

July 2021

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### Recommended Citation

Kroll, Jonathan and McMillian-Roberts, Kathleen (2021) "Developmental Outcomes of University Female Basketball Athletes As Participants in Peer Mentoring Groups," *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 3.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25035/jade.03.02.03>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/jade/vol3/iss2/3>



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# JADE

Journal of Athlete  
Development and Experience



PAADS

**VOLUME 3**  
ISSUE 2

**BGSU**  
Bowling Green State University

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# Developmental Outcomes of University Female Basketball Athletes As Participants in Peer Mentoring Groups

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## Abstract

Peer group mentoring can stimulate developmental outcomes for university basketball athletes. Seven female university basketball athletes from an NCAA Division III team participated in peer mentoring groups over the course of an academic year. By sharing about their lived experiences, the researchers were able to capture narratives that illuminated the impact of this developmental relationship. Thematic analysis was utilized to explore these descriptions and collate them into findings relevant for athletes, coaches, athletics administrators, and others. Findings presented below indicate that these peer group mentoring experiences (a) nurtured synergistic relationships; (b) cultivated athletes' resilience; and (c) developed athletes' self-efficacy.

**Keywords:** *peer group mentoring, resilience, self-efficacy, synergetic relationships, university athletes*

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Mentoring has been woven into our socio-cultural psyche over thousands of years—we're conditioned to understand it as a powerful developmental experience. Mentor is a character in the Greek Epic of Homer's *Odyssey*. In contemporary pop-culture contexts, we see it across the media landscape. In film, Mr. Miyagi and Daniel from the *Karate Kid* series is an idealized example. Within sport, coaches often embody the mentor archetype. Tony Dungy, football coach and author of *Mentor Coach* and John Wooden of college basketball fame are classic models. Cinderella's relationship with her fairy godmother, a children's story, is another example. It was the fairy godmother's emotional support and important instruction that encouraged Cinderella as she transformed from an enslaved second-class member of the family into a princess.

These examples highlight how mentoring has become deeply rooted and heavily embedded in

our consciousness. Scholarly literature supports this notion. According to Allen and Eby (2010), more people than not intuitively believe mentoring works. In Levinson's et al. (1978) germinal study, the authors highlighted the substantial role these relationships play in human development. Since this notable study, many scholars have researched the topic and practitioners have established programs and initiatives to maximize the developmental potential of these relationships. Contemporary scholarship highlights how new mentoring structures have arisen due to greater awareness of societal exclusionary practices of women, people of color, and other marginalized voices as well as potentially limiting developmental dynamics of traditional mentoring experiences.

Mentoring, as a developmental relationship, has significant prevalence in higher education. Formal and informal mentorship experiences are viewed as impactful, and students are encouraged to participate

for developmental growth. Yet, seldom has research focused on the mentoring experiences of university athletes. This is the first study we know of that explores peer group mentoring among university students—let alone college athletes. (The authors previously have published a paper in the academic journal *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership In Learning*, in which they share findings for a distinctive scholarly audience utilizing data from the same study. See: Kroll et al., 2020).

In this study, data from a nontraditional peer group mentoring experience was analyzed by the researchers. We asked the question: How does the participation in a peer mentoring group enhance basketball athlete outcomes? Simply, it does *not* improve technical abilities. Yet, based on the findings from this study, other critical developmental outcomes are the result—potentially more important and powerful than game-day player statistics and team wins.

Sixteen female athletes, teammates on a university basketball team, were pre-arranged into four mentoring groups—each with four members. In these groups, they co-created their mentoring experience. During bi-weekly engagements, they challenged and supported one another as they each pursued academic, athletic, social, and personal goals.

### Mentorship

Historically, mentoring has been described as a meaningful developmental relationship between a more mature mentor and a younger, inexperienced protégé or mentee. These relationships are purposefully centered around the protégé's development as opposed to a mutual experience (Kram, 1985; Levinson et al., 1978; Murrell & Blake-Beard, 2017; Ragins, 1999; Wanberg et al., 2003). Not surprisingly, mentorship has become a key feature of the university experience.

