make these issues common knowledge.

Of specific interest to the current study is the issue of athlete exploitation outlined by Benford (2007). Sport sociologists contend that intercollegiate athletes are in a position that does not assist in their personal development. Although Coakley (1994) recognizes that it is difficult to make generalizations about all varsity collegiate sporting programs, he maintains that there is
an emphasis on conformity and obedience from collegiate athletes, and little focus on the promotion of responsibility and autonomy. This control from administrators and coaches in college sport takes away from the educational and developmental mission that the NCAA promotes. Furthermore, the intercollegiate sporting environment can be seen to hinder athletes’ ability to think and act for him or herself and can lead to a sense of “learned helplessness” (Seligman & Maier, 1995). This “learned helplessness” therefore has the potential to lead, or contribute to intercollegiate athletes being trapped in a continuous state of adolescence (Lipsyte, 1995, cited in Benford, 2007). Critical sociologists therefore contend there is a need to return to an educational model of college sport with an emphasis on the personal development of athletes (Coakley, 1994; Sage, 1998).

With a focus on the personal development of student-athletes, Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001), promoted the need for student-athlete support programs within intercollegiate athletic departments. This was based on the belief that student-athletes have to cope with intense scrutiny from the public, extensive time commitments, and a physically and mentally demanding existence. The need for athlete support programs has been emphasized by the NCAA who have created and promoted programs such as ‘CHAMPS/Life Skills’ and various career development programs that attempt to enhance the personal development of student-athletes and to prepare them for the future. Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) therefore suggest that the ideal athletic program should focus on continued higher education by including academic support, career counseling, and personal development for student-athletes. The need for support networks is accentuated by Brown and Glastetter-Fender (2000) who explored the decision-making self-efficacy of student-athletes. The study found that student-athletes spend a great deal of time participating in their sport and are challenged managing the dual role of being a student and an athlete. Brown and Glastetter-Fender (2000) therefore highlight the importance of assistance for the athletes from individual administrators and coaches involved in athletics, and permission to attend and complete career and academic planning.

Intercollegiate sport therefore appears to be an environment with widespread problems and issues (Benford, 2007; Coakley, 1994; Sage, 1998). The personal development of the student-athletes is one of the main aims of intercollegiate sport but the challenges and difficulties associated with this goal must be recognized. Although developmental programs and support is provided to student-athletes, the issue of personal development remains an important issue. It
appears that more needs to be known about athletes’ choices in balancing sport, academics, and social lives and how the balance that they construct impacts on their personal development (Coakley, 1994; Sage, 1998). Specifically, the current study attempts to gain an understanding of the role of intercollegiate sport participation in the life skill development of intercollegiate athletes. This will continue to contribute to the understanding of the personal development of student-athletes. It is recognized that a large body of literature already exists in relation to the personal development of students in the college setting (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Although this has important implications for college student development, the current study has a specific focus on the sporting involvement of the athletes and not the academic involvement. The structured support programs created to assist student-athletes in intercollegiate athletics may be influential in the athletes’ personal development. The investigation of sport participation will however, make a further contribution to the current knowledge of the personal development of student-athletes.

Development in the context of collegiate sport is of interest because research indicates a number of important developmental potentialities at this time. For example, the notion that adolescence is a critical developmental period in acquiring identity has been identified by Erickson (1959) and has been explored by Danish, Petitpas and Hale (1993) in specific relation to life skill development. According to Danish et al (2002), adolescence can be defined in age from eleven years to twenty-one years. Of particular interest in the proposed study are 18-23 year olds. This time period is important from a developmental aspect because of the detachment from parents, focus on peer relations, and development of reasoning and transition into adult work (Danish et al., 2002). Thus, by investigating the life skill development of collegiate athletes, the knowledge base about the development of individuals in this 18-23 year old age group could be expanded. Investigating athletes’ perceptions of how participation in the intercollegiate sporting environment impacts on life skill development could assist in gaining a greater understanding of the ability of intercollegiate sport to contribute to the personal development of athletes.

**Defining Life Skills**

A wide range of terms have been used relating to life skills development in sport. Reviewing the sport psychology literature in life skills development, Gould and Carson (2008) note a lack of precision in the definitions of life skills as being problematic in the understanding
of research in the life skills and sport area. The general notion of “character” is often referred to when attempting to understand personal development in the sport domain. Character has been loosely defined as a collection of the positive moral and ethical traits valued by society (Vealey & Chase, in press). Sport has also been shown to have a major influence on one’s identity and feelings of competence (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). Identity has been defined as “a self-definition comprised of those goals, values and beliefs which a person finds personally expressive” (Waterman, 1985, p. 6). The concepts of “character” and “identity” however appear difficult to directly and accurately operationalize in the sport setting (Vealey & Chase, in press).

Positive youth development is another broad notion used to describe one’s development in the sport setting. This refers to the growth of diverse competencies that can help a young person in sport, in their current life and in the future (Gould & Carson, 2008). Competencies of positive youth development include physical and psychological attributes and dispositions alongside specific skills and attitudes. These competencies may include becoming caring, learning positive health habits, having a sense of optimism, and possessing the ability to set goals (Gould & Carson, 2008). Positive youth development therefore encompasses a broad range of competencies which makes it difficult to study specifically. The concepts of positive youth development, character and identity are broader than life skills development, but all can be seen to encompass the development of life skills. While all life skills center around positive youth, character and identity development, not all development efforts focus on the specific development of life skills (Gould & Carson, 2008). In order to design successful programs to develop such skills and attitudes (Gould & Carson, 2008), Danish, Taylor, Hodge & Heke (2004), stated a need for a clear definition of what life skills involve. This definition therefore also appears to be necessary to consistently and scientifically investigate and analyze the experiences of athletes in relation to the development of life skills.

Numerous definitions have been created for the concept of life skills. Life skills were originally defined by Danish, Nellen & Owens (1996) as the skills that enable us to succeed in the culture in which we live. The definition of life skills was then expanded by Danish and colleagues (2002) and defined as the mental, emotional, social attributes, characteristics, and behaviors that athletes develop or refine through sport participation that have the potential to transfer beyond the sport venue. The definition of life skills then continued its development being described as the “skills that enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which
they live, such as school, home and in their neighborhoods” (Danish et al., 2004, p. 40). This referred to behavioral (communication effectively) or cognitive (making effective decisions) skills, and interpersonal (being assertive) or intrapersonal (setting goals). Additionally, Jones & Lavallee (2008) using a participant-centered approach by asking adolescent athletes to create a definition of life skills. Defining life skills as a “range of transferrable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive” (Jones & Lavallee, 2008, p. 44), another valuable addition was made to the literature.

In order to holistically define the notion of life skills development through sport, it is imperative to recognize that the learning of skills is not automatically achieved through sport participation (Danish et al., 2002; Petitpas et al., 2005). Furthermore, if these skills are learned, the successful transfer of skills learned through sport to domains outside of sport is not necessarily automatic (Danish et al., 2002; Petitpas et al., 2005). The realization of possession of these skills and resultant ownership of the skills is therefore a vital ingredient in the successful transfer from sport to other life domains (Danish et al., 2002; Martinek, Schilling, & Johnson, 2001). Life skills help an individual succeed in sport as well as helping the individual once he or she transfers the skills to a non-sport setting and used successfully in that setting. Gould and Carson (2008) identify this distinction as being important in the definition of life skills. For something to qualify as a life skill, the individual needs to make an effort to have the skill transferred to other life domains or situations (Gould & Carson, 2008).

Gould and Carson (2008, p. 60) therefore state that life skills are “those internal personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed in sport and transferred for use in non-sport settings” (Gould & Carson, 2008, p. 60). This definition on life skills as a more focused and practical concept than character, identity and positive youth development will therefore be used as the operational definition for life skills in the current study. Life skills development will be the focus of the study which will incorporate the wider concepts of character, identity and positive youth development.

**Personal Development and Sport**

Our society places such a value on sports so that athletic competition can be seen as a cultural phenomenon that permeates all of society (Nelson, 1982). This impact can is seen not
only through the holistic society, but with sport participation providing a fertile ground for individuals to develop skills and attitudes to use in all areas of life (Petitpas et al., 2005), sport can also have a major influence on each individual involved (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). However, Danish, Petitpas and Hale (1993) state that identity development is not necessarily positive and that this development must be examined over the entire life span rather than a single developmental stage. Petitpas et al. (2005) support this notion by simply stating that sport can build “character or character disorder” with respective reference to both facilitative and debilitative effects of sport on the development of various skills, attitudes and characteristics. This idea has been confirmed recently by Fraser-Thomas, Cote, and Deakin (2005), who investigated the specific positive and negative experiences and outcomes of youth-sport participants’.

In a review of literature relating to youth sport and positive youth development, Fraser-Thomas, Cote and Deakin (2005) looked specifically at the developmental outcomes of youth sport participation. Based on correlational data from the previous literature, Fraser-Thomas and colleagues contend that youth have been shown to experience numerous positive developmental outcomes because of the physical, psychological, social, and intellectual involvement associated with youth-sport participation. For example, sport facilitates normal physical growth in children and regular physical activity correlates with a lesser propensity to smoke. This helps put youth at lower risk to develop numerous dangerous medical conditions such as heart disease, obesity and diabetes. Psychologically, youth active in sport are less likely to be depressed, more likely to show higher levels of self-esteem, report decreased levels of stress, and have a tendency to have a higher degree of happiness and subjective well-being. Socially, youth gain the positive experiences of fostering relationships with peers and adults and achieve social success and leadership through their involvement in sport. An overall sense of responsibility and initiative are also positive social attributes that are positively related to youth sport participation. Finally, positive correlations with sport involvement and grades, attendance, time spent on homework, and educational aspirations shows a relationship between sport participation and intellectual development (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005, 2005).

Although suggestions of many positive developmental outcomes are evident youth sport involvement, Fraser-Thomas, Cote, and Deakin (2005) also highlighted negative experiential correlations with youth sport programs. Physically, youth involved in sport have been linked to
injuries and eating-disorders that negatively impact on their personal development. Furthermore, body image problems have been associated with youths, specifically girls, at early ages in sporting and personal development. With excessive pressure to win evident in some youth sport programs, emotional and psychological development can be negative for youth. Additionally, feelings of being unattached to teams and low confidence or self-esteem in sport have also been correlated with detrimental effects on youth development. The prevalence of violence in sport can be related to negative effects on youth development where aggressive behaviors become more acceptable. Furthermore, youths’ showing poor sportsmanship in the youth sport setting provide a further link that could suggest that development through youth sport is not always positive (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005).

Sport psychology, in both a practical and research sense, is interested in how sport performance influences individuals and how individual characteristics influence sport performance (Weinberg & Gould, 2008). With involvement in sport being shown to have both positive and negative relationships with personal development of the athletes involved (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005), the development of individuals involved in youth-sport is therefore a primary focus in the field of sport psychology. The current study will continue to explore the developmental experiences of sport participation with a specific focus on the older, intercollegiate athlete population. By allowing intercollegiate athletes to explain their experiences through in-depth interviews, the current study will provide a valuable contribution to the developmental literature with specific individual perceptions of a previously unexplored athletic population.

*Sport Psychology and Life Skill Development*

The realization that personal development needed specific attention in sport psychology was made by Danish and Hale (1981). Danish and Hale (1981) undertook a critical analysis of the field of sport psychology to urge a more common professional pursuit from those working in the field. This paper stated that the development of sport psychology had created a distinct divide between applied researchers who focus on the various factors affecting athletic performance, and the clinical practitioners who intervene with the athletes, attempting to enhance their performance. A human developmental framework and an educational model of intervention were
therefore developed to provide commonalities and communication between applied researchers and clinical professionals.

Rather than focusing on remedial services and prevention of problems, the human developmental framework focuses on proactively enhancing and enriching individual ability in a constructive way. Promoting continual personal growth and change, the framework emphasizes intervening ideas about desirable behavioral goals, techniques to optimize both personal and athletic behavior, and views individuals as being able to change and integrate in different contexts. The human developmental framework was designed to provide all sport psychology professionals with a way to maximize both personal growth and athletic performance. Lifelong enhancement through the program is therefore seen as being beneficial for athletes to gain a sense of control of their own behavior and provide them with the best opportunities to learn skills that will help them direct their own future. With the field of sport psychology uncertain of the effective way to help athletes at the time, Danish and Hale (1981) created a new way of thinking. The human developmental framework has helped identify commonalities within the field, and therefore opened up the distinct personal educational and developmental focus of sport psychology.

Utilizing the human development framework and continuing to incorporate it within sport psychology, Danish, Petitpas and Hale (1993) related the practice of sport psychology to the training of counseling psychologists and those who teach life skills. The specific implementation of life skills teaching within the sporting realm therefore appears critical. Focusing on growth and change over time as the underlying assumption of the human development framework at a practical level, Danish, Petitpas and Hale (1993) outlined the Life Development Intervention (LDI). The LDI was based on the belief that sport psychology is the use of sport as a way to enhance competence and personal human development throughout one’s life (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993) With a strong concern about both athletic and “life” development, Danish, Petitpas, & Hale (1993) created the LDI based on the view that experiences and learning in sport has great value that extends to other areas of life. Providing a specific educational model, the LDI is a sport-based intervention that analyzes behavior change and development over critical life events, and attempts to enhance personal empowerment in individuals through the teaching of goal setting. Faced with possible “roadblocks” of having a lack of knowledge, lack of skill, fear of taking risks, and insufficient social support (Danish & D’Augelli, 1983), the use of the
LDI before, during, or after the events can be influential in empowering the development of life skills and coping strategies within the athletic realm.

In order to use sport to help teach life skills and promote both personal and athletic development, Danish et al. (2002) outline the effective use of community-based interventions. Through the use of SUPER (Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation) programs, Danish et al. (2002) created a sports-based life skills program which allows participants to understand the relationship between excellence in sport and other life domains, showing how mental skills can enhance performance in both sport and life, and highlighting accessible role models for student-athletes. Sport, as a site for development, is important in the growth of self expression and self control, where life skills are referred to as the transferrable behaviors and attitudes. Learning skills of problem solving, goal setting, communication, and how to deal with pressure are examples of skills transferrable to other domains as noted by Danish et al., (2002). Examples of SUPER programs include the First Tee golf program, which attempts to produce positive changes in youths’ personal and golfing skills. The program teaches golf skills in conjunction with nine key life skills in an attempt to develop youth in both social and sporting domains.

The use of life skill intervention programs is based on creating an environment that fosters the growth of life skills and promotes more self control and self expression from the individuals involved (Danish et al., 2002). Larson (2000) believes for positive youth development to occur in such intervention programs, the teaching and learning of initiative is essential. Based on the understanding that sport does not necessarily create positive development in its participants, Larson (2000) highlights the concept of initiative as being an important skill to have in modern society. Intrinsic motivation and focusing attention and effort on challenging, yet obtainable goals are viewed as key components in developing initiative. Furthermore, initiative can be seen as an important requirement for the positive development of leadership, engagement and creativity. Structured voluntary activities, such as sport-based life skills interventions, therefore offer an appropriate context for adolescents to develop initiative (Larson, 2000).

In the process of becoming independent adults, youth are often challenged in the transition from school to work where it is highly beneficial to have appropriate role models who possess the motivation and concerted engagement required for initiative. Furthermore, school appears to be a blocking experience where the lack of intrinsic motivation translates to minimal use of initiative
that can be experienced through structured voluntary activities, such as sport (Larson, 2000). The development at of initiative during adolescence is therefore viewed as necessary in the pursuit of positive youth development (Larson, 2000).

Highlighting voluntary participation as crucial, Larson (2000) believes that allowing participants to direct and regulate their own actions fosters self-esteem and also increases the chances of continued participation in that activity. Critical in the promotion of positive development is recognition that individuals and contexts may differ and therefore influence the development process in various ways. Understanding that negative factors are evident within the environment while also realizing that critical periods of this development differ between youths, it is crucial to realize the complex nature of development. Although athletes can learn and teach positive life skills themselves, coaches also appear important and are challenged with balancing voluntary self-direction, structuring and controlling a supportive environment that promotes a mastery-oriented learning climate (Larson, 2000).

Larson (2000) noted that the most persuasive research in this area will measure whether the skills are applicable across various contexts. Furthermore, interventions will need to focus on making individuals aware of their motivating and directing behavior. Larson (2000) believes this self-awareness will therefore allow the individuals to gain control of their involvement and learning in sport. This underlining of the skills that will lead to positive youth development highlights the need to measure the effectiveness of intervention programs and sport as a site for life skill development. Specifically, information is required about whether or not these skills are being developed within the sport setting. The current study will explore athletes’ perspectives of the role of intercollegiate sport participation in the development of life skills in athletes’ from their perspectives. The following studies investigate youth sport and intervention programs and the effectiveness of these in life skills development. By focusing on a college age population in intercollegiate sporting programs, this current research will provide an addition to the life skills development literature.

*The Effectiveness of Youth Sport and Intervention Programs in Developing Life Skills*

Youth sport and intervention programs that combine a focus on the development of life skills through sport participation have the potential to provide a significant positive impact on adolescent development. However, analysis of the effectiveness of such programs is necessary.
Unfortunately, when investigating the relationship between sport participation and the acquisition of life skills and positive characteristics inconsistent findings have been found (Bloom, 2000; Eccles & Barber, 1999). These results could be attributed to the small number of programs with systematic strategies for teaching life and sport skills in conjunction (Petitpas et al., 2005). Similarly, results and such findings appear to be based on correlational data and not causal data. It was therefore the aim of Petitpas and colleagues (2005) to examine precisely which factors are most critical for planning and assisting positive life skill in youth sport through the review of developmental literature in sport psychology.

Coaches and parents can potentially have a negative impact on the character development of children and youths by being overbearing, overtly promoting winning, and using unethical tactics within the sport setting. Alternatively that a focus on effort, a sense of mastery and control, and an emphasis on fun and intrinsic motivation has been found to foster self-esteem, persistence and an overall positive development in young athletes. Positive youth development should be a primary focus of youth sport programs (Petitpas et al., 2005). According to Petitpas et al., (2005), youth sport programs should therefore include four critical elements in order to promote positive psychological and social growth in participants. Adolescents should voluntarily engage in the program, they need to be surrounded by caring adults and mentors, skills and assets need to be taught and learned that are important to managing life situations, and evaluation and research needs to be completed in relation to program effectiveness. Youth development programs in sport can therefore promote growth and enhancement of skills and differ from intervention and prevention programs. Intervention programs often focus on decreasing negative behavior. Prevention programs attempt to keep participants away from the negative behaviors. Furthermore, these programs may affect youths in a wide variety of ways and it is therefore noted that qualitative and quantitative research methods should be used to effectively analyze the level of success of the programs, and how youths benefit from such programs (Petitpas et al., 2005).

Understanding the importance of program evaluation, Martinek, Schilling and Johnson (2001) investigated the effectiveness of a life skill intervention with a focus on underserved youth in the school setting. The program involved the implementation of a developmental mentoring program in a low-socioeconomic area. The mentoring program was a 6-month sport club which had the objective to promote motivation for children to take more responsibility in
their overall behavior and academic work. Based on Hellison’s (2003) basic levels of responsibility, the sport club program was used to assist the empowering of the children and promote self-control and respect for others, effort and participation, self-direction, assisting others, and the application of these principles outside the sporting, gym environment. The mentoring program aimed to develop learning experiences that would aid children to move through the progressive levels and apply the skills learned through sport, back into their academic learning environment. Through the use of mentor and teacher journals and exit interviews with the individual students, personal responsibility, social responsibility and transference were assessed to measure the success of the program. The participants were able to show effort and persistence on the initial levels of Hellison’s (2003) model, however, they struggled to transfer these skills from the gym setting into the educational classroom.

Martinek, Schilling & Johnson (2001) imply that understanding that one has learned and now “owns” a skill is a critical aspect in the transfer of skills. This emphasizes the importance of values which underlie a feeling of connection to the respective environment. One must perceive they actually possess the relevant skills to transfer across domains. Life skills such as responsibility have been shown to be facilitated in the gym setting. However, difficulty has been shown in the transference of the skills to the classroom domain. Learning how to transfer skills from one domain is a critical part of enhancement interventions and is an area of great importance in youth development for physical educators and psychologists (Danish et al., 2002; Petitpas et al., 2005). Individuals must understand that skills do not automatically transfer and must believe they possess the skills and qualities valuable to other settings. By understanding how the skills were learned, and the context in which they were learned, Martinek, Schilling, and Johnson (2001) confirm Danish, Petitpas and Hale’s (1993) idea that conscious awareness of learning and ownership of specific skills is a crucial facilitating component in the transfer of skills.

Counseling psychologists can be influential in preparing athletes for skill transfer and understanding the difficulties involved (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). The application of the human development framework, as shown in the previous summarized studies, has been successfully incorporated into the sporting realm. However, the application of the framework does not produce automatic positive development nor does it guarantee transfer of life skills from one domain to another (Danish et al., 2002; Martinek, Schilling & Johnson, 2001; Petitpas et al.,
It appears necessary for youths to understand what skills they are learning, and identify where and how they can be transferred. As older individuals may have gained more ‘life experiences’ and potentially had more time to learn and identify skills, investigating the concept over transferring life skills from sport to other areas of life may provide more valuable information (Martinek, Schilling & Johnson, 2001). Furthermore, analysis of individuals in a retrospective study may also provide valuable information and greater insight of the transfer of these qualities over time.

