

**It's About More Than the W's: The Creation and Experience of a Championship Team Culture  
in NCAA Division I Field Hockey**

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**Introduction:** Researchers have begun to explore how high-performance coaches build championship teams and experience multiple successful seasons (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Yukelson & Rose, 2014). Given their growing contributions of females to the coaching profession, the current study was used to examine how successful female coaches create and experience a championship culture using self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) as the conceptual framework. Seven NCAA DI head coaches were selected based on their experience (26 to 37 years), and history of program growth and success (Conference and/or National Championship wins).

**Method:** Coaches participated in semi-structured interviews (45-120 minutes) that were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim yielding 184 pages of single-spaced interview text. The first two authors independently coded each interview and then participated in weekly peer review meetings to discuss their analysis. Their coding was collapsed into one document and then sent to each coach for member checking. Initial results showed findings were consistent with the three components of self-determination theory: (a) competence, (b) relatedness, and (c) autonomy. More specifically, coaches' perceptions of competence increased throughout their careers and was linked to their team's success. Coaches explained increasing athletes' feelings of competence by giving athletes specific roles and helping them to not fear failure.

The importance of relatedness between coach and athlete differed based on coach personality, thus results revealed the use of various strategies including team bonding activities, open communication, honesty about roles, performance, and playing time, respecting athletes' desires for a relationship (i.e., not forcing a close relationship), and using assistant coaches. Autonomy was noteworthy in terms of both how coaches experienced their environment and the environment they created for their team. A key theme under autonomy was "choice within limits." They created an overall climate and roles within which rules and disciplinary actions fit. Coaches explained the importance of autonomy for their athletes, their assistants, and themselves.

**Results:** Though not part of the original research design, but based on the information shared by the coaches, a decision was made to also interview current and former players on their perceptions regarding championship team culture. So far, six former and four current players have been interviewed. These interviews have been transcribed and initial eyeballing of the data triangulates results found with

the head coaches. The next steps include completing the data analysis process with the coach data (i.e., interrater reliability tests) and creating a manuscript draft, followed by formal analysis of the athlete data.