It is therefore the aim of the current study to continue to look at the role of sport participation in the life skill development. Particularly, there is an interest in the perception of whether life skills have been learnt through sport, how the life skills have been learnt, and whether the life skills are transferrable to other life domains. Specifically, investigating intercollegiate sport participation, and gaining the perceptions of intercollegiate athletes, the study will analyze the latter years of youth which has received little attention in the developmental literature. This investigation of college age athletes will satisfy Martinek, Schilling, and Johnson’s (2001) idea that older athletes are able to provide more in-depth information. In addition, these athletes will have experienced a minimum of four years of intercollegiate sport participation. Participants will be able to analyze from a current and retrospective view point which provides the potential to investigate the important concept of skill transfer (Martinek, Schilling, & Johnson, 2001). Perceptions from a retrospective view point, of the role of sport participation in life skills development has received little attention. This could therefore provide further insight to this important area of research.

Petitpas et al., (2005) acknowledge the lack of research regarding the effectiveness of the sport-based intervention programs in developing life skills in youths. Similarly, the lack of research about the effectiveness of the role of general sport participation in life skill development is apparent in the literature. Although some correlational data has been generated, the need for further investigation from the athletes’ perspective is obvious. Investigation of the athletes’ qualitative perspectives will provide more causal explanations of the role of sport participation in life skill development. Specifically, this will provide much needed insight about how the athletes’ perceive their life skills are effectively developed.

*The Influential Role of Coaches*
A critical component in the positive psychosocial growth of athletes’ in a sporting program is the need to be surrounded by a caring adult mentor (Petitpas et al., 2005). Analyzing athlete’s perspectives of positive and negative sporting experiences, Fraser-Thomas and Cote (2009) outlined a need for additional emphasis on coach training and an understanding from coaches that they are very influential in the personal development of athletes. Furthermore, the interacting elements of competitive sport and peers, parents, and coaches have been shown to be vitally important in youth sport (Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2009; Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). Overall, this repetitive focus on the importance of coaching and mentorship in athlete personal development suggests that a sports coach is in a crucial position, as a leader and a mentor, to impact on life skill development.

Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) attempted to understand the relationship between coaches and athletes. Using qualitative case studies with coaches and athletes, and a review of relevant literature, the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q) was developed and validated. The study found that coaches’ and athletes’ emotions, thoughts and behaviors had many mutual and causal connections. This unique interaction was found to have two important constructs which influence performance in the sporting realm. “Closeness” is the emotional connection between the two individuals. “Complementarity” is the cooperative interactions that assist the setting and achievement of goals. Although previous research suggested that athletes and coaches having shared perspectives and a “co-orientation” would assist performance, this was not supported. By highlighting that specific component’s in the coach-athlete relationship correlate with performance, the role of the relationship on personal life skill development becomes an area of interest.

As coaches appear to have important roles to play in assisting athlete performance in sport, Gould, Chung, Smith and White (2006) examined the types of personal and social issues that coaches perceive important to understand, and the roles in which they play in relation to personal development issues, rather than performance issues. Analyzing coaches from different sports using a specialized positive youth development survey, the study focused on the high school sport setting which is promoted and accepted as a site for educational, physical, personal and social growth. The main coaching objectives appeared as having a winning team, having fun, developing physical skills and attributes, and developing social and psychological aspects of athletes. Interestingly, developing social and psychological attributes in athletes was ranked
overall as the most important coaching objective by coaches. Furthermore, the coaches perceived that positive values and skills were learned by athletes and that they as coaches, had considerable impact on the lives of the youths. Coaches also reported their perception that they frequently encounter problems and issues with their athletes within the high school sport setting. These included athletes failing to take personal responsibility, poor motivation and work ethic, and a lack of communication skills as the most frequent. Notably, no differences were established between boys and girls sports in relation to character development (Gould et al., 2006).

As discussed previously, issues facing student-athletes are shown to be wide ranging and the coach therefore has an important role in assisting social development around these issues, an aspect acknowledged and positively promoted by coaches. Development of social life skills is not, however, a direct by-product from participation in sport and possibly not a direct by-product from the coaches believing they “coach” these skills and values (Gould et al., 2006). This emphasis on social development suggests coaches do not primarily coach to win. However, as social development is a heavily promoted ideal of youth sport, the authors did note that coaches may answer research questions in a way to make responses match the developmental pursuit and socially desirable answers. By gaining athletes’ perspectives on such behaviors, validation or contradictions to the coaches actions and behaviors could be identified.

It can be stated that life skills are not necessarily caught, but they are taught through sport (Hodge, 1989). This suggests that life skills must be intentionally taught and fostered. Although sport is a desirable domain to teach and learn such skills, successful education is not guaranteed. To highlight the complexity of this, McCallister, Blinde and Weiss (2000) suggested that it is not necessarily easy for coaches to teach these life skills. In attempting to identify the important values and life skills that coaches perceive they teach and how they teach them, coaching philosophies and coaching behaviors were analyzed. The study used in-depth interviews with coaches in youth sport programs. The values, life skills and philosophies of youth sport coaches focused on positive social behavior and outcomes of sportsmanship, respect and teamwork that emphasize fun and desirable ways to function in society.

Interestingly however, coaches struggled in associating their values and their actual methods of coaching. Contradictions were found between teaching values of the coaches and actual behavior of the coaches. Most coaches assumed that by simply talking about the life skills, they would instill them in the youths. Although the young athlete age may have been an
influential factor, this inconsistency raised the important issue that although coaches recognized desirable life skills, they had difficulty teaching them. With coaches stating that their coaching philosophy saw fun as being more important than the outcome, the active promotion of winning over fun and a focus on competitiveness highlighted how philosophy can differ from actual behavior. Coaches that were surveyed typically had no formal training in how to structure a learning environment for life skills and promote the desired outcomes. It therefore appears crucial that coaches be trained to teach life skills so that they can talk and act out their philosophies in a position that is extremely influential in promoting positive youth development (McCallister et al, 2007). The lack of ability of coaches to actually parallel their coaching philosophies and coaching behavior appears to be critical aspect in the learning of life skills through sport participation.

Following these findings in relation to coaching philosophy and behavior, Gould, Collins, Lauer and Chung (2007) believed it was necessary to explore the exact methods and strategies coaches used to teach and develop life skills. By using competitive high school football coaches who had been recognized for their successful achievements, the study utilized in-depth qualitative interviews to establish a general pattern of strategies and therefore gain a greater understanding the life skills coaching process. In attempting to analyze coaching education, philosophies and style, the semi-structured interview was designed to gain a holistic, more in-depth understanding of the coaches’ responses than could be gained from surveys.

The two step analytical process which developed individual case profiles with individual themes, and then established themes across the ten participants, was used to articulate two general categories in relation to the coaches’ life skill implementation strategies. Within the first dimension of “Effective Coaching Strategies,” working with players was seen as important with respectful relationship, standards of accountability, and other factors such as flexibility and individualization, being the highlighted methods. Furthermore, dealing with significant others was a strategy coaches viewed as being integral in development life skills in players. “Player Development Strategies” was the second dimension established which emphasized the need for performance enhancement strategies in motivation and goal setting. Also, in this category, the teaching of life skills through academic enhancement and the transfer of skills and values were seen as being of vital importance (Gould et al., 2007).
Coaches were therefore viewed as using thought-out and fluent methods for developing the life skills in athletes and used a variety of different methods, thus following practical implications set out by previous research in the area. Although some strategies were not directly identified by coaches, the emphasis on building player-coach relationships was realized to aid life and sport skills. Consistency was viewed as being extremely important by Gould and colleagues (2007) with reinforcement of messages and key skills being influential in showing that the players knew what was expected of them and that they were accountable for their actions. By outlining the perspectives from successful coaches about the appropriate strategies to use to foster the development of life skills in high school athletes, Gould et al., (2007) provide another valuable addition to the positive youth development literature. It is suggested that future research could focus on whether the transfer of life skills actually occurred. The process of transferring of such skills appears to be very important in the positive youth development based on the Gould and Carson (2008) definition that a ‘skill’ gained from sport cannot be classified as a life skill until is successfully transferred into another area of life. Gould et al., (2007) suggested that the analysis of athletes’ perceptions of the skills learnt through sport participation should be an area of future research. The current study will therefore investigate the role of sport participation in life skills development from the athletes’ perspective. Furthermore, the process of transferring life skills learnt in sport to other life domains will be a specific focus of the study.

In addition to youth sport programs and intervention programs, coaches have been identified as being influential in the development of life skills in youths and athletes (Gould et al., 2007; Petitpas et al., 2005). Although it is recognized that coaches do not automatically have a positive influence on life skill development of their athletes (McCallister et al., 2007), they are in a very influential position. This position of power allows coaches to influence the lives of children and young adults. Many strategies and coaching behaviors have been outlined which coaches claim to positively influence this development (Gould et al., 2006; Gould et al., 2007). While this confirms that life skill development is an area of focus for coaches, a greater understanding of the effectiveness of the development can be gained through the exploration of the perceptions of the athletes’ involved. It is therefore the purpose of this study to explore collegiate athletes’ perspectives about the role of sport participation in their personal life skill development.
Athletes’ Perspectives on Life Skills Development in Sport

From the perspective of both research and practicing professionals in the sport psychology field, interventions, youth activities, and sport coaches appear to be highly productive in influencing youth development. However, a greater need for research investigating life skills development from a variety of perspectives has recently been emphasized (Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt, Tamminen, Tink & Black, 2009; Jones & Lavallee, 2008; Jones & Lavallee, 2009). Hansen, Larson and Dworkin (2003) investigated youths’ perspectives of their developmental and negative experiences from participation in youth activities. The 450 students used in the study were aged between fourteen and eighteen and were living in Mid-West cities. The youths participated in faith-based, service activities, academic and leadership activities, performance and art activities, activities within community organizations or in organized sport. Learning experiences were divided into personal development and interpersonal development. Personal development focused on identity, initiative, and emotive, cognitive and physical skills. Interpersonal development focused on the growth social skills and competencies, building relationships and networks and the interaction with adults to provide new information and knowledge. By also analyzing negative experiences of stress, anxiety and pressures, the study used the Youth Experiences Survey (YES) which investigated the full range of developmental responses and reactions to youth activities (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003).

Following the recognition of various learning experiences, it was established that different sport, arts and faith-based environments produce different types of experiences, yet all were still very supportive settings for the life education. Both personal and interpersonal experiences were highlighted by the participants as being developed through involvement in youth activities, and they further perceived that personal and interpersonal skills were possibly applicable to the wider social setting. The dynamic of the youth sport setting created a competitive and comparative environment that fostered positive experiences but also negative peer interactions and rivalry that caused inappropriate adult behaviors. The youths’ therefore perceived youth sport to be a setting which has the ability to help develop positive self-knowledge, emotional regulation and physical experience, but also limit one’s development through negative experiences.

Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin (2003), highlighted the importance of the evaluation of the sport setting as a site for personal development. Self-report measures from the youths appear to
be very useful. This methodology provides youths’ perceptions of their learning experiences and is important in establishing the underlying processes which facilitate or debilitate the affective response to positive experiences. Continuing research therefore needs to investigate these developmental experiences in line with positive change in both the sport and social setting (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003).

Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin, (2003) highlight a need to further focus on the sport setting and establish how athletes perceive sport participation influences their life skill development. With a specific focus on individuals involved in the sport setting, Jones & Lavallee (2008) attempting to gain an understanding of interpretation of life skills as a phenomenon, and which life skills are perceived as being important, and needed for British adolescent athletes. Focusing specifically on the British sporting environment, the study used focus groups made up of adolescent athletes, coaches and sport psychology graduate students and experts. The aim of conversation within the focus groups was to establish a definition of life skills, and find important interpersonal and personal life skills needed for athletes. The various individuals outlined specific life skills that they believed needed to be implemented in sports programs for individuals aged fifteen through twenty two.

Creating a definition of life skills individually tailored to participants within the sporting environment, the study made important additions to the life skills literature. Seeing life skills as “a range of transferrable skills needed for everyday life, by everybody, that help people thrive.” Three categories of life skills that should be incorporated in youth sport programs were established from information collected in the focus group setting. Interpersonal life skills included “social skills” in the form of communication and interaction. Respect, leadership and teamwork were also viewed as interpersonal life skills needed for athletes. Required personal life skills were self-organization and disciplinary skills of athletes. Additionally, self-reliance, time management goal setting and motivation were identified by the individuals as being necessary skills for athletes. Jones and Lavallee (2008) believed adolescents are able to view development as being self-controllable and thus, creating a focus where athletes could teach themselves should be an aim of youth sport programs. Having more self-control, the researchers believe that having individuals directing their own exploration of interpersonal and personal skills, therefore allows for a more positivistic youth and life skill development. Based on the knowledge generated in the focus groups, it is believed that the ability to transfer a skill gained from sport to another life
domains relies on one having the knowledge of the skill they possess. Jones and Lavallee (2008) provided valuable perspectives about the need youth sport programs to develop specific life skills. Furthermore, further insight was provided about the role individual athletes’ can play in their own personal development and the importance of individual self-control.

Jones and Lavallee (2008) provided valuable insight into the various perspectives of life skills needed in youth sport programs, however further information is required specifically about the athletes’ perspectives of development through sport participation. Although providing some insight about athletes’ views of life skill development, the use of focus groups used by Jones & Lavallee (2008) may have potentially impacted on these perspectives. Coaches and sport psychology experts views may have influenced the athletes views of the important life skills needed due to the more senior nature of a coach or older sport psychology expert. By focusing on one particular group, such as the athletes themselves, further insight could be gained that goes beyond definitions and specific life skills, but also the processes of learning that were not explored by Jones & Lavallee (2008). The idea of understanding developmental experiences in sport from the athletes’ perspective was therefore explored by Fraser-Thomas and Cote (2009).

Fraser-Thomas and Cote (2009) expanded on their previous work in relation to the developmental outcomes in sport (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005) by gaining an understanding of both positive and negative developmental experiences in sport through a qualitative analysis with competitive Canadian swimmers. Undertaking semi-structured interviews, the study attempted to identify the specific processes involved in personal development through sport from the athletes’ perspective and provide implications for organizations and individuals involved in youth sport. Athletes identified being challenged in the structure of competitive swimming as a positive experience. The challenging nature of the sport promoted a strong work ethic that rewarded commitment, discipline and perseverance. Coaches’ who demonstrated unfaltering belief in athletes and provided constructive feedback, goal setting advice, and held high expectations, were also viewed as positive developmental resources for the athletes. Meaningful relationships with parents and coaches and peers were identified as important in positive development. These relationships were identified as facilitating positive development if they involved good communication. Also relationships were perceived to be positive by providing appropriate role models and unique relationships that were acquired through the challenges of swimming. The community club nature of swimming was seen to
provide social support and further assisted positive development for athletes. The implicit structure of swimming provided the development of time management, independence, resilience to stress, and good communication that the athletes’ identified as positive in their development.

Alternatively, poor relationships with coaches provided negative developmental experiences for athletes. Poor communication, unequal attention to athletes’ who were viewed as favorites, intimidation, and inappropriate behaviors and comments were identified as negative experiences. Peers were also identified as potential negative influences when jealousy and poor work ethic was evident in their behavior. Furthermore, parents who placed pressure on their children to win and excel, and to stay involved in sport, were negatively perceived in relation to their development. Although stress had been identified as positive, forms of excessive stress and negative self-perceptions were psychological components that negatively influenced development. Fraser-Thomas and Cote (2009) provided specific examples of positive and negative developmental experiences as perceived by athletes in competitive swimming and highlighted the important fact that all individuals involved in the sporting environment, coaches, parents, peers and the athlete him or herself, impact the development of life skills and character from sport.

Insight has therefore been provided as to how athletes’ perceive sport participation influences personal development through sport (Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2009; Jones & Lavallee, 2008). Fraser-Thomas and Cote (2009) expand on the previous research (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005) by exploring both positive and negative developmental outcomes of sport participation. This study provides specific examples of how sport participation influences development from the athletes’ perspectives. The current research proposes to continue to investigate the role of sport participation in the personal development of athletes’, but incorporate the specific focus of life skills development. The current study will question athletes’ about what skills they learned through sporting experiences, how they learned life skills through those experiences, and how the athletes’ feel they can use the learned skills in other areas of life. This expands on Fraser-Thomas and Cote’s (2009) by allowing athletes’ to relate the positive and negative sporting experiences directly to the learning of life skills and how they can, or have transferred these skills to other areas of their lives.

To explore life skills development from the athletes’ perspective, Jones and Lavallee (2009) undertook a single case study of a 22 year old female tennis player. Using semi-structured
interviews and informal discussions, the study looked at the perceptions of an athlete with regional and national experience in the United Kingdom, and collegiate experience in the United States. The athlete believed that life skills were developed through the integration of individual athlete dispositions and specific experiential learning through tennis participation. Believing that the skills learnt reflected the specific requirements of tennis, the athlete’s perceptions supported the notion that life skill development was not automatic through sport participation (Danish et al., 2002; Petitpas et al., 2005). The ability to engage in hard work was identified as an imperative skill that the athlete believed she was born with and then increased through her participation in sport. Furthermore, the athlete implied that no coach, parent or peer had explicitly taught her life skills, but the process of youth development was dependent on her innate self-awareness and the situational requirements.

Parents were identified as a supportive structure that stimulated life skills learning and it was stated that she learned the skills unconsciously, and it was not until later when she realized she had successfully acquired the skills. Additionally, the athlete believed that skills could be transferred across life domains, but this was dependent on the type of skill being transferred. By using examples of transferring communication skills and hard work from tennis to academia, the athlete highlighted the meaning and importance successfully transferring the skill, which enabled her to save money through an athletic-academic scholarship. This retrospective study provided a unique addition to the sport psychology literature by showing a single athlete’s perspective of life skill development and showed the positive experiences of a successful athlete who emphasized the importance of dispositional qualities interacting with situational experiences. Jones and Lavallee (2009) have therefore provided beneficial insight of an athlete’s perspective of how specific sporting experiences influence life skill development. Critically, the researchers suggest that the development of life skills can occur through sport but not necessarily as the result of systematic, direct teaching strategies. The case-study, however, only provides the perspective of one British athlete’s experiences in an individual sport. Further exploration of the role of sport participation on life skill development in different team and individual sports and different cultures and social settings would continue to expand the knowledge base in this life skill development literature.

Continuing to investigate and expand on the literature about athlete perspectives of life skill development through sport participation, Holt, Tamminen, Tink, and Black (2009) focused
on a Canadian competitive youth sport population who participated in a range of individual and team sports. The 40 young adult participants were interviewed retrospectively about their adolescent sporting involvement with the interview focusing on examining positive life events. Being qualitative interviews, this study focused the lived experiences of the young adults, and the meanings and interpretations from the individuals. Social networks established through sport, and the interactions with peers, were identified as the most meaningful feature of youth sport involvement. The ability to work with other people was viewed by athletes as important skill in being able to establish these meaningful friendships. This was the same for team and individual sports, and the ability to interact with others was identified by participants as a skill transferrable to adult life.

Parents were also identified as influential in imparting social skills and personal values. Positively influencing sportspersonship, parents appear to emphasize personal responsibility for involvement in sport. Athlete interactions with coaches were identified as both positive and negative in influencing life skills development. Persistence, effort and hard work arose from positive interactions with coaches while negative communication and an overemphasis on winning from coaches were features of the coach-athlete relationship that were viewed as negative. The important interactions with peers, parents and coaches were identified by athletes in learning social skills in youth sport and appear to be areas in need of future investigation. Holt et al., (2009) provided much needed insight in the sport psychology developmental literature by investigating athletes’ perceptions of the role of youth sport participation in life skill development.

Holt and co (2009) have provided insight about youths’ the specific skills they perceived to learn through sport while Jones and Lavallee (2008) outlined the notion that life skills are learned through the interaction of the individual and the environment in experiential learning, as opposed to teaching. By analyzing athletes’ perspective of the role of sport participation in life skill development, recent research has made valuable contributions to the literature and understanding of life skill development as a phenomenon. With the intercollegiate sporting environment producing conflicting opinions as a site for personal development (Benford, 2007; Sage, 1998), this population appears to be an appropriate target life skill development research. Furthermore, it is understood that college age individuals are considered adolescence and in the ‘developmental’ stages (Danish et al., 2002). The current study will therefore attempt to gain an
understanding of the role of intercollegiate sport participation in the life skill development of intercollegiate athletes. This will add to the growing research which analyzes the perceptions of the athlete population and investigate intercollegiate sport which is a previously unexplored sporting environment.

Conclusion and Research Questions

By proposing a human development focus in sport psychology, Danish and Hale (1981) created a new way of thinking in the academic field. The change promoted a focus on the development of individuals in both the personal and athletic realms and attempted to encourage a sense of personal control for athletes regarding their own behavior. The focus on personal development has prompted sport-based interventions to be established that emphasize the learning of life skills through sporting activities and the transfer of these skills to other life domains. Although the strong focus on positive youth development has been promoted, the learning of life skills does not appear to be an automatic process (Petitpas et al., 2005), and it appears that life skills need to be taught in order for athletes to possess the life skills (Gould & Carson, 2008). In addition, the transfer of skills from sport to other important domains is complex and not guaranteed. Coaches, parents, peers and sport psychology specialists’ perspectives have been shown to be influential and have provided significant insight into how the development can be made for the athlete to prosper socially. Recently, research has begun to explore the perspectives of recreational and competitive athletes about the relationship between sport participation and life skills development. Gaining the athletes’ perspectives of the relationship between sport participation and life skill development has provided more insight about the teaching and experiential learning processes.

However, understanding about the role of sport participation in developing life skills from the athletes’ perspective is in need of greater attention. Specifically, the exploration of perceptions of athletes’ in different sporting environment at different ages would provide continued benefit to the literature. Intercollegiate athletics is a significant component of the United States sporting landscape. Interestingly, there is debate over whether the intercollegiate sporting environment is focused on being business venture or on the personal development of athletes (Benford, 2007; Coakley, 1994; Sage, 1998). Personal development is promoted within athletic departments (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001) and appears necessary as 18-21 year
old athletes’ are still in their adolescent developmental years (Danish et al., 2002). It therefore appears necessary to analyze the intercollegiate sporting environment in relation to the personal development of athletes. The personal development of students in the college setting has received great attention. However, this study focuses on student-athletes and the role of sport participation in personal development (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Specifically, a greater understanding about collegiate athletes’ perspectives of the role of sport participation in life skill development would provide a valuable addition to the literature. Thus, the purpose of this study is to gain an understanding about whether the intercollegiate athletes feel they have learned life skills through intercollegiate sport participation, how they believe they have acquired these skills, and how they believe they are using, or can use, these life skills in other areas of life. Therefore, three research questions are examined in this study. Do athletes perceive they have learned life skills through their participation in sport? If not, why not? What are these skills, and how do the athletes believe they have acquired them? How do athletes believe they are using, or can use, these life skills in other areas of their lives? If not, why not?

Chapter 2

Methods

Research Approach

The current study is informed by a phenomenological research approach. Phenomenology focuses on the meaning of a lived experience of a small group from the standpoint of a specific phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007; Schram, 2006). Hence, the study investigated the meaning of sport participation as a lived experience for athletes as a small group of people, from the standpoint of life skills development as a concept or phenomena (Schram, 2006). This was therefore a transcendental phenomenological study because it was focused on what experiences within the sporting environment meant for the athlete (Cresswell, 2007). Because they were in a position to give a comprehensive description of the experience, former college athletes’ were recruited to help provide an understanding of the essence and central underlying meaning of the relationship between life skill development and sport participation (Schram, 2006).

Phenomenology is defined by two ‘orienting concepts’: *epoche* and *lived-world* (Cresswell, 2007; Schram, 2006). *Epoche* refers to the ability to distance ourselves, and bracket judgment
about the nature of our personal experience and the *Lived-world* focuses on ones practical reasoning and commonsense gained from ordinary, everyday experiences. Hence, critical in the undertaking of this phenomenological study was that I recognize, reflect on, and ‘bracket’ my judgments and preconceptions about the nature of the relationship between life skills development and sport participation (Schram, 2006). Furthermore, I had to seek to understand the ‘lived-world’ of sport for the athletes who participated in the study and question its practical and ‘commonsense’ knowledge and how they provided meaning for the athletes (Schram, 2006).

Being informed by a phenomenological approach, it was essential that all participants in the study have experiences of the phenomena being studied and that these sources have a meaningful and appropriate link to this context (Mason, 2002). The study sampled athletes who were currently involved in their college sporting careers. Using this population of individuals in the sampling population, the sample was based on distinguishable, discrete athletes as meaningful data sources. Providing meaning to their specific experiences of life skills development and sport participation, it was important to note that this sample was only representative in terms of their known and specific characteristics and not necessarily representative in every sense (Mason, 2002).

**Procedures**

**Participant Recruitment**

The sampling universe in the current study was current Division I intercollegiate athletes, who were identified using both purposeful strategic sampling and convenience sampling. To construct my thesis sample, individuals were selected so that they could inform the researcher about, or provide an understanding of life skills development and sport participation, which is the central phenomena of the study (Cresswell, 2007). The sampling method was purposive in that intercollegiate athletes were selected based on the fact that they had experienced intercollegiate sport. It was a convenience sample in that individuals who were selected had experienced the phenomena but were primarily selected because they will be easily accessible to the researcher.

Participants were recruited via connections at a Mid-Western United States University. Two athletes were recruited from a recruitment speech in a lecture class. Four were recruited via email following recommendations from professors of athletes who fit the inclusion criteria. One athlete was recruited via ‘word of mouth’ from one of the athletes who had previously completed the research interview. The inclusion criteria for participation in the study interviews required
athletes to be in their final year of intercollegiate athletic eligibility. In asking these individuals to talk about experiences from past sporting intercollegiate sporting experiences, this research retrospectively sampled from various times and places during intercollegiate sport participation that the athletes perceived as important in regards to the relationship of life skills development and sport participation. Additionally, the researcher attempted to obtain an even number of male and female athletes from a range of different sports. The recruitment of different athlete genders and different sports was desired so that the research encompassed as wide range of intercollegiate athletic experiences. This attempted to cover a broad range of the 19 intercollegiate sports at the Mid-Western United States University and not have athletes who were involved in the same specific athletic program. Using the criteria mentioned for the specific population, the study followed a criterion type of sampling where all participants meet the criteria of being involved, in a either four or five years, of intercollegiate sport (Cresswell, 2007).

Participants were seven current senior intercollegiate athletes from A Mid-Western United States University. Athlete 1 was a female cross-country runner who received an athletic scholarship. She participated in each of her four years. Athlete 2 was a female volleyball player who received an athletic scholarship. She was a ‘starter’ for the majority of her four year career. Athlete 3 was a female field hockey player who received an athletic scholarship. She was not a ‘starter’ in her freshman year but was for the remainder of her career. Athlete 4 was a male football player who was not on an athletic scholarship. He received little playing time until his fifth year when he became a ‘starter’. Athlete 5 was a male cross-country runner who received an athletic scholarship. He was injured during his second and fourth years of competition which hindered his ability to participate during those times. Athlete 6 was a female softball player who received an athletic scholarship. She was a ‘starter’ for the majority of her career. Athlete 7 was a male ice hockey player who received an athletic scholarship. He was a ‘starter’ for the majority of his second and third years of eligibility. He did not receive much playing time during his first and fourth seasons. All of the athletes, aside from Athlete 6, had completed their final season of intercollegiate athletic eligibility. Athlete 6 was approximately one month from the end of the season.

All of the athletes involved in the study were willing participants in the interviews. Athlete 1, Athlete 2, Athlete 6, and Athlete 7 agreed to participate via email, Athlete 3 and Athlete 4 approached the researcher following a recruiting speech, and Athlete 5 approached the researcher
following discussion with a former study participant. Athlete 7 discussed his excitement about getting the chance to share his intercollegiate athletic experience at the beginning of his interview.

The Qualitative Interview

Mason (2002) describes a qualitative interview as a conversation with a purpose. The interviews were informal interactional exchanges of dialogue, but they had a specific purpose. This method focused on the importance of building effective reciprocal communication whilst inquiring into the meaning people made of the phenomenon being researched. It had a fluent and flexible structure and although it was based on an interview script, it was not imperative that the full list of questions were covered during the interview. Inherent in this communication are six primary functions as outlined by Jakobson (1976 cited in Shank, 2006). These underlying functions serve as critical aspects of the interview process.

The “referential function” referred to the transfer of information from the sender to the receiver and the information was then analyzed in relation to the each individual’s perceived “truth” about the world. The “emotive function” of qualitative interviews related to the processing of all of the non-verbal information being passed, where each message sent and received had emotion and feeling attached. As all messages were intended to persuade, the “conative function” was the persuasive function of each communicated message which helped the interviewer steer the interview. The “metalingual function” referred to the codes in the form of dress, manners and conduct shared during the conversation and the importance of building a joint awareness of these and understanding how they were used and what they meant. The need to pay close and careful attention to the communication and “how” the information was being communicated, was the “poetic function” of the interview. Finally, the “phatic function” referred to the need to understand the verbal and non-verbal signals transferred between the individuals that relate to an open channel of communication (Shank, 2006).

In qualitative interviews, avoiding too much disclosure was important in helping the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible. Furthermore, silences were an inevitable part of the interview and it was important that the interviewer did not try and fill the awkward silences. Rather, the interviewer attempted to remain quiet and allow the interviewee to collect his or her thoughts and communicate at a personalized pace. The process was also heavily influenced by the questioning and conversation at the beginning of the meeting. A “grand-tour question” was used to
lead the conversation in a desired direction. This was then followed by “mini-tour questions” which helped provide more detail and focus, and were used throughout the interview. By also promoting the explanation of examples and personal experiences from the interviewee, greater specifics could be obtained. Unstructured qualitative interviews were shaped and guided by the interviewee and these questions were used as a checklist during the interview and were raised if they were not naturally raised (Shank, 2006). Qualitative interviews were interpersonal events and were shaped by the situational interpersonal dynamics. The interviewer understood and learned how to deal with phrasing questions to avoid closed answers, and focused on promoting open, reflective dialogue. The qualitative interview process was then completed with the verbatim transcription of the interview completed, which was a time-consuming task (Shank, 2006).

Procedure

The researcher made initial contact with the athletes outlining the broad research topic of personal development and sport participation and requested their participation in the interviews (Appendix B). When the athletes agreed to participate in the interview, the researcher then arranged a date and time for the interview that was convenient to the study participant. Individuals who declined participation in the study were thanked for their time and not contacted again. The interviews took place in a closed room or office where there were minimal distractions. The researcher arrived 15 minutes before the scheduled interviews to set up the room and test the tape recorder. The researcher then explained the broad research purpose and asked the participant if he or she has any questions, as shown in the introductory script (Appendix C). The participants were then required to complete a ‘Participation and Informed Consent’ form and ‘Background Information Sheet (Appendix D and E). Once the forms were completed, and the tape recorder was successfully tested, the researcher reminded the study participant that he or she may choose to not answer any question, and that he or she could ask for clarification of any questions if not understood. The researcher also informed them that he or she may stop the interview at any time for any reason, and that there was no “right” or “wrong” answers. The researcher then emphasized that he was interested in her/his experiences and perceptions.

Following the prepared interview guide (Appendix A), the interviews followed a semi-structured interview style which guaranteed that all questions on the interview guide were asked. This started with the “grand tour” question and the procedure then included leading, open-ended
questions that were critically developed upon the participants’ content. This followed a classic field interview which allowed the researcher to discover the interviewee’s perceptions of the everyday world (Shank, 2006). The interviews each had their own “natural length” (Mason, 2002) and concluded once all of the interview guide questions had been asked and when the energy of the interview was decreasing.

After each of the individual interviews had ended, the study participant was debriefed about the purpose of the study and the researcher offered the participant the chance to ask any further questions. The researcher then offered the participant a copy of my final report and got his or her mailing details. The interviews were transcribed following the completion of all seven interviews. Each interview was not transcribed and critically analyzed before the next interview took place. However, the interviewer did use previous experiences with questions to guide the order and structure in the following interviews.

As noted previously, purposive and convenience sampling was used to select the participants for the study because as Mason (2002) defines it, the researcher wanted to construct a qualitative research sample that was empirically and theoretically meaningful. The researcher completed interviews with a total of seven athletes. Following the completion of the seven interviews, the researcher believed that this provided sufficient information to answer the research questions. As Mason (2002) notes, “sample size should help you understand the process rather than to represent a population and it should be an ongoing and dynamic process” (p. 134). The researcher believed that the data collected from the seven interviews provided sufficient understanding of the role of intercollegiate sport participation on the life skill development of collegiate athletes.

Analysis

Analysis in qualitative research required the researcher to “have a conversation with” his or her data (Shank, 2006, p. 146). Baptiste (2001 cited in Shank, 2006) has outlined four essential phases of this engagement in qualitative data analysis. The first phase, defining the type of analysis to use, refers to the need for researchers to make decisions about the specific approach to use and to understand the assumptions about reality and knowledge that the approach has. Researchers doing qualitative science share many of the same assumptions of quantitative research in terms of issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability, while those conducting qualitative inquiry
assume that every group or individual is different and does not look to generalize (Shank, 2006). The second phase involves the researcher choosing a way to organize the data. This includes choosing which data to pay attention to and which to ignore, and then classifying it into groups or categories. Categorization is often difficult in terms of trying to capture the appropriate data and then identifying whether or not the number of categories is correct. This also differs between qualitative science and qualitative inquiry. Qualitative science looks for more abstract, wider groupings, and qualitative inquiry which looks for contextual, situation-specific groupings (Shank, 2006). The third phase of analysis in qualitative research is the identification of connections between the different classes of data and seeing what the data is “telling” the researcher at a larger level. This includes the identification of patterns of perspectives and/or behaviors that help with creation of themes or theories. The fourth phase refers to the presentation of the results of the analysis in figures, tables and a discussion. The aim of this phase is to communicate the data in the most effective way (Shank, 2006).

In this qualitative science study, the following processes were followed in the analysis of the data. The transcripts were created and organized so that they could be read through with ease. The transcripts were then re-read multiple times so the researcher became fully engaged in the data from the participants. In understanding that coding is a process that requires selective attention, the analysis attempted to identify everything in the transcripts that the researcher believed related to the role of sport participation in the development of life skills for athletes. This required interpretation from the researcher, which involved the use of epoche as the researcher took a step back and attempted to interpret meaning from the data (Cresswell, 2007; Shank, 2006).

Significant statements were identified and marked on the transcripts and these “slices” of data were recorded as meaning units. Once meaning units had been identified throughout the transcripts, these pieces of data were grouped into themes or categories. This categorization was based on the specific information from each unit and the essence of that information in relation to the phenomena of life skills development. These themes were therefore made up of groups of meaning units that were identified as being relevant and related (Cresswell, 2007). Cross-sectional coding was then completed across the all data and participants once all of the interviews had taken place.

**Standards of Evaluation**
Qualitative research has received criticism in the scientific ranks for its perceived failure to adhere to the principles of reliability and validation (Cresswell, 2007). However, as the systematic, empirical inquiry into meaning (Schram, 2006), the process of ensuring quality in qualitative research, occurs according to different standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba see the concept of trustworthiness as parallel to the quantitative notion of validity. Trustworthiness refers to the degree of dependability and credibility that can be attached to the research findings. Trustworthiness has four facets or is established in four ways. Dependability is the ability to know where a study’s data came from and how they were “collected” and used. Credibility is the believability of the research findings and the degree to which the findings are cohesive and consistent. Transferability refers to the extent the results of a study can be transferred to different settings and populations. Confirmability relates to the use of methodology and the degree to which the researchers have given enough detail to allow others to evaluate their data generation and analysis (Shank, 2006).

Trustworthiness acknowledges many of the criteria of traditional validity and applies them to qualitative research (Shank, 2006). Some qualitative researchers see no reason to apply the standards of quantitative research to qualitative research because qualitative research does not seek to be reliable, valid, or able to be generalized across populations (Johnson, 1997). However, according to Johnson (1997), validity in qualitative research can be thought of in three ways. Descriptive validity refers to the accuracy of the reporting of descriptive information by the researcher. Interpretive validity is the accurate portrayal of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences that the participants attach to what is being studied. Theoretical validity is the credibility and dependability of the theory developed about the phenomenon of study in relation to its fit with the data. Although more typical in quantitative research and not the major purpose of qualitative research, internal validity refers to the extent of justification a researcher has in claiming causal relationships and external validity is the level of generalizability of research data (Johnson, 1997).

To improve the validity of the current study, the researcher practiced reflexivity (Johnson, 1997; Schram, 2006). “Reflexivity” involved self-awareness and critical self-reflection on the assumptions, beliefs, and predispositions the researcher had about the life skill development and sport relationship (Johnson, 1997). Having a personal background related to sport and certain perceptions of the intercollegiate sporting environment, the researcher had to practice reflexivity in order to recognize how his beliefs and experiences affected and guided the research process.
(Johnson, 1997). This research also used what Johnson (1997) refers to as “low inference descriptors.” This was the use of descriptive phrases that were verbatim or very close accounts of what the participants said in the interviews. Using direct or verbatim quotations from the interviews helped improve the descriptive validity of this study.

Finally, “investigator triangulation” was used to further improve descriptive validity (Johnson, 1997). The researcher and his thesis advisor each analyzed the interview data and then compared the analysis or interpretations of the data. This improved descriptive validity by having more than one perspective in the data analysis and allowed for cross checking of the data to make sure the data were accurately represented (Johnson, 1997).

**Chapter 3**

**Results**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding about whether the intercollegiate athletes feel they have learned life skills through intercollegiate sport participation, how they believe they have acquired these skills, and how they believe they are using, or can use, these life skills in other areas of life. As described earlier, the analysis of the data was based on the specific information in the transcribed interviews and the essence of that information in relation to the phenomena of life skills development and the stated purpose of the study. The results can be categorized into two sections. The first section focuses on establishing that the interviewed athletes did perceive that they learned life skills through participation in intercollegiate athletics. This section recounts the experiences of the athletes and describes how the athletes believe they learned life skills. This section also specifies the life skills the athletes learned. The second section of the results categorizes the life skills into themes using the techniques described in the previous chapter (Cresswell, 2007). This section then explains how the athletes believe they are using, or can use, these life skills in other areas of life.

*How the Athletes Learned Life Skills*

First, this section of the results confirms that the athletes do perceive that they learned life skills through participation in intercollegiate athletes. This confirmation is derived from the stories and experiences illustrated by the athletes. These experiences of the athletes specify the perceived
life skills learned and describe how the athletes believe they acquired these life skills. The learning of life skills through intercollegiate sporting participation can be categorized into two sources. First, ‘Significant Others’ were identified as a source of influence in life skill development in intercollegiate sport. Four high-order themes and six lower-order themes were constructed to explain how significant others influenced the life skill development of intercollegiate athletes. From the experiences with ‘significant others’, specific life skills were perceived to be learned by the athletes. Table 1. shows the experiences and perceived life skills learned from ‘significant others’ in the intercollegiate sporting environment. The second source of influence was ‘The Nature of Intercollegiate Athletics.’ Seven themes were constructed to explain how the nature of intercollegiate athletics influenced the life skill development of intercollegiate athletes. Each of the high-order themes and lower-order themes created learning experiences. From each learning experience related to ‘the nature of intercollegiate athletics,’ specific life skills were perceived to be developed. Table 2. shows the experiences and perceived life skills learned from ‘the nature of intercollegiate athletics.’

**Significant Others**

**Higher-Order Theme 1: Coaches**

Athletes identified their coach or coaches as being influential in the development of life skills throughout their intercollegiate careers. The athletes believed that interactions with coaches and the behaviors of the coaches were meaningful in learning different skills. Three lower-order themes were constructed for the theme ‘Coaches.’ First, coaches were seen as being ‘positive role models’ with athletes suggesting that they learned behaviors and skills to replicate in their lives. Second, the athletes also claimed to understand and learn life skills in situations where the coaching behavior was viewed as undesirable by the athlete, thus creating the lower-order theme ‘negative role-models.’ Additionally, athletes’ explained experiences where coaches challenged them personally. The athletes’ claimed to learn life skills from these different ‘challenging experiences,’ the third lower-order theme.

**Lower-Order 1: Positive Role Models**

As a figure of authority in the intercollegiate sport setting, the coach or coaches were identified by athletes as being role models in positive ways. As positive role models for the
athletes, coaches were seen to assist in the development of life skills for athletes. Athlete 1 claimed that her coach helped her learn how to work with people and handle them in different situations:

- **Athlete 1:** “Then the coaches, I learned what to do and certain skills like how they handle situations with people, how they handle umm just athletes in general or other coaches and stuff like watch and learn how I would react with other people like umm calmly and not like take everything as the end of the world, and like take things by stride I guess”

Athlete 2 and Athlete 4 also suggested that coaches were able to assist them in learning how to work with people, specifically working with authority figures:

- **Athlete 2:** “Yeah, I’ve definitely learned a lot umm being around somebody that much umm that you report to, that you look up to, that you go to when you need help or advice or even just I mean any questions besides volleyball. I would go to my coaches for anything, they’re awesome people and so, but what I’ve learned from them is that you know in the same way, you’re always gonna have somebody there that’s higher than you that you can go to for different things, when you need help with life, you have questions, you need answers, whatever it is umm and I think you need to learn how they operate, that you know how to approach them, you know not everybody’s the same, you can’t approach people the same way with the same kind of questions, I would never you know like talk or say things to a superior that I would hang out and talk about with my friends on the weekend like some of the stuff is just different so I think you really have to learn what their style is and that way I think you’ll get a lot more from them”

- **Athlete 4:** “it was more of a joy to be around, because you knew going down to the stadium for practice you knew you had that kind of relationship that you know, it wasn’t like strictly business all of the time, you knew you had somebody to talk to umm, joke around a bit when the time was right and umm you know it just kinda made you like, you weren’t like as intense, you weren’t tensed up, you could feel more relaxed because you had that kind of relationship and you knew he was going to get on you when you screwed up but at the same time he had your back no matter what so I think that was definitely important to have some sort of relationship like that because you know you want to feel comfortable cause you want to respect the guy enough where you’ll go all out for him umm so”

*Humility* was identified as a skill that Athlete 7 believed he learned watching and learning from his coach as a role model:

- **Athlete 7:** “I think our coach had a huge impact, like the way that he handles media ah is a very classy way, he’s very classy in public’s eye which is awesome and I definitely learned a lot from that. And just what we talk about in the room when the coaches come in and the way that our team goes and the path that our team is on, it’s not on a path to boast so that ultimately starts to ensue humility umm absolutely”
Through interactions with his coach during his athletic career, Athlete 5 identified a change in perspective and a *new mastery orientation of goal setting* as a skill that was learned.

- **Athlete 5:** “he’s really helped fuel that philosophy that I have of doing your best and having a good time while you are doing it because I don’t think I….may be one time in my four years here has coach ever said something somewhat negative to me after a race and I’ve had plenty of bad races so umm he’s always very positive afterwards even if you don’t have a great race and I feel like that’s probably a really good thing to take into other areas, is that you know sometimes it’s not going to work out quite like you planned but so long as you put in the effort that you would, the certain amount of effort to get a good you know product, that sometimes that’s good enough and in that way it kind of makes it more about the means than the ends and I feel like that’s a very important thing to focus on, not to be so strictly result specifically oriented”

**Lower-Order Theme 2: Negative Role Models**

The undesirable behavior of coaches as role models was also identified as being influential in the learning of life skills for athletes. Athlete 1 outlined her coach’s treatment of his athletes during competition and she suggested she learned how to *deal with authority* while also viewing it as a negative way of *working with people*, and something she would personally avoid in the future:

- **Athlete 1:** “like whenever we raced he would umm if we weren’t doing what he wanted us to or running the splits that he wanted us to run, he would just look away and not pay attention to us and then at the end of the race we’d go to like talk to him and talk about the race and he would just like walk away or wouldn’t have anything to do with it so I feel like, I learned that pushing people away is not going help athletes get better, you need like talk it out and work through”

**Sub-theme 3: Challenging Behaviors**

The athletes identified a number of challenging situations in the intercollegiate sporting environment where coaches assisted in their life skills development. Through different actions and strategies, coaches appear to have created scenarios of adversity for athletes. From these experiences, the athletes have identified different skills that they believe they have developed. Athlete 2 suggests *hard work* and *leadership* were developed during her challenging experiences:

- **Athlete 2:** “our coaches push you and they won’t always tell you what they’re trying to do but you know talking with them now, now that I’ve graduated and even just after the moment, you know they tell you later on that they did certain drills or put you in certain
situations to see how you’d react so umm even when you’re not necessarily leading a team in terms of a mean situation, they want to see you’re like every moment of the practice day even. So there’s definitely moments where they push you to find out what you are capable of and I think knowing that they were doing that, and me not knowing that at the time one of the most valuable and kinda get to hear what they think you’re leadership styles are and you grow in that and you get to see yourself what you don’t want to be and you also learn from others so I think it’s valuable”

- **Athlete 2:** “I don’t think it was always positive. I think a lot of people find out who they really are in some of the worse situations they find themselves in so….you know coaches put you in a hard drill you know, it’s impossible to succeed ah I think you find out you know you might become frustrated or how much you wanna put blame on somebody else and those kinda things and hopefully you know I don’t find myself in any of those scenarios or things but you can’t say everybody does that all the time so…it wasn’t always finding ‘oh I’m a good leader because I never got in a fight with anybody or I always won the game’ or whatever it was, it was sometimes there were challenges and those were the times where you got to step back and say ‘okay am I gonna be somebody that just pushes myself through to get out of this or am I gonna somebody that brings others with me’ so I think it was sometimes the challenges and the harder parts that showed you and taught you a lot more.”

Similarly, Athlete 3 identified leadership and responsibility as skills developed from expectations of her coach:

- **Athlete 3:** “it was definitely expected of us, I think as we got older, I went from freshman year to sophomore year and sophomore to junior year, our coach addressed that she needed us to step up as far as leadership went and umm taking on more of a role where ah we take more responsibility and umm I think I did mature more as the years wore on and so that was able to help me as far as taking leadership. Freshman year I would not speak up without a reason with the issues we were having just because I didn’t feel like it was my place and as I got older, I took more of the responsibility where I felt like I was able to talk more about these issues so…I think that you definitely learn responsibility, so every year you get a little bit more responsibility”

Through difficult experiences with his coach, Athlete 4 stated that dealing with criticism was a skill that he learned. These experiences were viewed negatively at the time by the athlete

- **Athlete 4:** “the criticism and things like that on the field and 6am workouts you know I’ve learned that not to take it personally because they’re just trying to get the best out of you, they’re wanting to be the best in the league, the best in the country and umm you know it takes that, it takes getting criticized every now and then when you screw up or things like that so I learned to a lot of times, like when they get on you, they just want more out of you, they just want the best for you, rather than just picking on you”
• **Athlete 4**: “I hated them at the time but now you look back and you respect them because at the end of the day all they want is the best out of you and the same as like your family, your parents, you know all they want is the best out of you, it’s just a different way to get it out of you so when it was happening I don’t think there anything that I hated more but looking back, you know it made me a better person”

*Risk-taking* was identified as a skill that was promoted by the coach of Athlete 2. Through the use of the skill in her sport, the athlete acknowledged the use of risk-taking outside of sport:

• **Athlete 2**: “I never would have considered it something that I learned…unless it was, it was very much umm brought up by the coaches, they’d always talk about taking risks, you know the differences between good and bad risks and timing of risks and everything and we talked about it so much that I started to see how it applied other places or how you could use the same criteria for a good risk in volleyball and you know change the wording around and make a good risk in life or in school or friends of relationships, whatever it is so umm you know it was one thing that I didn’t really discover on my own but ah it was definitely a part of it.”

**Higher-Order Theme 2: Parents**

The athletes identified parents as being important in their development of life skills while participating in intercollegiate sport. Athletes talked about the supportive roles of parents during their intercollegiate sporting career and how this influenced their development. Two lower-order themes were constructed. The first theme was titled ‘Role Models’. Specifically, the athletes suggested that their parents discussed or portrayed certain life skills and involvement in intercollegiate sport allowed the athlete to gain experiences where the development of the skill occurred. The second theme was labeled ‘Support’. Parents were viewed as being a ‘safety net’ and support network during challenging times during the intercollegiate sporting experience.

**Lower-Order Theme 1: Role Models – “Planting Seeds”**

When asked about the influence of parents during his college life, Athlete 4 suggested his mother promoted *commitment* and *persistence* as important skills to have. The athlete suggested that he has learned these through his experiences.

• **Athlete 4**: “I remember my first camp you know, my freshman year with all of these older guys, I was 18, didn’t know anyone and umm you know I was upset, I remember calling
my Mom like basically crying you know wanting to come home cause it was all new to me and things like that, you know she said stick with it, it’ll pay off in the long run and umm it definitely has, cause I’ve gotten close with some guys on the team and made me feel more comfortable with”

Discussing the influence of her Mother, Athlete 6 mentioned qualities that her Mother possessed which she believes she has been able to use intercollegiate sport as a site to develop and utilize the skills of commitment and persistence.

- **Athlete 6:** “my Mom was the biggest fighter that I know and I think that that’s really taught me to stand up for myself and stand up for what I believe in and finish things umm you know not everyone finishes and not everyone goes into something saying hey I’m gonna get through it or hey I’m gonna finish this, a lot of people when things really suck they just, they sit down and say I’ve had enough and umm you know, my Mom was just not like that at all and it was more of an upbeat type attitude about everything and I could never be like that but if I can take a little piece of that with me then umm you know I’m a better person for that”

**Lower-Order Theme 2: Support – Safety Net**

Parents were identified by athletes as an important support network throughout the intercollegiate sporting experience. Athlete 1 discussed the support offered by her parents with advice about how to continue to develop leadership and working with people as important life skills.

- **Athlete 1:** “I mean my parents are really influential in my running career as well and helping me learn to how to deal with things especially when I had my old coach but I feel like I’ve definitely transformed from when I was a freshman umm until now and it deals more with like training and stuff like that, like I understand how to handle that and what I would do in certain situations but I’ve definitely learned that in college.”
- **Interviewer:** “So are your parents still a big influence well you’re still in college?”
- **Athlete 1:** “Yeah uh huh definitely. Umm if like something’s not going right or I’m having trouble with somebody I definitely consult with them and see what they say I should do and I look from advice from them.”
- **Interviewer:** “Yeah so they are still helping your development if you will?”
- **Athlete 1:** “Yeah definitely I mean if it wasn’t for my parents then I don’t think I’d be where I am now and especially with running, I don’t think I’d be where I am now so they put things in perspective in development and I feel like I’ll take that with me for the rest of my life.”
- **Interviewer:** “Can you think any examples of your parents doing stuff for you or saying certain things?”
• **Athlete 1:** “Umm I guess every parents or a lot of parents do it but umm my parents are the perfect critic, they don’t sugar coat things for me, like if I do something wrong they’ll tell me or umm they give me the honest opinion rather than a friend whose just like ya know maybe not the whole truth so umm that’s one thing I guess…and then they’ve always like they’re there for me all the time, 100% of the time, they’re like selfless people and I feel like that’s something that I would take or try to take into running and bring into the rest of my life, to help other people.”

Athlete 1 continued to describe specific examples where she perceived she learned these life skills:

• **Athlete 1:** “situation will happen or something and I guess, we had a really bad work-out and I told them that we had a bad work-out and that if we wanted to win conference that’s not how we’re gonna do it umm you know and just trial and error like I might have been a little bit too harsh with that and I’ll go and talk to my parents about it and they’ll be like ‘next time why do you try doing this a little bit better so you don’t offend people’ or something like that”

• **Athlete 1:** “they say things like ya know like jokingly like ‘I hope you win this’ or ‘I hope you make it to nationals’ or something like that but I know that if I don’t or if I have a bad race they’re still gonna be there supportive of me. Like they’ll tell me what I did wrong but they’ll be there, I guess and that’s something that umm I learned a lot from them too, to treat other people like that ya know.”

Athlete 5 also discussed the important background supportive role his parents played:

• **Athlete 5:** “my Dad was my baseball coach from the time I was five until the time I was sixteen so umm he had always been in the habit of saying ‘okay this is what I think you need to do this’ so then in high school I started running, and it’s something that no offence he knows nothing about and then he still kind of tried to coach me a little bit and I’m thinking you don’t know what you’re talking about so he let go of that a little which I’m sure was to some degree a little bit difficult for him but umm they’ve kind of taken, I don’t want to say a blasé approach but it’s been a very ah hands off and supportive to where, the same thing with how my coach would always say you know good job after a race well even if the result wasn’t good, they knew that all the training that I went through, the time that it takes and then actually getting to the race itself, you know all of that was, it’s a lot of work and umm for a few years I was too thick headed to really see that and appreciate that but I dunno with the perspective that I have now I feel like that was a very good approach and I was very pleased to have support because if your parents don’t support you then who’s going to”

**Higher-Order Theme 3: Teammates**

The interactions the athletes had with teammates were acknowledged as being influential in the development of life skills. Two lower order themes were constructed for the theme ‘Teammates’. First ‘Positive Interactions’ were identified. Second, ‘Negative Interactions’ were
identified. Both the positive and negative interactions with teammates in the intercollegiate sporting environment were viewed by the athletes as learning experiences.

**Lower-Order Theme 1: Positive Interactions with Teammates**

A number of life skills were perceived to be developed by the athletes through their experiences with other members of their sporting team. Athlete 7 claimed that his involvement with teammates allowed him to learn how to care for people and assisted him in learning how to develop and build relationships:

- **Athlete 7**: “hockey really taught me so much about understanding how to be there for somebody to where they understand you, they want it, they feel comfortable coming to you for advice, they feel comfortable just calling you to tell you about their day and that’s not some place that’s easily gotten to umm and it doesn’t come by just being fake about it all”

- **Athlete 7**: “The love of your teammates, no question. Showing up every single day, you have a choice whether or not you’re going to spend time with these guys, making a conscious effort outside of class, like you have so much on your plate so you have so many things that you could do, but choosing the right ones to do, a great bit of wisdom that I’ve learned and one of the things just spending time with people umm having dinner with guys, having good conversations, finding time to do that umm and making time, getting homework out of the way so you have free time to go and hang out with the guys for a little bit and really developing relationships beyond the rink”

Training and practice with other individuals was identified and perceived as an experience which helped develop hard work and commitment for Athlete 4:

- **Athlete 4**: “seeing each other get stronger and things like that and in summer, running out on the field together, on that turf it got up to close to like 100 degrees, your feet feel like they’re on fire, the sun beating down but knowing that the guys next to you are doing the same exact thing you are, putting in the same effort and you know just working as a team in the summer and doing things in the off-season as a whole”

Athlete 5 identified one specific teammate as being influential in the development of his personal self-belief. The athlete believed that the growth of self-belief as a skill could be attributed to his interactions with his teammate.

- **Athlete 5**: “I guess one positive thing, actually the same guy I had the friendly competition with, umm he was a very, it’s weird to refer to him as a role-model because
he’s my same age but he definitely was for me and the most important thing that I learned from him is that even if it seems like the majority of people don’t think that you’re doing something right but you feel like you are so just keep doing it, not listen to what the doubters have to say, as long as you are pleased with, and feel that it’s right to be doing things the way that you are, that’s a very important thing to do and umm but at the same time”

Athlete 7 identified his coach as assisting him in the development of humility as a life skill. Additionally, observing and interacting with teammates in a positive way was perceived to help the development of humility:

- **Athlete 7:** “I definitely learned a lot (humility) from that, you see other guys on the team acting that out in different ways and you catch on to things like that and I definitely learned a lot”

By observing and interacting with teammates, Athlete 2 believed that teammates also play an influential role in the development of leadership:

- **Athlete 2:** “you like follow and you stare at people, you learn from other people too and that way, you find what style works for you and umm I think you personality has to do with it and others you know, others have to trust in you. So I spent two years as an underclassman but at the same time getting to know my teammates and my peers and you know every year a new group came in so that by the time I was a junior there was already an entire class and a half who you knew my personality and knew what I was like and trusted me. So I think you know the whole time you’re not just waiting for that one moment and then trying something and failing, I think you’re building trust so that when something happens you know, hopefully when you do something people are going to trust you and follow you in it.”

Discussing the differences between high school and college sport, Athlete 4 claimed that he was more mature and able to develop the skill of accepting and understanding diversity through his involvement in intercollegiate sport:

- **Athlete 4:** “Umm I think in high school, it was a little different in high school because those guys you play high school football with, like you grew up with those guys so you knew them a little better but at the same time in college, you’re more mature so you like you get to know those guys in a different way because you hadn’t grown up with them and umm you learn to adapt to their background because you know there’s a lot more diversity than there was in high school and like guys come from different areas and things like that so I think it was definitely different than, like I’m good friends with my guys back home from my high school team, the same as I am in the five years that I’ve been here, it’s kind of a different friendship so…”

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Lower-Order Theme 2: Negative Interactions with Teammates

The athletes discussed challenging, unpleasant experiences with teammates and claimed that life skills were learned through these interactions. Athlete 1 claimed that unhappy exchanges with teammates helped her learn how to work with people:

- **Athlete 1:** “I mean obviously we all fight and we all come to practice grumpy and stuff but umm that’s where you learn, when you do stuff umm you get into fights and stuff, you take those experiences and you’re like OK well this shouldn’t be happening and lets work on it from here on…”

- **Athlete 1:** “I know you can get really jealous, I can get jealous of my teammates who are doing well if I’m not doing well and I think you have to learn that like other people are going to be better at what you do and instead of like getting jealous or upset about it you take what they’ve doing and try to learn from it or you like ask them for advice rather than hating them or something like that…”

- **Athlete 1:** “I feel like in high school maybe not everyone, but I was a little bit more self-absorbed but like coming into college you know, it’s kinda a wake-up call, just with competing like you’re not the best like you were in high school and I feel like that comes in with everything like everyone has their own priorities, their own thing going on and we all come together and it like you have to learn to umm accept other people from where they came from and like learn that like not… the world doesn’t revolve around you so if you’re having a bad day you gotta put that aside for other people so you can do your best at practice.”

Additionally, Athlete 1 described how these challenging interactions helped her work with people and deal with controversy in difficult situations:

- **Athlete 1:** “you do have your individuals where you just clash with and that’s just because umm like I think that all the teammates that I’ve clashed with, just because we’re both confrontational people like we don’t let things slide if we’re not happy. So I feel like you just have to learn how to deal around that and deal with people like that, who are different from you, and that’ll help you outside of running, you’ll know how to handle people or get along with people better rather than being stubborn and causing trouble”

*Dealing with controversy* was a skill that Athlete 2 believed she developed through interactions with teammates. These experiences were also identified as assisting in the development of leadership.

- **Athlete 2:** “one that sticks out is holding teammates accountable when you know you’ve got practice and you’ve got training and the night before they’re out drinking like you don’t wanna be the one that says something but when you’re in that leadership role you
need to confront the problem directly and not talk about them behind their back, not just start saying stuff and spreading rumors but you need to go to that directly and that was one of the hardest ones but again if you talk about it to them, you’re not only continuing to build their trust but other people learn from you the right way to handle those situations and umm you know seeing others handle it the wrong way you learn okay I don’t want to do that, I don’t want to be known as the person that talks about people or spreads rumors or just nobody can confide in or whatever but umm that’s one example I guess as a student-athlete but it’s gonna come up almost anywhere, somebody’s gonna wanna skip the training go out and party and drink and do whatever but it’s college”

- **Athlete 2:** “I think learning from the negative experiences are the most important umm you never find out what kind of person you are, how you handle pressure or controversy, or you know uneasiness, it’s…if you’re never in those situations it doesn’t mean you go looking for them but they’re always gonna find you umm and so in those negative or not so wanted situations are where you have to learn umm because those are the type of things you want to prevent so from that time on, and if you don’t learn from them there only gonna repeat themselves, if you can learn from them, you can hopefully stop them from happening again so you have to learn from those more importantly than any other situation”

Athlete 2 also acknowledged that she was unable to be friends with all of her teammates but believed she used those experiences to learn how to respect others in working relationships:

- **Athlete 2:** “I mean I’ve had teammates that I really don’t care for and you gotta play with them every day and you gotta respect them. In no way does that mean that they are any better or worse than you, and so you have to find a way to get along and keep going and something that helps with that is the team and look, you and I have our differences but we’re going for a common goal, we’re doing this together, we’re both going for the same thing, umm and something that we also learn is that you don’t have to be friends with everybody but you have to respect everybody and you have to be able to work with them”

In addition to respect, Athlete 3 claimed that trust was a skill gained and needed during negative interactions with teammates in the intercollegiate sport setting:

- **Athlete 3:** “we had some issues on the team and umm it’s something that you wanna deal with just in team, either different behavioral issues or other stuff like that and so you learn trust through those experiences by trusting each other, trusting the team that it will be kept private or kept in a way that is being handled just within the team and we had to deal with those problems all four years I’ve been here and it has been a struggle umm but I think that trust is a huge thing that you learn and that you build and umm without it would be chaos…”

- **Athlete 3:** “there were a lot of times when there were tears and there was anger and there was every other emotion that you can possibly think of in a negative way but I think every time there was I just learned from them so it was good!”
Honesty was another critical skill that Athlete 1 believed was required and able to be developed through interactions with teammates in the intercollegiate sporting participation:

- **Athlete 1:** “I feel like you have to be able to umm be open and direct with teammates and not like umm, i’ve learned a lot to just be honest. Honesty is huge with sports because if I’m saying something to someone else and then it gets back to the teammate that just causes problems so if you’re just honest from the get go you just avoid fights and you avoid drama and trouble so honesty is kinda big and being open with your teammates rather than not telling them how you feel.”

Athlete 7 believes that courage was a skill that he built through tough conversations and interactions with teammates:

- **Athlete 7:** “it definitely builds courage aswell with going to have tough conversations with people cause everything is not simple and easy, it’s easy to walk the other way and make assumptions about what he’s thinking, it’s another thing to have the courage to walk up to him and actually ask him and have a face-to-face that way so growing courage that way, that totally impacts your way of your life umm being able to handle times when you lose games and understand how you can encourage others to get the morale back up, the adversity in sports remarkably impacts your development cause if you think about it, if everything is good in your life, nothing’s going wrong, you don’t ever have to ask questions, you don’t know what you’re doing, you don’t learn, you just keep doing what you’re doing”

**Theme 4: Athletic Support Staff**

Coaches in the intercollegiate sport setting have been shown to be influential in the athletes’ development of life skills. Additionally, the sporting support staff were identified as being helpful in teaching such skills. Athlete 3 discussed the importance of her Strength and Conditioning coach in learning the skills of hard work and commitment:

- **Athlete 3:** “as far as my strength and conditioning coach, they definitely taught me a lot of lessons as far as like being committed to something umm pushing yourself, pushing the limits umm and stuff like that”
- **Athlete 3:** “one of their mottos is that ‘we should push ourselves to the limit’ so you push yourself until you can fail so as far as when we are lifting weights and stuff or doing pull-ups or chin-ups or whatever we’re doing, they want you to try and dig deep and find whatever you possibly can to lift that weight that you should not be able to lift or whatever but umm let’s say I was doing ah bench press or something and I felt like there was no way I was gonna be able to push any more than I was already doing, they would be the ones to tell me that I can add that 2.5 pounds weight on to each side or whatever and try to get me
to do it and the moment that you say to yourself that you are going to do that and that you put those weights on is the moment that you are going to push yourself and be committed and stuff and it took me a while to do that, I’m not gonna lie, freshman year I did not want to do a chin-up and could not do a chin-up and I didn’t know when I was going to be able to and umm after the four years and pushing myself and constantly trying to improve and stuff, I’m now able to do it..so it’s been able to, it’s been really helpful as far as the way they push you, you may hate them as they’re yelling at you and telling you to put more weight on or telling you to do more but you do end up learning a lot from them so…”

Nature of Intercollegiate Athletics

Theme 1: Structured and Demanding Lifestyle

The structure of intercollegiate athletics and demand placed on athletes’ in intercollegiate sport appeared to be influential on the development of the athletes’ life skills. The Athletes’ identified a number of different life skills that they believed they needed to develop to continue to be successfully involved in sport at the college level. Speaking about interacting with his professors, Athlete 4 discussed the importance of communication and responsibility as an individual with responsibilities to both academics and sport:

- Athlete 4: “I think it’s important for being a student-athlete because you know throughout the year at some time you’re going to miss some classes for you know games and things like that so umm you know going in, it’s important to go in when you miss a class for a game, it’s important to go in and explain, I’m gonna be gone Friday because we’re travelling to Buffalo, umm what am I going to miss? It’s up to me to sit down and talk about what I’m gonna miss and any assignments or any notes I need to get from anyone or I think umm it’s umm important to have that kind of relationship, being a student-athlete with your professor”

Athlete 1 and Athlete 2 both identified discipline as a skill that they believe they developed through the structure of intercollegiate athletics and the commitment required from each athlete. Interactions with other students and the ‘college life’ appeared to create challenging experiences and Athlete 1 and Athlete 2 both identified the need to develop discipline through these experiences:

- Interviewer: “Do you think time management you’ve had the whole time you’ve been here or have you had specific experiences where you have thought ‘hey I had to learn time management or…””
• **Athlete 1:** “I feel like umm with college it’s so easy to get wrapped up with like all like typical college things like drinking, going out all the time, like that kinda stuff and running keeps you from doing that and keeps you in a strict line like we always say that we’re jealous of like the regular college students cause they don’t have to like compete or practice but in the end like I never have it any other way because who I am is because of running and ya know I feel like it transformed me or helped transform me.”

• **Athlete 2:** “but you know trying not to let the college life or others here get in the way of that, that’s probably the hardest part…you know seeing other people out, you know partying or staying up late, hanging out when you’ve gotta get up cause you got practice the next day, you need a good night sleep, you know that’s where your true colors really show and where your dedication comes in but umm, I think you know in the beginning…it works itself out…in the beginning you don’t wanna mess up so you do everything right and you know as you grow up and people are looking up to me, you wanna be doing the right thing so that they’re learning the right thing and it kinda just gets relayed through like that so it’s a pretty good system here”

*Time management* was identified as an important life skill developed as a result of the demands of intercollegiate athletics. Athletes’ stated that balancing all aspects of their lives was a requirement as an intercollegiate athlete and *time management* was a skill that needed to be developed. This is highlighted by athlete 1, athlete 3 and athlete 4:

• **Athlete 1:** “I think I definitely learned it more…I mean it started in high school just cause I played sports in high school but umm in college it’s so much different because you have so much more homework. You have to umm keep up with that and like travelling on the weekends, you have to manage your time so when you’re travelling on the bus you’re doing homework and you know when you get to the meet you’re focusing on your thing and stuff so I definitely have had, I’ve gotten a lot better at it in college than I was in high school because we didn’t have as much outside things affecting, homework wasn’t a big deal”

• **Athlete 3:** “I struggled with that freshman year umm you’re in the weight room if you’re not the weight room you’re on the field if you’re not on the field you’re doing something else that’s involved in field hockey so time management is a huge thing, I had to manage between my classes and when we were playing hockey”

• **Athlete 4:** “the big thing is time management, you know having to be 15 minutes early to everything cause you know like in the football program, if you’re on time, you’re late. You know if you’re 10-15 minutes early you’re on time so you know, knowing how to manage your time, learning how to manage time and things like that I think umm will help me all throughout life”
Athlete 5 stated that he became more *self-sufficient* in college. Specifically, the athlete identified intercollegiate athletics as being an important and the easiest structured environment to assist in the development of the skill.

- **Athlete 5:** “I mean obviously the whole trying to be self-sufficient away from home is huge and umm but I think kind of the irony of that is while you are no longer with your parents and your familiar setting, it doesn’t necessarily mean that you have to do it yourself and you have to just wherever you end up going, however many times you move to whatever different place, you’ve got to find a separate social support system that ah helps you get through the things that you need to get through, whether it be athletic, academic, social, emotional, whatever the case is that you have to, you can’t be resigned to just yourself, the idea of self-sufficiency is not really possible”

- **Interviewer:** “And your social support system, where would you say you found that?”
- **Athlete 5:** “I did find it through athletics by enlarge, umm because that was the easiest way for me to do and wherever I end up going after this I won’t have that same security net”

The athletes’ suggested that intercollegiate athletic teams have a leadership hierarchy based on age. Athlete 1 and athlete 3, as seniors, identified *leadership* and *responsibility* as skills that they believe were developed and expected of them during the later years of intercollegiate sporting involvement:

- **Athlete 1:** “Like with running as a senior, as a team you know you’re forced to be a leader in that position”

- **Athlete 3:** “Freshman year I would not speak up without a reason with the issues we were having just because I didn’t feel like it was my place and as I got older, I took more of the responsibility where I felt like I was able to talk more about these issues so…I think that you definitely learn responsibility, so every year you get a little bit more responsibility”

**Theme 2: Nature of Particular Sport**

Within the intercollegiate athletic environment, there are a range of different teams competing in different sports. Through interview with athletes from a variety of sports, it appears that athletes perceive that they learned different life skills due to their experiences within the specific sport each athlete was involved in. Athlete 1 identified her sport as being less popular than certain sports and believed she learned to *understand and respect others* from this experience:

- **Athlete 1:** “I feel like the football players experience in college is different than a runners like umm everyone knows who the football players are like, even like hockey. Everyone
knows who they are and they like worship them on campus and stuff but and like teachers, I feel like if you tell them you’re part of this sort of culture, you’re cool but then if you say like you’re a runner they’re just like okay. Like I feel like people don’t umm really, I mean every sport takes a commitment but running is just as much as any sport.”

- **Interviewer:** “How do you think that affects your experience? Do you think it does?”
- **Athlete 1:** “Umm at first it’s kinda like a wake-up call but then again in high school that was how running was too. I mean running is not an exciting sport which I can understand, boring to watch but umm I dunno I feel like, if anything it wants to make me like talk about it more to people so they know what’s going on”

- **Interviewer:** “Yeah, what about in terms of your development, do you think it helps you personally?”
- **Athlete 1:** “Yeah I guess having to deal with the fact that we’re doing it like, even if we do all these great things, no one pays attention as like a team. Umm but you just learn that not everyone, you’re not gonna be appreciated for everything you do or umm I dunno, what you care about, not everyone else is gonna show interest in but it still, that doesn’t stop me from doing what I wanna do.”

Conversely, Athlete 7 participated in a popular and very successful sport. Athlete 7 believed he developed *humility* through the experiences of winning and being recognized around campus:

- **Athlete 7:** “so going through winning as we have and not walking around campus like we deserve more than anyone else, like we are better than anybody, cause we absolutely don’t, we’re no better than anybody, absolutely not so I think like walking around and being freed from that has definitely been a great growth in humility with all the success”

**Theme 3: Power and Authority in Intercollegiate Sport**

An intercollegiate athletic department includes a large number and staff and student-athletes. Athletes discussed the different relationships and associated interactions that resulted from the various relationships. These experiences related to the functioning of an intercollegiate athletic department were therefore identified as sources of the development of life skills for the athletes. Athlete 3 suggested that interacting with a large group of athletes within an athletic department assisted her in learning to respect others:

- **Athlete 3:** “you have to respect not only your sport but also the entire community of athletes, one thing we really focus on here is the culture of athletes and umm you’re showing an image, I think that was a big thing is learning that”
Being involved and functioning within an athletic department also assisted Athlete 5 in the
development of life skills. Specifically, Athlete 5 discussed learning to understand a lack of
integrity and dishonesty. Through negative experiences in the intercollegiate sporting environment,
the athlete gained these new understandings of power and authority involved in intercollegiate
sport. Specifically, athlete 5 believed he learned about dishonesty because the athletic department
philosophies did not always match the behaviors acted out by those who make the rules within the
athletic department:

- **Athlete 5:** “the phrase Miami athletic culture to me is vague, I guess because I just have a
limited experience with people outside of men’s and women’s track and field. So I don’t
know if I can necessarily speak to the culture as a whole, I know kind of individually how I
perceive ideas like the culture of champions to be and I don’t know, to me it just feels like
a lot of kind of empty words that are put there in place of, you know it seems like a good
idea on the surface but I don’t know the degree to which any of the teams really try to
embody what culture of champions talks about”
- **Interviewer:** “And do you think you learned anything from that, or do you think actually
not being what it is, do you think you take anything from that that you could use?”
- **Athlete 5:** “I think the proponents of it are good, I feel like the few people that do really
exhibit the different tenants of it are you know good successful people and umm I dunno, it
just to me it seems like it sets up, okay well here’s the rules or the norms would be a better
word for it, and coming from an authority position of the athletic department I feel like it
says this is how things should be and then when you actually get around to meeting with
people ah who are involved with different sports it’s not necessarily how things are…”

- **Athlete 5:** “another thing that I learned too through some of the experiences ah that I’ve
been through is that sometimes it looks like ‘here are the set of rules’ and then when people
actually get caught breaking the rules, there’s still sometimes no punishment for them just
because of ah of the type of administration that’s set in place”

**Theme 4: Competitive Environment of Intercollegiate Athletics**

Intercollegiate sport was identified as a competitive environment that assisted in the
learning of life skills for the athletes. The athletes suggested that difficult and challenging
experiences whilst being involved in the intercollegiate athletic environment assisted in the
development of skills. Many of these experiences were identified as being different to high school
sporting involvement and therefore a new learning experience. **Hard work and commitment** were
mentioned by multiple athletes’ as being skills that were developed through these times of struggle
and adversity.
• **Athlete 1:** “I’ve struggled with running and I feel like that’s helped me, not everything is gonna be easy and like and I’ve had to work for it and I feel like I put that to other things in my life, like I really work for things and I’m really ambitious and I go after it.”

• **Athlete 3:** “umm freshman year I struggled just because I wasn’t playing because I came from a high school where I was known as the star player just like everyone else is when they come and then you get here and you’re like why am I not playing, I used to be the starter like blah blah blah in high school and it’s the same way for everyone so I guess it was just kinda getting used to that at first and realizing that everyone on the team was a star and everyone was fighting the positions and stuff so umm I guess it took a year for me to realize that it was gonna be that way and I constantly contemplated as far as dropping out but I think what kept me staying was the fact that I wanted to prove to myself and to everyone else that I could stick at it, stick out with it and push myself to the level that I needed to be at to be a starter and be playing so…I used a lot of my anger towards either like my coach mostly because I thought it was her fault that I wasn’t playing, it wasn’t till a while after that I realized they needed me for us to win so umm I used that as encouragement which is kind of a bad thing haha but it worked, I just pushed myself and tried to prove everyone wrong and that’s how I got to where I am so”

• **Athlete 6:** “obviously with all athletics, you condition haha and you run and run and run and you lift and lift and lift but it’s the days that you just don’t want to be there, the days that you, obviously you love the sport and you want to be there and you have a passion for the game but there’s just some days where you just, you’re game doesn’t show up or you are middle in line finishing through the line instead of first when you’re usually first and those kind of days are the days that you just have to suck it up and go for it…you know sometimes you gotta take what you’re given and work hard to get through everything”

Along with **hard work** and **commitment**, Athlete 1 identified **respecting and accepting others** as a life skill that she believed was learned through the challenging interactions in her intercollegiate career:

• **Athlete 1:** “umm I feel like in high school maybe not everyone, but I was a little bit more self-absorbed but like coming into college you know, it’s kinda a wake-up call, just with competing like you’re not the best like you were in high school and I feel like that comes in with everything like everyone has their own priorities, their own thing going on and we all come together and it like you have to learn to umm accept other people from where they came from and like learn that like not… the world doesn’t revolve around you so if you’re having a bad day you gotta put that aside for other people so you can do your best at practice.”

The competitive environment created by the intensity of intercollegiate sport was also identified as a contributing factor to the skills of **working with people**. Athletes’ suggested that the
challenges in this environment created a need to develop teamwork and working in ways that are best for the overall team:

- **Athlete 1:** “I feel like you learned like the basis of it in high school but then like when you get to college everything’s a little bit more intense so umm like teamwork is a little more umm fundamental because there’s only like 15 girls in the cross country team, you have to get along with everybody and if you don’t have those skills, to give in, to give and take with your teammates then its gonna be a horrible experience.”

- **Athlete 5:** “you need to be able to rely on your teammates as teammates umm yeah obviously it’s a different atmosphere coming to the college level umm especially at a division I competitive school where coaches are bringing in the top athletes from respective teams and it was easy in high school because for the most part, you’re the best on the team, that’s just how it works…specific to me here, and knowing that one of the other guys also wearing a Miami singlet is going to be behind you and you don’t need to worry about if he passes me ah that’s a bad thing, you need to be able to say ‘okay this is my teammate, he’s hurting as bad as I am, I need to go with him and work with him to umm better the both of us and ultimately that’s going to be the best for the team”

Athlete 1 also suggested goal setting was a life skill that was developed through her experiences with running in the intercollegiate environment:

- **Athlete 1:** “guess running has helped me set goals. I set my goals and I want to attain them and that’s helped me outside of running”

**Theme 5: Scholarship Status of the Athlete**

Scholarships are an important aspect of intercollegiate sporting involvement for every athlete. However, not every athlete is given an athletic scholarship. The athletes, under different scholarship statuses, identified different skills learned from their specific experiences. Athlete 1 stated that she experienced pressure associated with being a scholarship athlete and this assisted her in learning to deal with pressure:

- **Athlete 1:** “if you’re a scholarship athlete you know you have a little bit of pressure to like be competing well because if you don’t, you can get it taken away…Like I feel like I can handle pressure situations better”

Contrastingly, Athlete 4 did not receive a scholarship during his intercollegiate sporting career. He suggested that he learned the skills of hard work, working with people and dealing with criticism as a result of these experiences:
• **Athlete 4**: “Umm you know scholarship guys, they come in and you kind of know who’s the scholarship guys and who’s the walk-ons you know and like it’s not talked about as much as like a bigger school like Miami, Florida or like Texas or something like that, where you can like clearly tell the difference but you can tell the difference and like you know as far as like being treated by the coaches, you can tell the difference, you know cause it’s scholarship, like you know who the star players are so they seem to get a little bit more attention than the walk-ons or like…”

• **Interviewer**: “So how would you say you are treated by the coaches, treated differently as a walk-on?”

• **Athlete 4**: “Umm you know for the most part, I don’t think I was treated that much differently but umm I think that as far as like walking around, like coaches talk to you and things like that, I think there is a difference cause I feel like they’re not putting money into you so you’re not as high priority as like someone they’re giving $20,000 a year to to like develop and become a great football player. So yeah I think there is a little bit of a difference”

• **Interviewer**: “So with that difference, would you say you have learned anything from being in that position?”

• **Athlete 4**: “Umm yeah it gave me motivation to work harder, to get a scholarship, to be more like the guys on scholarship, because you know if you get put on scholarship like the team realizes like this guy must doing something good you know to be put on scholarship so you know never being put on scholarship, it was unfortunate because sometimes the guys looked at me differently because I was just like a walk-on all 5 years but umm for me personally, you know not getting the scholarship but getting the starting job, that was enough me to realize like I was working towards something.”

• **Interviewer**: “So that motivation and hard work, do you think that has helped you in other areas of life and do you think you’ve learned from that?”

• **Athlete 4**: “Umm yeah, like umm learning to talk to people and dealing with criticism from the coaches, like getting screamed at, getting yelled at, things like that like you know you learn to adapt to that and you know, going through things like that, the 6am runs where they’re screaming at you, it make things on the outside of sport and the outside of football like not as hard to adjust to not as hard to adjust to because you are used to it, you know you’re used to change and things like that and I think it has definitely helped me.”

**Theme 6: Non-Participation**

Athletes’ who experienced periods of ‘non-participation’ in their sport identified the situations as assisting in their learning. Through the challenges associated with being unable to compete in their sport, athletes’ believed these were life skills learning experiences. Athlete 1 recounted times of injury in which he believed he learned a new method and perspective of goal setting:
• **Athlete 5:** when I came in, I was thinking that I’m gonna be an All-American, I’m going to be the number guy on Miami’s team, you know all of the goals that I set were very much geared towards outcome umm and completely I mean if you look at those goals, they deal with other people probably more than they deal with me and that’s something out of my control. Umm since, like you mention, I learn mention non-participation more than participation I think, is that I just need to be concerned with doing the best that I can, you know and it sounds cheesy, it sounds like this YMCA kind of idea that you tell seven year olds but realistically I feel that I spent kind of a lot of my athletic career focusing on the wrong types of goals and the wrong things and I guess going forward now I would like to be a coach at some time, either cross-country, track based or whatever I can get in to, and I think that probably the most important thing that I have to communicate is that you need to focus on yourself and what you can control and can’t worry about other people so that’s probably the number one thing that I’ve learned”

• **Athlete 5:** “with the experiences that I’ve had, you know whether it be injuries or you know just other different hardships not running at the post season meets a few times umm to me it’s just shifted my mentality to umm running post-collegiately now for me is going to be kind of a lifestyle thing and it’s going to be I’m going to run because I enjoy it, I’m not going to run because I want to be faster than everybody else, I just, I guess that’s an important shift to be made”

• **Athlete 5:** “when everything’s going well you don’t learn anything because you don’t change anything because it’s going well so I guess the adversity is the most important experiences that I’ve had here”

Athlete 7 discussed times of adversity where he was not selected in to play in his sport. He suggested that he gained resilience and learned how to deal with adversity. Additionally, this experience assisted athlete 7 in becoming hard working and committed.

• **Athlete 7:** “the adversity in sports remarkably impacts your development cause if you think about it, if everything is good in your life, nothing’s going wrong, you don’t ever have to ask questions, you don’t know what you’re doing, you don’t learn, you just keep doing what you’re doing but as soon as little bumps in the road hit, it’s a question of whether it becomes a mountain to you or a speed bump and learning different skills in your life to be able to make that speed bump make it like a little crack in the road if anything, like versus having to climb a mountain and really yeah…”

• **Athlete 7:** “growing up all the way through junior year I played just about every single game, I dressed just about every game my sophomore year, I had a little stint where I didn’t but ah junior year especially I dressed every game umm had the best year of my life, I scored like a ton of goals and it was awesome, I had no question whether I was going to be in the lineup, I was just playing really well and the best year of my career. Senior year I dressed half the games. I had one point. I celebrated the CCHA championship in a suit and tie, like this year was a great adversity and being able to realize what’s important through it all, realizing where my identity truly lies through it
all, that sports still doesn’t define me, I can still show up and do my best every day, ultimately find my joy elsewhere, like not only do I find joy in playing hockey but my joy doesn’t come whether I play in the weekend or not, my joy comes from the fact that I get to play all four days of the week and hopefully I get to play in the weekend, if I don’t you know it’s okay, it’s not the end of the world, realizing that your identity doesn’t reside in whether you dress or not, umm so that for me, not dressing umm a lot of the games and still learning how to show up every day and to be myself and be authentic every day, to be a joyful and appreciative kid that’s still moving forward, that’s ah, that’s life and everything in it, and your relationships in your life, your family relationships don’t depend on whether you play or not, that at the end of your life when you’re laying in your death bed you’re not gonna care about the fact whether you played or not, you’re gonna care about the people that you build around you, to how you impact their lives, you’re gonna care about greater things than that. So going through that situation and learning how to handle yourself through all that, learning how to handle my classes, learning how to handle the way, when people would come, my relationships, and people would want to feel bad for me, and I rejoiced the sympathy that they felt but just realizing this is this greatest thing I can tell you, it’s not the end of the world haha! It’s okay! Don’t feel bad! Just share that and just impart the great purpose and joy that I’ve found though it all umm onto others, that no matter what it is you’re a part of, whatever your job is that it’s not what defines you. That’s been a great challenge for me. So we’ll see what happens, whether I get to go play hockey or not or who knows? I would love to keep going playing but if it’s not, it’s not the end of the world.”

Athlete 7 does believe that he would have still developed in a positive way if he was not involved in sport in college:

- **Athlete 7**: “My whole life has been sports all around, if I didn’t play a sport I could not see myself not doing something, I would have easily and surely got involved with so much stuff, intramurals, clubs, umm just stuff that I don’t know it because the way that I am, I can’t just sit still, I gotta get out and do stuff, I gotta be active, I gotta be outdoors, I gotta be involved with different things and like I love competing, competing is such a blast, I just think it’s awesome so that just being part of, I would have to do something. I don’t know how things would have been different cause I feel like I would have just packed my time with different things”

**Theme 7: End of Eligibility**

Following the completion of their intercollegiate athletic careers, the athletes’ identified skills that they believed they had learned due to the cessation of their careers. Athlete 3 suggested that the realization that her career was finished was difficult to experience but assisted in her learning to *deal with change and transition*:
Athlete 3: “that was really rough and I think at first it was the realization that I wasn’t going to be playing ever again was the hardest thing because really there’s no other place for me to go or do or whatever cause field hockey was my life, I didn’t do anything else which is so sad haha and umm I, it was really hard realizing that I wasn’t going to be with those people that I have been with for all four years and doing this thing that I’ve been doing since 4th grade so umm I had a really hard time”

Athlete 3: “I think I’m going to have to face difficult times or experiences where I’m having to let go of something or having to umm move on from something and I think that this is going to help a lot because this is a big piece of my life and I think that if I end up having to do something else where I’m having to leave some sort of aspect of my life, something that I’ve been doing for a while, I think is going to be difficult but I think I’m going to be able to handle it a lot better knowing that I’ve done this already with field hockey.”

Athlete 4 believes that he developed confidence and self-belief as life skills as a result of the sense of accomplishment that he gained from the completion of his intercollegiate athletic career:

Athlete 4: “these guys are getting up right now at 5:30 in the morning and running outside at 6 in this cold weather and you know it kinda makes you feel good because you put your time in and you know it’s time for me to move on and I’ve done a lot more than those guys have as far as like the freshmen this year, they’ve only done it one year, I’ve done it five years so in the sense of like, it feels like the accomplishment has been done and umm you know, I’ve done all I can do and it’s time to move on, time to graduate and turn over a new chapter”

Interviewer: “So in terms of achieving that accomplishment, umm do you think you learned from that?”

Athlete 4: “I’ve definitely learned from that, just being done with everything umm like a sense of accomplishment, I think I can take that down the road and knowing that I’ve done something big, played college football for five years, it’s like a lot of people haven’t done that and you know I can say that I’ve done that and you know the employers and things, they know how much time you put into that so I think it’s something that’ll help me down the road for sure”

Transfer of Life Skills

This section of the results describes how the athletes believe they have, or can, use these life skills in other areas of their lives. To help explain this transference, the life skills discussed by the athletes in the previous section of the results were categorized into four themes, shown in Table 2. The first theme was named ‘Relationship Skills’ and included three lower-order themes. The
second theme, ‘Mental Toughness’ had three lower-order themes. The third theme was labeled ‘Personal Integrity’ and the fourth theme, ‘Organization’. These life skills were then viewed as being transferrable to different areas of life. The athletes’ identified that they had, or could, use skills learned from sport and use them as life skills in general life experiences and interactions. Life situations included current and future employment, the social college environment, the college academic environment, relationships with family, relationships with friends, and for overall personal wellbeing.

Higher-Order Theme 1: Relationship Skills

The athletes were involved in a wide range of relationships throughout their intercollegiate sporting careers.’ As shown previously, these relationships with coaches, parents, teammates and athletic support staff were identified as being influential in the development of life skills for the athletes. Life skills perceived to be learned from the athletes’ interactions with significant others were categorized into ‘relationship skills.’ This theme consisted of three lower-order themes. The first, ‘Interpersonal Interactions’ was based on the athletes’ claims of learning how to work with people, how to handle people, how to work in a team environment and how to work and deal with authority. The second lower-order theme was ‘Social Skills.’ Athletes believed that they learned the social skills communication, trust, respect for others, and caring for people. Finally, ‘Understanding People’ was the third theme. Athletes identified gaining a greater understanding of people and relationships. This consisted of learning how to build relationships and understand diversity. After identifying the relationship skills learned through their intercollegiate athletic participation, the athletes discussed ways in which they have and can transfer the different life skills to a range of different life domains.

Lower-Order Theme 1: Interpersonal Interactions

Relationship skills were developed by the athletes through interpersonal interactions and these life skills were seen to be transferrable to other areas of the athletes’ lives. Athlete 1 believed that teamwork was a life skill that she would be able to transfer in her future employment as a teacher. The athlete believed she would also be able to work with people, handling people and dealing with criticism in the future:
**Athlete 1:** “you definitely learn from that and I think that kind of will help me in other things as well cause when I go to get a job I know that the people I work with, they’ll be like my team, they’ll be my teammates and I know to work with them and to take criticism and I need to be criticized and I know how to handle that now and things like that so I think definitely it helps”

**Athlete 1:** “I wanna be a teacher so I feel like it’s helped me with doing stuff like that and umm doing a sport has helped me relate with different areas in life, so I can relate with different people and different aspects and I am more understanding I guess of other peoples time and aware of other peoples commitments and understanding that like it’s a lot of commitment to do a lot of different things…and it’s gonna help me with being a teacher and teaching with athletes as well.”

*Working with people and handling people* were skills that Athlete 2 believed she learned through sport and was she recognized this as a skill that she had been able to transfer into her interactions in the wider college environment:

**Athlete 2:** “I’d say it’s even more so in school but that becomes prevalent, there’s a lot more people in the Miami pool, there’s enough undergrads that I’m not gonna get along with than on my team but umm it was, working with people is probably the most applicable skill that you learn playing a sport and taking it out and using it in the real world”

Athlete 2 does recognize that her own individual background and experiences has positively influenced her ability to use and transfer these skills:

**Athlete 2:** “Umm I think I found sport and stuck with it for as long as I have because I just always had desire to compete. I think I get it from my dad, I think he’s pretty competitive so umm and I also grew up, I’m the second oldest of five so there’s always somebody to compete with so I kinda brought that to volleyball umm sports has definitely enhanced that but again I think I like thrive on sports because of how competitive I am naturally”

**Interviewer:** “So do you think you’ve sort of been guided to sports because of your personality?”

**Athlete 2:** “Yeah”

**Interviewer:** “Are there any other traits like that do you think?”

**Athlete 2:** “Like competitiveness….ummm I mean I like people, I like being with people, I like hanging out and meeting new people umm and I think that volleyball is a really good way to do that but anything else…ummm…I enjoy succeeding and doing well umm and I think I grew up playing, I mean in grade school you play every sport you know, volleyball and basketball and soccer and whatever it was and umm I guess I would always consider myself athletic but I was not good at all those sports ha umm and so when I think when I found volleyball it clicked and you know when you succeed I’m the kind of person who likes to please other people, make myself and other people happy or whatever that is so umm knowing that when I won and when I succeed and I would do
something right that made me feel good and so I think that kinda subconsciously helps you keep going with it, when you find something that you’re naturally good at”

With aspirations of being a coach, Athlete 5 stated that he would be able to transfer the skills teamwork and working with people, that he believed he learned through sport into his future employment:

- **Athlete 5:** “I guess in terms of if I was to become a coach someday, it’s important that I would, if I were a head coach let’s say, it would be important for me to use my assistant coaches and treat them as equal because they have perfectly good input and they may see things that I don’t whereas if I look at it like ‘oh well you know, you’re probably just trying to compete for a head coaching job someday, why do I need to work with and agree with you’ ah that’s cheapening the athletes’ experience because if we were all working together, they would get a better learning experience and athletic experience. So I feel like yeah no matter what situation I go into, umm it would be better for the company and for ourselves as individuals, it would be more fulfilling to work as a team collectively versus as a bunch of individuals with separate goals on a team because I don’t think that works very well at all for any parties involved.”

Athlete 5 also believed he has been able to transfer working with people into his school work by finding comparisons between his sport, coaching and group work in the academic environment:

- **Athlete 5:** “my senior year I already took my capstone class last semester and there were kind of a lot of, we did it in a project, it was very broad and almost vague and we could have taken it a bunch of different ways and ultimately what kept us together was the fact that umm, actually I’ll liken it to the head coaching job specifically, in a track environment there’s a bunch of different events that are all loosely related under the umbrella term of track, so a distance coach would have a very different task to a hammer-throw coach because they’re really pretty unrelated, the 10,000m and the hammer-throw but if you kind of unify under this umbrella term of track and you work together and realize that okay I’m the head coach but that doesn’t mean that I know more about hammer-throw than the hammer-throw coach, and you work together and you kind of realize okay this person has a certain expertise we need to use it, incorporate it and don’t confine them to what I think is right because I don’t know any more than they do. So we each kind of took a different area that we wanted to see it go and umm we always worked with a consensus on the general direction that we wanted to take, so then from that umm different group members had different expertise and we kind of worked it all together and I think it worked pretty well again because we weren’t at each others’ throats, we didn’t say ‘oh you know, Bob’s doing a terrible job we need to make sure that someone checks up to see if he knows what he’s talking about’. There was a level of trust there and if ah, we got an A on the project so that was, I guess that was the proof that it worked.”
Following discussions of interactions with her coaches, Athlete 6 identified *dealing with authority* as a skill that she learned through intercollegiate sport that will be important to transfer into her future employment experiences:

- **Athlete 6:** “that’s very important to carry off the field as well because when you get out into the world or when you go into class rooms, you might not like someone or you might not enjoy what the professors teaching but in all reality that’s your boss and you have to learn to really work and cooperate”

**Lower-Order Theme 2: Social Skills**

Relationship skills can be categorized into specific social skills. The athletes identified specific social skills that they believe they learned through their intercollegiate sport participation that they have or can transfer into other areas of their lives. *Trust* and *respect* were two skills that Athlete 3 believed she learned through her sporting involvement that she could use in her future employment as an athletic academic coordinator:

- **Athlete 3:** “I think trust and I think respect are going to be two huge things with the type of employment I’m trying to get into because I want to be an athletic academic coordinator and that’s why I need to have trust and commitment to your job especially because you are dealing with student athletes everyday and you need to make sure that you’re respecting their privacy and they can trust you with certain things”

Having stating that his sport helped him learn how to *care for people*, Athlete 7 believed he has been able to use this skill in the relationships he has with his family:

- **Athlete 7:** “…Miami has impacted me so greatly, my relationships with my family, my sisters are just really good now so I’m walking out of here like a blessed man.
- **Interviewer:** “So you talk about your family relationships, just thinking about your four years as a student-athlete, how has that sort of impacted your learning and development of family relationships?
- **Athlete 7:** “It’s taught me a lot about how to really care for people and like ah especially family. Realizing that the ways that you act, the things that you do, their heart is so much to care for you, they want to love you so much, you realize the things and the ways that you respond to them really impact them and influence them, it taught me a lot about that, it taught me a lot about how to really respect and honor your parents, how to be close enough to your sisters and close enough to your siblings that you can be part of their life and encourage you to be someone that they’ll turn to umm somebody that they trust and turn to and somebody…..hockey really taught me so much about understanding how to be there for somebody to where they understand you, they want it, they feel comfortable coming to
you for advice, they feel comfortable just calling you to tell you about their day and that’s not some place that’s easily gotten to umm and it doesn’t come by just being fake about it all, like just to call them like once every now and again, it takes a lot of effort and when you make that effort and you make that continual effort it shows a lot of love just with what you do with that so like hockey has really taught me a lot with how to love”

Interviewer: “So hockey and being involved in the hockey program has helped you do that? Could you explain that?”

- Athlete 7: “No question. The love of your teammates, no question. Showing up every single day, you have a choice whether or not you’re going to spend time with these guys, making a conscious effort outside of class, like you have so much on your plate so you have so many things that you could do, but choosing the right ones to do, a great bit of wisdom that I’ve learned and one of the things just spending time with people umm having dinner with guys, having good conversations, finding time to do that umm and making time, getting homework out of the way so you have free time to go and hang out with the guys for a little bit and really developing relationships beyond the rink it’s been…no question about that, it’s helped me so much with my family umm no question about that, umm realizing and just seeing how little things that you can do to impact them and to serve the guys on your team are easily ways you can do the same for your family and ah ultimately relationships are a deal and we’ve talked a lot about that today.”

Lower-Order Theme 3: Understanding People

Athletes claimed to gain a greater understanding of people and the functioning of relationships through their intercollegiate sporting experience. Athlete 2 stated that the perceived learning how to build relationships in the sporting environment has helped her, and will help her with other relationships and friendships in life:

- Athlete 2: “Oh yeah umm same thing when you build relationships and friendships and things, you look to those same questions, who can I talk to, who can I hang out with, who can help me, who understands me… all of the things become important so umm those things never die, they always carry over, they’re always important so…”

Through learning to understand diversity in his intercollegiate sporting career, Athlete 4 believed that that would be a skill he will be able to transfer to his future employment:

- Athlete 4: “being able to talk to people, being comfortable talking to people. You know getting to know these guys with such different backgrounds and knowing and learning how to like talk to them and things like that, you know I think it’s helped, it’ll help me in the long run and umm and I think that’ll only help me when I go to get a job and things like that, working with people and working with diversity umm and understanding people and where they come and they’ll have certain expectations I think will definitely help me in the long run.”
Higher-Order Theme 2: Mental Toughness

Involvement in intercollegiate sport was found to assist athletes in developing skills that can be seen to enhance their overall mental toughness. Mental toughness in sport has been defined as having the natural or developed psychological edge that enables you to, generally, cope better than your opponents with the many demands that sport places on a performer and, specifically, be more consistent and better than your opponents in remaining determined, focused, confident, and in control under pressure (Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2007). Three lower-order themes were constructed for the theme ‘Mental Toughness’ using three of the major tenets of the definition shown above to define ‘Mental Toughness’ in all areas of life (Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2007). The first was labeled ‘Coping Skills’. The athletes claimed to develop coping skills that allow them to deal with criticism, controversy, pressure and life changes. The second theme ‘Confidence’ was constructed as confidence was seen as being gained through intercollegiate sport by assisting the perception of growth in a sense of self-belief and an enhanced ability to take risks. ‘Determination’ was the third lower-order theme. The athletes’ stated that they learned the skills of hard work, commitment, persistence and discipline. This growth in determination was attributed to the athletes’ involvement in intercollegiate sport. Recognizing an enhanced mental toughness, the athletes’ believed they have been able to transfer these life skills into other areas of their live and will continue to do so in the future.

Lower-Order Theme 1: Coping Skills

The athletes’ believed that intercollegiate athletics helped build their coping skills in different situations. These coping skills were also seen to be transferrable to other life domains. Dealing with criticism throughout his intercollegiate career, Athlete 4 believed this would assist him and make similar situations outside of sport easy to deal with:

- Athlete 4: “yeah, like umm learning to talk to people and dealing with criticism from the coaches, like getting screamed at, getting yelled at, things like that like you know you learn to adapt to that and you know, going through things like that, the 6am runs where they’re screaming at you, it make things on the outside of sport and the outside of football like not as hard to adjust to not as hard to adjust to because you are used to it, you know you’re used to change and things like that and I think it has definitely helped me”
Perceiving pressure from her athletic scholarship, Athlete 1 believed that this experience would help her *deal with pressure* and stress in the future:

- **Athlete 1:** “Like I feel like I can handle pressure situations better and with that kinda transition being like a new teacher, I can have a tonne of that so I know how to handle that and handle stress without like completely freaking out”

Athlete 1 believed that dealing with people in difficult situations in sport will help her *deal with controversy* with people in the future:

- **Athlete 1:** “So I feel like you just have to learn how to deal around that and deal with people like that, who are different from you, and that’ll help you outside of running, you’ll know how to handle people or get along with people better rather than being stubborn and causing trouble” (1)

Athlete 3 stated that the cessation of her intercollegiate sporting career was a challenging experience. The athlete believed she would be able to use this experience in the future as she claims to have the skills to *deal with change*:

- **Athlete 3:** “I think I’m going to have to face difficult times or experiences where I’m having to let go of something or having to umm move on from something and I think that this is going to help a lot because this is a big piece of my life and I think that if I end up having to do something else where I’m having to leave some sort of aspect of my life, something that I’ve been doing for a while, I think is going to be difficult but I think I’m going to be able to handle it a lot better knowing that I’ve done this already with field hockey.”

**Lower-Order Theme 2: Confidence**

Confidence can simply be defined as one’s belief in his or her ability to be successful (Vealey, 1986). Intercollegiate sport can be seen to enhance the athletes’ confidence. Athletes’ claimed to gain more self-efficacy through their sport-related experiences and believed this skill could be transferred throughout life. Athlete 4 claimed that the sense of accomplishment he gained from completing his intercollegiate sporting career gave him to self-belief that he complete challenging tasks in the future:

- **Athlete 4:** “I’ve definitely learned from that, just being done with everything umm like a sense of accomplishment, I think I can take that down the road and knowing that I’ve
done something big, played college football for five years, it’s like a lot of people haven’t done that and you know I can say that I’ve done that and you know the employers and things, they know how much time you put into that so I think it’s something that’ll help me down the road for sure”

Learning how to take risks, and gaining the confidence to take risks in sport, Athlete 2 believes she has gained the confidence in risk-taking other areas of her life:

- **Athlete 2:** “And then I guess in life, there’s a lot of risks umm but one of the biggest risks for me right now is the job market and you know finding a job that works for me, I kinda have this desire to do something new, go somewhere new umm I’ve grown up in STL all my life and I have a job offer there, the people I interned for and it’s a great company but I don’t know, I’ve basically been given an offer but I wanna maybe do something else but do I go as crazy as ‘look I’m going to Ireland, I’m going to New Zealand’ like do I go somewhere super crazy ….like I guess the severity of the risk that you know, you have to find out what works for you”

**Lower-Order Theme 3: Determination**

Intercollegiate sport was defined by the athletes as a challenging experience that required determination and commitment. The athletes’ believed that such skills have and can be transferred into other areas of their lives. When asked about her future endeavors, Athlete 1 recognized potential difficulties but believed she would be able to transfer the skills of hard work and commitment she learned through her sport to her future employment and personal wellbeing:

- **Athlete 1:** “I think it’s gonna be difficult but I think I’m gonna be a little bit more prepared maybe or I dunno if it’s the right word like with running and school and stuff that I think I’ll be prepared to go into real life just because I’ve learned all of these skills that I’ve mentioned. And I think leaving running behind will be really huge but that will also help keeping the health up cause I’m just not gonna stop running so umm but yeah I think it’s still gonna be hard to transition and into a different world but I think it might be a little bit easier with running or having had running because that’s kinda like a job”

**Commitment** and dedication were skills that Athlete 3 and Athlete 6 believe they have transferred into their current internships, and will transfer into their future employment:

- **Athlete 3:** “you are committed to your job, you’re not fooling around and whatever, you’re staying on task trying to keep everyone [student-athletes] eligible and…”

- **Athlete 2:** “yeah definitely umm use it in internships and job search all the time and I’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback from you know employers or recruiters or whatever it is in
the business world that just find it really impressive, the dedication and the you know time commitment and all or that that comes with being a student athlete”

Athlete 6 believed that she has been able to transfer the commitment, dedication and persistence she learned through sport into the classroom:

- **Athlete 6**: “Yeah I mean I can definitely say that the dedication that I’ve learned on the field transfers over umm in the classroom and transfers over in my relationships that I have with people, you know the commitment because there’s a difference in half doing something than umm than really committing to it and really going hard after it and that’s one thing that softball has definitely taught me is to, you know if you’re gonna do something, don’t half arse it and go at it as hard as you can and if you mess up you know you went at it trying so…”

Athlete 3 also states the need to transfer the hard work and persistence to every aspect of her life:

- **Athlete 3**: “I think pushing yourself to the limit and going the extra bit is very important in every aspect of life umm like you don’t have enough time in the day to do certain things but if you push yourself and you do it then obviously you’re going to use the time to its best and doing your best on certain things and not doing just your best but doing more than your best so I think…”

**Theme 3: Personal Integrity and Civility**

The athletes’ identified a number of life skills that they believed they learned through their intercollegiate sport participation that enhance their personal integrity and sense of civility in helping others. Integrity can be defined as the adherence to moral and ethical principles. The skills of leadership, responsibility, honesty, courage and humility were recognized as being transferrable to other areas of life. Leadership was a skill that Athlete 6 believed she developed through her intercollegiate sporting experiences that she has used in the classroom setting and something that she will be able to use in her future employment:

- **Athlete 6**: “I definitely feel more confident when I have discussions with people or umm group projects or umm just in general I think that, like I said before actions speak a lot louder than words so if you’re leading in the classroom, you might not be the person that’s raising your hand the whole time but you are doing things to get the job done and that’s what leaders do, they get the job done. When they’re called upon, when it matters the most, when it doesn’t matter at all and you know that’s important to carry on through life and through class and through everything that you do.”
• **Athlete 6:** “leadership is definitely one that companies are looking for and I say companies because I’m a senior and business major and graduating, looking in the job market so it’s very relevant to me right now. But I think that they really value that because it’s so hard to train leaders at this point in your life umm if you don’t have any experience at all. I think that you know you have to have something to build off of so they’re using that, looking for leadership and thinking that leadership that I have as a student-athlete is really relevant and really valuable.”

Athlete 1 identified *leadership* as a life skill that was developed during her intercollegiate sporting career. However, the athlete believed she will not be in a leadership position immediately. As a result, she may not be able to transfer the skill and this might create a difficult experience:

• **Athlete 1:** “Like with running as a senior, as a team you know you’re forced to be a leader in that position and then going into a new world and in that application I won’t be a leader, I’ll be umm just starting out, I feel like that transition might be a little rocky umm but other than that I feel like I’m not too worried about it”

Transferring the *leadership* that she believed she learned through sporting experiences into her coaching future is something that Athlete 6 plans to do:

• **Athlete 6:** “I plan on going into the coaching field as soon as I get done with my degree, I am an education major so I plan to, you know a teacher is a leader, a teacher has to lead her students, a teacher has to umm be an example and that’s important whether it be a bad example sometimes or whether it be doing the wrong thing and people learning from that because people do learn from that or whether it be that example that it’s that shoulder to lean on or the person that really pushes someone to their potential umm and you know carrying that out into what I want to do is perfect because you know I’ve seen great coaches and I’ve played with great players and it’s just umm, I plan on carrying out every skill and everything that softball has given to me because you know, I’ve put a lot of my life into this sport but it’s given me back so much in return so”

This helped Athlete 6 reflection on her personal experiential learning and overall personal development and growth of maturity:

• **Athlete 6:** “I definitely think that umm you know I’m sure anyone could tell you that’s known me for four years that I am a different person and I am, I mean I’m the same person but I am different in how I think and I am different and I’m so much more mature”

Athlete 1 identified *responsibility* as skill she perceived was learned through her leadership experiences in sport and a skill that she will be able to transfer into her future teaching and coaching:
• **Athlete 1:** “I feel like umm as I’ll be a teacher and an authority figure I guess I learned you know that it is good to let them go off on their own and try to figure things out by themselves so that they can also develop skills that they need to be successful.” (1)

• **Athlete 1:** “taking control of things and umm I guess and more so with like just responsibility like I said taking short cuts is not the right way to do things like you need to be on top of things and do things that you’re supposed to be doing and taking responsibility for your own future rather than placing it on my coach."

Additionally, **honesty** that was perceived to be learned through interactions in the intercollegiate sporting environment is a skill that Athlete 1 views as being transferrable to her teaching future:

• **Athlete 1:** “learning to be honest in dealing with people who sometimes have different viewpoints than you, I’ve learned to deal with that in running and I think that’ll definitely help me out in the real world especially with teaching and dealing with parents and stuff and other colleagues I guess”

Athlete 5 discussed learning about dishonesty and a lack of integrity through his team experiences and involvement within the athletic department power-structure. He believes that these lessons learned are transferrable to society at large:

• **Athlete 5:** “it just to me it seems like it sets up, okay well here’s the rules or the norms would be a better word for it, and coming from an authority position of the athletic department I feel like it says this is how things should be and then when you actually get around to meeting with people ah who are involved with different sports it’s not necessarily how things are and I think that is generalizable to umm the society at large, I mean for instance it’s kind of a dumb example but speed limits, I mean the sign clearly says ‘speed limit 65 miles an hour’ and people start honking at you if you’re not driving at least 65 so that’s kind of how the culture interpreted and really changed the meaning of what that law or norm would be.”

**Theme 4: Organization**

The athletes’ believe that involvement in the intercollegiate athletic environment assisted in developing their organizational skills. Time management, goal setting and self-sufficiency were identified as being transferrable organizational skills. Athlete 3 claims to have developed her **time management** skills through the sporting involvement and has been able to use the skill in school and her current internship:
• **Athlete 3:** “time management is a huge one, I would definitely say time management umm with school as well as trying to figure out where I wanna go and umm what I wanna do and stuff. I’ve actually, I’m on the other side of athletics now, I am working in the athletic department as an assistant coordinator in there so to keep athletes eligible to play and stuff and I’ve been shadowing one of our coordinators and she’s actually in charge of field hockey which is kind of weird, being on the other side of the door hearing everything and stuff but umm it has been interesting and I’ve been balancing work life and student life so time management has been really helpful with that”

Having developed a new *goal setting* perspective through his athletic participation in college, Athlete 5 believes he will be able to transfer the skill and new perspective to his future coaching:

• **Athlete 5:** “I guess going forward now I would like to be a coach at some time, either cross-country, track based or whatever I can get in to, and I think that probably the most important thing that I have to communicate is that you need to focus on yourself and what you can control and can’t worry about other people so that’s probably the number one thing that I’ve learned”

The first section of Chapter 3 outlined the experiential learning of life skills as discussed by intercollegiate athletes. The numerous skills were then categorized into themes in the second section of Chapter 3. Life skills perceived as being learned by intercollegiate athletes included relationship skills, skills that enhanced mental toughness, skills that produced and confirmed personal integrity, and organizational skills. These skills were then identified as being transferred, or able to be transferred, into other areas of the athletes’ lives, therefore being defined as life skills (Gould & Carson, 2008). As shown above in the second section of Chapter 3, skills could be transferred from sport to general life experiences, current and future employment, the social college environment, the college academic environment, relationships with family, relationships with friends, and to overall personal wellbeing.

*Summary*

The overall process can of the role of intercollegiate sport participation in life skill development is outlined in Figure 1. Two influential sources in the perceived development of life skills in intercollegiate athletes were identified. These sources ‘Significant others’ and ‘the nature of intercollegiate athletics’ and are depicted on the two halves of the outer blue circle in the diagram. The ‘significant others’ half of the circle is divided into four sections which represent the
four groups of influential individuals in the athletes’ life skill development. The ‘nature of intercollegiate athletics’ half of outer circle is divided into seven sections which represent the seven influential aspects of the intercollegiate sporting environment on life skill development.

The outer ‘sources’ circle is then seen to interact with in the inner red circle. This circle represents the individual athlete. The influence of each individual athlete on the different experiences in the sporting environment was identified throughout Chapter 3. This individual was seen to be very influential in the perceived learning of life skills in intercollegiate sport and will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4. The interaction of the source of experience and the individual athlete was then seen to create the learning experience. Experiential learning of life skills therefore appears to be highly dependent on the interaction of the individual and the experience.

The learning experience is depicted in the middle yellow circle. In this developmental realm, the interaction of the individual and the experience is seen to develop life skills. The life skills are shown within the circle with reference to the overall themes and sub-themes of the life skills. Once the life skills have been perceived to be learned by the athletes, they are then seen to be transferred to other areas of life. This transference is depicted by the pot of gold in the center of the diagram. Within the pot of gold are three broad domains in which life skills are transferred to. The pot of gold is representative of transference as a vital component of skills becoming life skills. A skill learned through sport participation is not a life skill unless it is successfully transferred into other areas of the athlete’s life (Gould & Carson, 2008). The overall process of life skill development in intercollegiate sport is therefore simply depicted in Figure 1. Different sources in the intercollegiate sporting environment interact with the individual athlete and can create the experiential learning of skills to use in different areas of the athlete’s life. These skills can then be transferred into different life domains and used as life skills.

**Chapter 4**

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding about whether intercollegiate athletes feel they have learned life skills through intercollegiate sport participation, how they believe they have acquired these skills, and how they believe they are using, or can use, these life skills in other
areas of life. Seven senior intercollegiate athletes participated in in-depth interviews which attempted to provide an understanding about the role of intercollegiate sport participation in the life skill development of athletes. The interviews confirmed that the athletes did believe they learned life skills whilst being involved in intercollegiate sport. Specifically, the athletes’ identified two main sources that they perceived to be influential in the development of life skills in the college sport environment. Significant others in the form of coaches, parents, teammates and athletic support staff were seen as being important agents in the development of life skills. The nature of intercollegiate athletics was also identified as being an influential source that assisted the life skill development of athletes. This was observed through the structured and competitive nature of intercollegiate sport, scholarship status, the athletes’ end of eligibility, non-participation and the political influence of the sporting environment. The life skills the athletes claim to have learned could be categorized into relationship skills, mental toughness skills, skills based on personal integrity, and organizational skills. The athletes’ believed they were able to, and would be able to continue to, use these skills in other areas of their lives.

Three specific questions were established at the beginning of the study. These questions were: Do athletes perceive they have learned life skills through their participation in intercollegiate sport? What are these skills, and how do the athletes believe they have acquired them? If not, why not? How do athletes believe they are using, or can use, these life skills in other areas of their lives? If not, why not? The answers, according to the athletes in this study, are addressed in this chapter. Additionally, the significance of the answers in relation to the area of life skill development is discussed.

Learning Life Skills in Intercollegiate Sport

Seligman and Maier (1995) argued that the nature of intercollegiate athletics in the United States helped contributed to athlete ‘learned helplessness.’ To compound this problem, Robert Lipsyte (1995 cited in Benford, 2007) believed that this ‘learned helplessness’ hinders the ability of the collegiate athletes to transition into adulthood. Through the analysis of athletes’ experiences in the intercollegiate sporting environment in the present study, this notion of ‘learned helplessness’ does not appear evident for this group of athletes. Life skills in this study were defined as “those internal personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed in sport and
transferred for use in non-sport settings” (Gould & Carson, 2008, p. 60). Thus, based on this definition, the development of life skills would assist an athlete’s transition into adulthood. It is important to note that the focus of the current study was specifically on the role of intercollegiate sport participation in life skill development, not on the role of academics and involvement in the general college environment in life skill development. The athletes identified numerous experiences during their intercollegiate sporting careers that they believe contributed to the development of life skills. Critically, the athletes were then able to provide examples of ways in which they have, or can use, those life skills in other areas of life. According to the operational definition of life skills in this study, the ‘transfer’ of the skills is an integral component, because a skill could therefore not be defined as a ‘life skill’ if the transfer was not evident (Gould & Carson, 2008). The specific elements of the development of life skills can be seen in the following example. Athlete 7 identified learning how to love and care about people:

- **Athlete 7:** “…hockey has really taught me a lot with how to love”  
- **Interviewer:** “So hockey and being involved in the hockey program has helped you do that? Could you explain that?”  
- **Athlete 7:** “No question. The love of your teammates, no question. Showing up every single day, you have a choice whether or not you’re going to spend time with these guys, making a conscious effort outside of class, like you have so much on your plate so you have so many things that you could do, but choosing the right ones to do, a great bit of wisdom that I’ve learned and one of the things just spending time with people umm having dinner with guys, having good conversations, finding time to do that umm making time, getting homework out of the way so you have free time to go and hang out with the guys for a little bit and really developing relationships beyond the rink it’s been…no question about that, it’s helped me so much with my family umm no question about that, umm realizing and just seeing how little things that you can do to impact them and to serve the guys on your team are easily ways you can do the same for your family and ah ultimately relationships are a deal and we’ve talked a lot about that today.”

Within the above discussion, Athlete 7 identifies his sport as being influential in helping him learn “how to love.” The athlete then explains how his teammates helped him learn this skill. Finally, he describes how he has transferred this skill to the relationships he has with his family.

Research into the role of sport participation in the development of life skills has only recently begun to explore athletes’ perceptions of their learning experiences. Holt et al. (2009) provided insight into the perceptions of Canadian athletes about their learning of life skills during their youth sport participation. This confirmed that youth athletes did find sport to be an educational site for life skill development. Jones and Lavallee (2009) contributed to the literature
with the analysis of an individual British athlete’s perceptions of her life skill development throughout a 13 year career. This study suggested that the interaction of individual and environmental factors contributed to the development of life skills. As intercollegiate sport is an integral part of the United States sporting culture it appears necessary to gain an understanding of the process of life skill development within this realm. Unfortunately however, there are conflicting views of the influence of intercollegiate sport participation on the personal development of the athletes involved. The current analysis of collegiate athletes’ perceptions of life skill development during their intercollegiate sporting participation therefore provides a beneficial addition to the literature. Specifically, the study is able to show that athletes believe that intercollegiate sport participation can assist in the life skill development of athletes and gains an understanding of the learning processes involved.

As shown throughout Chapter 3, the intercollegiate athletes provided numerous examples of experiences and ways in which they perceive they learned skills that they have, or can, use in other areas of their lives. This is a valuable finding in two ways. First, the age group of 18-23 years has received little attention in relation to the role of sport participation in their life skill development. Second, the personal development of athletes is claimed to be a primary aim of the NCAA and the intercollegiate sporting culture, however this notion has received criticism and success of this goal has been doubted.

First, this current study suggests that during the age of 18-23 years, sport participation does appear to assist athletes’ development life skills. As shown throughout Chapter 1, youth sport and life skill intervention programs have received much attention. This research supports the idea that programs directed at developing life skills through sport-based interventions can be successful (Danish et al., 2002; Petitpas et al., 2005), and youth sport can be a site for the development of life skills in youths (Gould et al., 2007; Holt et al., 2009). This previous research has been primarily focused on youths under the age of 18. With Danish et al., (2002) stating that adolescence can be defined in age from eleven years to twenty-one years, the age group of 18-21 therefore stands out as being a category that has not been studied in relation to life skill development. This time period is important from a developmental aspect because of the detachment from parents, focus on peer relations, and development of reasoning and transition into adult work (Danish et al., 2002). This study suggests that, during the ages of 18-23, sport participation does play a role in the
development of life skills and overall personal development. This importance of this time in one’s life can be summarized by Athlete 6 during a time of self-reflection:

- **Athlete 6:** “I definitely think that umm you know I’m sure anyone could tell you that’s known me for four years that I am a different person and I am, I mean I’m the same person but I am different in how I think and I am different and I’m so much more mature”

Overall, the athletes mentioned a variety experiences during their four or five years of intercollegiate sport participation that were influential in the learning of life skills. It appears that involvement in sport at this age was beneficial for athletes in that it provided specific experiences that helped them learn new life skills, and situations that caused the athletes to believe that they ‘needed’ to learn life skills. Additionally, intercollegiate sporting experiences were seen to provide opportunities to confirm and ‘polish’ life skills that had been previously learned. This is discussed more fully later in the chapter.

Second, involvement in intercollegiate sport is influential in the development of athlete life skills. One of the primary aims of the NCAA is for intercollegiate athletes to gain an education and benefit from the physical, mental, and social benefits that are obtained from participation as a college athlete (Sage, 1998). This suggests that personal development is one primary purpose of intercollegiate sport. From the athletes interviewed in the current study, the overall belief was that involvement in intercollegiate sport assisted their personal development and learning of life skills. This is validated by Athlete 1:

- **Athlete 1:** “I mean being a college athlete and I think a lot of college athletes would say this, that it has really helped who I am as a person, if it wasn’t for running in college, I would be someone completely different, probably somebody that I wouldn’t like and you know I would be as driven umm as I am now or I wouldn’t be getting things done like I am now and doing college sports gives you a lot of opportunities later in life”

These overall perceptions of the athletes in the current study could therefore suggest that the NCAA is achieving its aims of assisting in the personal development of athletes involved. Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) suggest that collegiate athletic departments should include academic support, career counseling, and personal development for student-athletes. The incorporation of this assistance should provide an enhancement of higher education and help promote life skill development and academic achievement simultaneously (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001).
Although this may be true, it is the researcher’s view, based on the perceptions presented by the athletes’ interviewed, that life skill development in intercollegiate sport occurs mainly from the everyday experiences and interactions that occur in the athletic environment. Based on the review of the life skill development literature to date, Gould and Carson (2008) state that life skills are taught and not caught in youth sport. Alternatively, Jones and Lavallee (2009) contend that life skills can be developed through sport participation but not necessarily as the result of systematic, direct teaching strategies. It is not the aim of this research to argue that life skills are not taught through sport, however the following section of this chapter will provide support for Jones and Lavallee’s (2009) notion of the experiential learning of life skills and attempt to explain the significance of the learning experiences in intercollegiate sport as discussed by the intercollegiate athletes’ in this study.

Additionally, the idea that life skills are developed through intercollegiate sport participation but not necessarily as the result of systematic teaching has interesting implications for the current intercollegiate athletic environment. Currently, a significant amount of time and resources are put in to creating and maintaining successful personal develop and ‘CHAMPS/LifeSkills’ programs (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Although such programs can be effective, it was interesting to note that they were very rarely mentioned by the athletes interviewed in the current study. This may have been caused by the questioning used in the interviews, however, the fact that the athletes did not mention the structured programs when discussing personal development and life skill development in intercollegiate sport may be concerning to the NCAA and program organizers. Continued research into the effectiveness of specific programs and critical analysis from the athletes involved may provide useful information to help to continue to develop such programs. Additionally, the possible inclusion of a component in these courses that promotes discussion and critical thinking about the experiential learning of life skills in all areas of intercollegiate athletics may help strengthen the effectiveness of such programs.

**How Life Skills Were Learned**

The athletes involved in the current study all believed that they learned life skills through their involvement in intercollegiate sport. This suggests that intercollegiate sport had a positive impact on the personal development of the athletes’ involved in the current study. Of special
interest, however, was the recurring theme that the athletes learned life skills from challenging, difficult and often negative experiences. The importance of learning from negative was expressed by Athlete 2:

- **Athlete 2:** “I think learning from the negative experiences are the most important umm you never find out what kind of person you are, how you handle pressure or controversy, or you know uneasiness, it’s…if you’re never in those situations it doesn’t mean you go looking for them but they’re always gonna find you umm and so in those negative or not so wanted situations are where you have to learn umm because those are the type of things you want to prevent so from that time on, and if you don’t learn from them there only gonna repeat themselves, if you can learn from them, you can hopefully stop them from happening again so you have to learn from those more importantly than any other situation”

Athlete 3 claimed that she learned from her difficult experiences:

- **Athlete 3:** “there were a lot of times when there were tears and there was anger and there was every other emotion that you can possibly think of in a negative way but I think every time there was I just learned from them so it was good!”

The importance of the adverse, challenging experiences was mentioned again by Athlete 5:

- **Athlete 5:** “when everything’s going well you don’t learn anything because you don’t change anything because it’s going well so I guess the adversity is the most important experiences that I’ve had here”

Adversity was also a critical learning factor from Athlete 7’s perspective:

- **Athlete 7:** “the adversity in sports remarkably impacts your development cause if you think about it, if everything is good in your life, nothing’s going wrong, you don’t ever have to ask questions, you don’t know what you’re doing, you don’t learn, you just keep doing what you’re doing but as soon as little bumps in the road hit, it’s a question of whether it becomes a mountain to you or a speed bump and learning different skills in your life to be able to make that speed bump make it like a little crack in the road if anything, like versus having to climb a mountain and really yeah…”

The previous quotes outline the overarching theme that the difficult and challenging experiences that occurred in the intercollegiate sport setting were viewed as being important by the athletes in relation to their personal development. As shown in Chapter 3, various positive interactions were identified with ‘Significant Others’ that resulted in the learning of life skills for the athletes. However, many negative or challenging interactions were also discussed by the athletes. Such life skill learning experiences that were perceived as being unpleasant by the athletes included: coaches who were ‘negative’ role models, coaches who used challenging...
behaviors, negative interactions with teammates, and being challenged by athletic support staff. The ‘nature of intercollegiate athletics’ was identified as being influential in the athletes’ development of life skills. Interestingly, the majority of the learning experiences discussed in relation to the ‘nature of intercollegiate athletics’ were viewed by the athletes as being challenging, difficult, and often negative. These experiences included, the challenges associates with the demanding structure of intercollegiate sport, being involved in a ‘less popular’ sport, the perceived dishonesty associated with the political structure of the athletic department, possessing a scholarship, not possessing a scholarship, being unable to participate because of injury, being unable to participate because of non-selection, and the cessation of one’s career due to the eligibility rules.

The important idea arising from these experiences is that, although the experiences were perceived as negative and challenging at the time, the positive result of such experiences have now been realized by the athletes. The perceived development of life skills was the positive result. This notion follows the basic tenets of the ‘Resiliency Model’ (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, & Kumpfer, 1990). This model conceptualizes resilience as a process by which positive adaptation does not just occur from experiencing and overcoming a challenge or obstacle. The process involves self improvement to a higher degree than the previous level of competence. The purpose of this model is therefore to outline how resilient qualities are strengthened by experiences of adversity. The athletes in the current study identified a number of different experiences. From these experiences, the athletes were able to identify self improvement through the development of life skills, and thus show how resilient qualities and life skills were strengthened by experiences of adversity (Richardson et al., 1990).

Fraser-Thomas and colleagues (2005, 2009) outlined negative experiences that athletes described from youth sport experiences. Although these studies described how athletes overcame or attempted to overcome challenges, no self-improvement was identified by these athletes through the difficult experiences. The current study was able to gain an understanding of how intercollegiate athletes can, and have, used challenging experiences to improve their perceptions of personal competence through the development of life skills. Shields and Bredemeier (1995) suggested that the resiliency model would appeal to those who believe that sport can “build character” through process of learning and growing as a result of experiencing adversity. The
current study supports this notion by suggesting that the resiliency model matches the process of the development of life skills by overcoming adversity.

Previous research suggests that parents play a critical role in the personal development in their children who are involved in youth sport. This suggests that parents used sport in a positive way to help reinforce the ideas of work ethic and sportspersonship (Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2009; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt et al., 2009), but also negatively influenced development by pressuring their children to excel in sport and pressuring them to stay involved in sport (Fraser-Thomas & Cote, 2009; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Perceptions from athletes in the current study suggest that parental influence is different when their child is participating in intercollegiate sport. As shown in Chapter 3, parents were identified as influential in the development of life skills by being more of a support network than directly teaching the skills. Athletes stated that their parents were not as directly involved in their intercollegiate sporting experience compared to high school, but were still a critical part of their development of life skills. The athletes’ suggested that they would go to their parents when they required critical, honest feedback and appeared to be more appreciative of the ‘background’ support role for parents. This is highlighted by Athlete 1 who outlines the important supportive role of her parents when she required it:

- **Athlete 1:** “I mean my parents are really influential in my running career as well and helping me learn to how to deal with things especially when I had my old coach but I feel like I’ve definitely transformed from when I was a freshman umm until now and it deals more with like training and stuff like that, like I understand how to handle that and what I would do in certain situations but I’ve definitely learned that in college.”
- **Interviewer:** “So are your parents still a big influence well you’re still in college?”
- **Athlete 1:** “Yeah uh huh definitely. Umm I like something’s not going right or I’m having trouble with somebody I definitely consult with them and see what they say I should do and I look from advice from them.”
- **Interviewer:** “Yeah so they are still helping your development if you will?”
- **Athlete 1:** “Yeah definitely I mean if it wasn’t for my parents then I don’t think I’d be where I am now and especially with running, I don’t think I’d be where I am now so they put things in perspective in development and I feel like I’ll take that with me for the rest of my life.”
- **Interviewer:** “Can you think any examples of your parents doing stuff for you or saying certain things?”
- **Athlete 1:** “Umm I guess every parents or a lot of parents do it but umm my parents are the perfect critic, they don’t sugar coat things for me, like if I do something wrong they’ll tell me or umm they give me the honest opinion rather than a friend whose just like ya know maybe not the whole truth so umm that’s one thing I guess…and then they’ve always like they’re there for me all the time, 100% of the time, they’re like selfless
people and I feel like that’s something that I would take or try to take into running and bring into the rest of my life, to help other people.”

Athlete 5 discussed the appreciation he showed for his parents taking a background supportive role.

- **Athlete 5:** “my Dad was my baseball coach from the time I was five until the time I was sixteen so umm he had always been in the habit of saying ‘okay this is what I think you need to do this’ so then in high school I started running, and it’s something that no offence he knows nothing about and then he still kind of tried to coach me a little bit and I’m thinking you don’t know what you’re talking about so he let go of that a little which I’m sure was to some degree a little bit difficult for him but umm they’ve kind of taken, I don’t want to say a blasé approach but it’s been a very ah hands off and supportive to where, the same thing with how my coach would always say you know good job after a race well even if the result wasn’t good, they knew that all the training that I went through, the time that it takes and then actually getting to the race itself, you know all of that was, it’s a lot of work and umm for a few years I was too thick headed to really see that and appreciate that but I dunno with the perspective that I have now I feel like that was a very good approach and I was very pleased to have support because if your parents don’t support you then who’s going to”

Gould and Carson (2008) state clearly that life skills do not automatically develop from mere participation in sport. Furthermore, the development of such skills is not a simple process. The findings of the current study support this through the notion that although some skills may have been realized during high school sporting participation, the athletes believed that intercollegiate sport helped them ‘polish’ the skills and fully learn the life skills. High school sport was obviously an influential time in the development of life skills. However, as noted by Martinek, Schilling, and Johnson (2001), it is imperative that individuals consciously perceived they possess the skill to be able to transfer it to other life domains, and therefore be able to define it as a life skill (Gould & Carson, 2008). Based on the athletes’ perceptions that intercollegiate sport was necessary in allowing them to fully understand, and ‘polish’ the life skills, these sporting experiences appear to be vitally influential in the development of life skills. This idea is highlighted by Athlete 4 when describing how he learned to understand diversity and work with people:

- **Athlete 4:** “Umm I think in high school, it was a little different in high school because those guys you play high school football with, like you grew up with those guys so you knew them a little better but at the same time in college, you’re more mature so you like you get to know those guys in a different way because you hadn’t grown up with them and umm you learn to adapt to their background because you know there’s a lot more
diversity than there was in high school and like guys come from different areas and things like that so I think it was definitely different than, like I’m good friends with my guys back home from my high school team, the same as I am in the five years that I’ve been here, it’s kind of a different friendship so…”

This idea is also noted by Athlete 1 in her description of learning about time management as a life skill:

- **Interviewer:** “Do you think time management you’ve had the whole time you’ve been here or have you had specific experiences where you have thought ‘hey I had to learn time management or…”
- **Athlete 1:** “I think I definitely learned it more…I mean it started in high school just cause I played sports in high school it’s so much different because you have so much more homework. You have to umm keep up with that and like travelling on the weekends, you have to manage your time so when you’re travelling on the bus you’re doing homework and you know when you get to the meet you’re focusing on your thing and stuff so I definitely have had, I’ve gotten a lot better at it in college than I was in high school because we didn’t have as much outside things affecting, homework wasn’t a big deal”

Discussing the differences between high school and college in relation to learning how to understand and work with other people, Athlete 1 also uncovered the notion of a changing life perspective. Specifically, the idea of a ‘reality check’ and a need to move from a state of self-absorption to a more mature and open perspective of life was realized:

- **Athlete 1:** “I feel like in high school maybe not everyone, but I was a little bit more self-absorbed but like coming into college you know, it’s kinda a wake-up call, just with competing like you’re not the best like you were in high school and I feel like that comes in with everything like everyone has their own priorities, their own thing going on and we all come together and it like you have to learn to umm accept other people from where they came from and like learn that like not… the world doesn’t revolve around you so if you’re having a bad day you gotta put that aside for other people so you can do your best at practice.”

This idea was reflected throughout the interviews with the athletes in the current study. This is contrary to Robert Lipsyte’s (1995 cited in Benford, 2007) opinion that most college athletes are trapped in a state of adolescence and John Gerdy’s (2002 cited in Benford, 2007) view that the controlled structure of intercollegiate sport hinders the athletes’ ability to think and act for him or herself. It is noted that the individual athlete telling the story does impact greatly on the personal development achieved through such experiences. Similarly, a retrospective analysis from the athletes may impact on the perceptions of the learning experience. This is
addressed later in the chapter. However, according the experiences of the college athletes interviewed in this study, it does appear that intercollegiate athletes have the ability to mature and gain a new perspective on life that moves past the self-absorption and lack of ability to think and act, labels described in some of the literature.

Again, parallels with Richardson and colleagues (1990) resiliency model can be seen. The athletes on different occasions noted that they entered college with what they perceive as an inaccurate perception of their own ability and a sense of self-absorption as stated by Athlete 1. The athletes were then involved in difficult, challenging experiences which may have challenged their initial perceptions. Some of these experiences included challenges in negative interactions with people, receiving criticism, and learning leadership through trial and error. By then overcoming these difficult experiences, the athletes were able to gain skills such as leadership, dealing with criticism, and working with people that allowed them to gain a new sense of self acceptance and an increased competence (Richardson et al., 1990).

**Transferring Life Skills**

The operational definition of life skills used in the current study clearly states that a skill learned through sport participation is not a life skill unless it can be successfully transferred to other areas of life (Gould & Carson, 2008). For the purpose of the study, it was imperative that the athletes were able to explain and identify the transference of such skills. It therefore appeared important to gain the athletes’ perspectives of their intercollegiate sporting experiences from a retrospective point of view. This allowed athletes to reflect, understand and explain how they are, have, or been, able to transfer skill into other areas of life. As identified by Jones and Lavallee (2009), athletes learned life skills unconsciously and only realized they possess the skills after the event, thus retrospection and reflection appears to be important. Retrospective analysis of four or five years of participation in the current study was therefore done by athletes who were in the final year of eligibility or had just completed their final year of eligibility. This importance of retrospection was found to be similar in the intercollegiate population interviewed in the current study and highlighted by Athlete 2 and Athlete 5:

- **Athlete 2**: “it’s not something that you’re consciously thinking ‘I’m gonna do this and learn from it’, It’s just it’s when you step back and say okay that could have been handled better or I’m really glad that I addressed that right now and how good you feel, you just constantly keep learning, I don’t think it’s a conscious thing ahead of time umm you
definitely take some time to reflect on how you feel afterward, what they feel or think afterward.”

- **Interviewer:** “So when you do feel you have done most of your reflection, do you think you were able to do it as you went through or maybe…”

- **Athlete 2:** “It’s more after, after the situation is over. Usually when I’m alone with my thoughts is when I reflect about it. If I ever were to talk about it with anyone else, I’d try to go to a friend outside of volleyball umm if I needed to either vent or you know how did this, what would you think if I said this to you kind of thing, umm but it was definitely more after the fact.”

- **Athlete 5:** “personally I learned best from my mistakes and I feel like some of the mistakes that I’ve made, that we’ve talked about today, and different things that I now understand that I should probably do differently, you know I think overall retrospectively it was all together, it was good, and umm you know kind of the benchmark for me about judging something is would I change anything”

Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001), note that student-athletes must cope with scrutiny from the public, extensive time commitments above and beyond any academic requirements, and demanding expectations from various people in the intercollegiate sporting environment. For Division I athletes to therefore successfully begin and complete their four or five years of eligible participation in intercollegiate sport on top of any academic achievements, it makes sense that these individuals possess some strong dispositional qualities that helped contribute to their personal success. Furthermore, through interviewing an individual athlete about her perceptions of life skill development, Jones and Lavallee (2009) concluded that personal dispositions were hugely influential in the learning and transfer of life skills. This supports the underlying belief of life skill intervention programs, where the individual must be a willing and personally responsible component of the interaction that successful develops the learning of life skills through sport-based programs (Danish et al., 2002; Petitpas et al., 2005). Gould and Carson (2008, p. 71) sum up this notion with their idea that “life skills are caught and not taught.” The current study identified numerous life skills that intercollegiate athletes learned through their sporting participation in college and therefore must recognize and understand the importance of the individual athlete who interacted with the sources of learning in the intercollegiate athletic environment.

The athletes stated many characteristics that they believe they personally possessed. In general, the athletes believed that their competitive and aspiring dispositions suited
intercollegiate sport. This is observed through the following quote from Athlete 2 during the reflection of her past:

- **Athlete 2:** “Umm I think I found sport and stuck with it for as long as I have because I just always had desire to compete. I think I get it from my dad, I think he’s pretty competitive so umm and I also grew up, I’m the second oldest of five so there’s always somebody to compete with so I kinda brought that to volleyball umm sports has definitely enhanced that but again I think I like thrive on sports because of how competitive I am naturally”
- **Interviewer:** “So do you think you’ve sort of been guided to sports because of your personality?”
- **Athlete 2:** “Yeah”
- **Interviewer:** “Are there any other traits like that do you think?”
- **Athlete 2:** “Like competitiveness….umm I mean I like people, I like being with people, I like hanging out and meeting new people umm and I think that volleyball is a really good way to do that but anything else…umm…I enjoy succeeding and doing well umm and I think I grew up playing, I mean in grade school you play every sport you know, volleyball and basketball and soccer and whatever it was and umm I guess I would always consider myself athletic but I was not good at all those sports ha umm and so when I think when I found volleyball it clicked and you know when you succeed I’m the kind of person who likes to please other people, make myself and other people happy or whatever that is so umm knowing that when I won and when I succeed and I would do something right that made me feel good and so I think that kinda subconsciously helps you keep going with it, when you find something that you’re naturally good at”

Obviously, not all intercollegiate athletes possess these specific individual characteristics and dispositions. It does appear though that each athlete involved in the current study was able to find a certain integration of processes to successfully learn life skills through intercollegiate sport participation. The interaction of the individual and their specific experiences in intercollegiate sport appear to contribute to the development of life skills. This supports Jones and Lavallee’s (2009) finding that an individual tennis player integrated her personal dispositions and experiential learning to develop a range of life skills. This study, although not analyzing individuals in single case studies, was able to gain an understanding about the variety of experiences within the intercollegiate sporting environment and gain an understanding of how these scenarios interacted with seven different individuals to contribute to the learning of a range of different life skills across the population interviewed.

As previously noted, it appears that a student-athlete required an individual who was conducive to interact with different environmental experiences to learn life skills. Athlete 7
therefore wisely states that such individuals, if not involved in intercollegiate sport, would have found alternative experiential outlets to learn life skills:

- **Athlete 7:** “My whole life has been sports all around, if I didn’t play a sport I could not see myself not doing something. I would have easily and surely got involved with so much stuff, intramurals, clubs, umm just stuff that I don’t know it because the way that I am, I can’t just sit still, I gotta get out and do stuff, I gotta be active, I gotta be outdoors, I gotta be involved with different things and like I love competing, competing is such a blast, I just think it’s awesome so that just being part of, I would have to do something. I don’t know how things would have been different cause I feel like I would have just packed my time with different things”

Sport is a cultural phenomenon that has value throughout society and is a site that can have a major influence on ones’ personal development (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993). The current study confirms this notion by outlining the importance of intercollegiate sport in the life skill development of the athletes’ involvement.

*Limitations and Future Research*

Although the current study assisted in gaining a greater understanding about the role of intercollegiate sport participation in the life skill development, limitations of the study must be recognized. This phenomenological study involved seven intercollegiate athletes who were involved in individually significant and different experiences. These experiences are therefore only relevant and applicable to each of the athletes involved and not necessarily transferable to other intercollegiate athletes or the entire intercollegiate athletic population. The interview and analysis techniques utilized in the study may have provided a limitation to the study. The interview guide remained the same for all of the seven interviews. Additionally, all of the interviews were analyzed at the conclusion of the data collection. By reviewing the questions used in the interview guide more critically after each interview, the researcher may have been able to alter questions or create new questions to better answer the research questions, based on the answers received from the interviewees. This may have provided more insight and a greater depth of information to answer the research questions. Additionally, transcribing and analyzing each interview immediately after the interview took place may have helped provide the research with more information about the research questions and could have provide insight to change or alter the interview guide questions.
Future research could investigate the role of intercollegiate sport participation in life skill development in a different way. Retrospective interviews could be completed with the same participants, or different participants, in a number of years to analyze whether or not life skills have been transferred from sport to other areas of life. Youth sport participation and intercollegiate sport participation both appear to be influential in the life skill development of athletes. Future research could also be completed using a longitudinal design. Athletes could be interviewed through their sport participation during youth, college and then the through and following their cessation of involvement in sport. Research in this manner could then provide further insight about the timing, experiential learning, and transfer of life skills and the role of sport participation in this process. Furthermore, an ethnographic approach to the research may help provided more insight into the phenomena of life skill development through intercollegiate sport. Through participation observation and spending more time with athletes in their sporting environment, ethnographic research could provide a more in-depth story of an athlete’s life skill development through sport participation. This could also help to explain the specific learning experiences and transfer of life skills.

Finally, the athletes in the current study were in their final year of eligibility in intercollegiate sport. This suggests that their experience was positive to the extent that they did not finish their careers prior to their allotted time. Although this study did not attempt to generalize the learning of life skills across all intercollegiate athletes, the fact that no athletes in the study had ‘dropped out’ of intercollegiate sport means that the population was reflective of the entire population. Future research could therefore conduct a similar study with intercollegiate athletes who chose not to complete their four or five years of eligibility to gain an understanding of this populations perceptions of life skill development and intercollegiate sport. As previously noted, individual athletes and learning experiences interact to influence the development of life skills. Further research could provide comparisons to the current study by investigating the non student-athlete population to gain an understanding of their life skill development whilst in their college years.

Conclusion

To say that sport automatically builds character is untrue. However to say that intercollegiate sport creates helplessness is unfair. The college athletes involved in the current
study did perceive intercollegiate sport does appear to be influential in the development of life skills. Specifically, the challenging experiences and interactions that come with the commitment of being an intercollegiate athlete were identified as important learning experiences for the athletes. Athletes showed resiliency through these experiences of adversity and were able to develop skills that they have, or can, use in other areas of their lives. It was therefore an interaction between the individual athlete and the athletic environment that was appeared to contribute to the development of life skills in the intercollegiate athletes interviewed. Thus, athletes in the later years of adolescence appear to be able to developmentally learn life skills through a range of different experiences and may not necessarily need the ‘teaching’ of life skills that younger youths require. The current study does suggest that experiential learning of life skills appears to occur through intercollegiate sport participation, although not necessarily in the joyful, positive manner that we all hope.
References


Interview Guide

Grand-Tour Question:

1. What do you think intercollegiate sport has taught you as a person over your years of participation, besides all of the physical skills?

Mini-Tour Questions

2. Can you think of and describe any situations or examples from your collegiate sporting career where you think you learnt valuable or invaluable lessons for life?

3. Can you think of and describe certain things or people within the collegiate sporting environment that were important in influence the learning of these skills? Good or bad?

4. During your time at college, can you think of and describe any situations or examples outside of sport that may have influenced the development of these skills?

5. If you have learnt certain things through your collegiate sport participation, do you use these learnt skills in other aspects of life? If so, how?

6. How do you think participation in sport and the learning of these skills will affect you, and be used, in the future?

Closing Question:

7. Is there anything else you can tell me that you didn’t get the chance to say, that you think will help me better understand your experiences of intercollegiate sport and what you feel you have learned from those experiences?
Appendix B: Initial Contact Script

Hello! My name is Scott Pierce and I am currently a graduate student at Miami University. As part of studies, I am completing a thesis which involves research interviews. Because of my interest in becoming a professional in the sport psychology field, I have chosen the topic of life skills development for my project.

I am contacting you to see if you’d be willing to help me out with my project. If so, your involvement would be an interview about your experiences and perceptions of the role of sport participation in the development of life skills. I expect this interview will take about 45 minutes.

Is this something you think you could help me out with?

**IF YES:** Great! Then let me get a sense of when you might be available for an interview…

Is it o.k. if I contact you the day before the interview to confirm it with you? What is the best way for me to reach you?

Also, let me give you my contact information in case you have any questions or concern: piercesw@muohio.edu

At this point do you have any questions? O.k. I’ll see you on….

**IF NO:** That’s fine! No problem. Thanks for considering it!
Appendix C: Interview Introductory Script

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in my project. I know that you are taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in this interview.

- I really appreciate your willingness to help me gain a better understanding of sport and life skills development.

- My goal for this interview is to learn about your experiences and perspectives of the role of sport participation in life skill development.

- There are not any right or wrong, good or bad answers. Rather, I am interested in your perceptions, experiences, and insights.

- If any question is unclear to you just let me know. If you don’t want to answer a question just say so. And of course, you are free to end this interview at any time.

- Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

- O.k., let’s get started…

- Letter of Informed Consent

- Background Information Sheet

- O.k., now I guess we’re actually ready to start the interview so let’s make sure the tape recorder is working…
Appendix D: Participation and Consent Form

Dear ____________:

My name is Scott Pierce and I am currently a graduate student at Miami University. As part of studies, I am completing a thesis which involves research interviews. Because of my interest in becoming a professional in the field of sport psychology, I have chosen the topic of life skill development and its’ relationship with sport for my project.

You are invited to participate in my project. I will ask you to participate in an interview about your experiences and perceptions of the role of sport participation in the development of life skills. This interview will be audio-tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Your name will not be associated with your responses in any way (that is, the information you provide will be used anonymously and grouped with the information of other interviews). The interview in its entirety should take approximately 45 minutes. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any time or refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. You will not be asked to do anything that exposes you to risks beyond those of everyday life. The benefit of the interview, educationally, is that it will help me learn how to do research, as well as help me understand how collegiate athletes perceive the role of sport participation in their development of life skills.

If you have further questions about this project, please contact me at piercesw@muohio.edu or contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Robin S. Vealey vealeyrs@muohio.edu.

Thank you for your participation and for helping me out with my thesis. I am very grateful for your help and hope that it will be an interesting process for you. You may keep this top portion of the page.

*****************************************************

Cut/tear at the line, keep the top section and return this bottom section.

I agree to participate in the project on the role of sport participation in life skill development. I understand my participation is voluntary and that my name will not be associated with the information I provide.

Participant’s Signature __________________________________________

Date ___________________________________________________________________
Appendix E: Background Information Sheet

Interviewee #1

Date/Time/Place:

Sex:         F  M

Race: ______________________

Age: ______

Formal Education:          HS    College    Graduate School    Prof’l School

Occupation: ________________________________

Sports participated in throughout life: ________________________________

______________________________________________

Highest level of sport participation: ________________________________

Sport participated in at highest level: ________________________________
Table 1: The influence of ‘significant others’ in the development of life skills in intercollegiate athletics.

<table>
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<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Life Skill</th>
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<td>Working with People</td>
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Commitment
Table 2: The influence of ‘the nature of intercollegiate athletics’ in the development of life skills in intercollegiate athletics.

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Table 3: Life skills learned through intercollegiate athletic participation

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<td>Time Management, Goal Setting, Self-Sufficiency</td>
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Figure 1. Collegiate Athletes Perspectives of the Role of Sport Participation in Life Skill Development.

Significant Others

Teammates

Structure/Demand

Sport Nature

Power

Competitive Nature

Scholarship

Non-Participation

Eligibility

Academic Support Staff

Academics

Relationships

Employment

Personal Integrity & Civility

Mental Toughness

- Coping Skills
- Confidence
- Determination

Organizational Skills

Relationship Skills

- Interpersonal Interactions
- Social Skills
- Understanding Relationships

Source of Experience

Individual Experience

Learning Experience

The Nature of Intercollegiate Athletics

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