In this traditional apprenticeship model of mentoring, the older and wiser individual is expected to train and oversee the younger less experienced

individual. Data within numerous studies indicate that this mentorship structure results in significant developmental benefits for mentees and mentors alike (Curtright & Evans, 2016; Ehrich et al., 2004). Nevertheless, this power-laden relationship and authoritarian structure can be damaging, especially for the mentees' development (Eby & McManus, 2004; Scandura, 1998). Power dynamics may lead to a mentorship approach that easily avails itself to reoccurring and demeaning actions toward mentees. This aligns with Freire's (1970, 2002) conception as educational *banking*. Comparatively, mentees are regarded as repositories where mentors make 'deposits' (Mullen, 2009).

Mentoring, in the apprenticeship model, lends itself to exclusionary practices. Research reveals the unbalanced power distribution that limits opportunities for women and people of color (Eby & McManus, 2004; Mott, 2002; Scandura, 1998) in both formal and informal structures (Mott, 2002). For these reasons, historically, when judged against other one-to-one relationships, these dyadic mentor relationships are viewed as hierarchical in nature and elitist (Hunt & Michael, 1983).

### Group Mentorship

Mentoring, even with a long historical imprint in literature and as a developmental construct, still is evolving. Alternative approaches to the traditional, hierarchical structure of a one-on-one relationship have grown in popularity since the 1990's. Non-traditional structures and diverse methods of mentoring address inequitable practices. Group mentoring is one such example.

Group mentoring is a collection of three or more individuals, connected by their social relationship, distinctly gathered for the specific and shared purpose of intentionally challenging and supporting others to enhance personal growth and professional skills/development (Kroll, 2015; 2016). This non-hierarchical developmental relationship lends itself to high quality, empowering interactions that allow

group members to power-share across cultures and genders, and to experience authentic, diverse perspectives (Darwin, 2000; McMillian-Roberts, 2014, Stockdale et al., 2017).

Peer group mentoring, a subset of group mentoring, hinges on two factors: mentoring collaborators (a) self-identify as being *peers* and (b) engage in a *mutual* mentoring practice. That is, the participants identify as being similar (Kaunisto et al., 2012) and they each serve in both mentoring capacities—as mentors (by providing healthy and appropriate challenge) and as mentees (by receiving mentoring support).

### Method

Our research inquiry invited 16 female basketball athletes (teammates) representing a single NCAA Division III northeast urban institution, to participate in an academic year-long peer group mentoring experience. The athletes participated in their peer mentoring groups for the duration of the study. Ultimately, seven of these participants chose to share about their experiences through hour-long semi-structured interviews. The researchers used thematic analysis as a method to collect and analyze data.

The purpose of this study was to explore the peer group mentoring experiences of basketball athletes. It was not our intent to seek specific answers, but design questions to generally understand the impact and value of such an experience for this population. Our Interview Protocol was not guided by a strict, controlled procedure but simply to serve as an interview template. During these conversations, participants offered their reflections and insights by sharing stories from their peer mentoring group experiences.

### Research Approach

Qualitative research is designed, structured, and employed with an attempt to *understand*. As researchers, we avoided predicting or controlling the

outcome by framing broad questions to be reflected upon and responded to (by our participants) rather than forming premature hypotheses. By focusing on the lived experiences of these peer group mentoring participants, we could capture reflections, beliefs, and attitudes. With the publication of such research, learning is fostered and encouraged (Magolda, 2000).

Specifically, we utilized narrative inquiry as a mechanism to reveal, recognize, and articulate patterns that emerge from the combination of each individual participant's experiences. This type of narrative research allowed for us to probe cultural barriers, give voice to the human experience, and better understand these student-athletes' actions and intentions, (Larson, 1997).

### Participants

Each member (all 16) of the Court University Women's Basketball team (NCAA Division III) participated in an academic-year-long peer group mentoring experience. Participant names and the institution (Court University—an American northeast urban institution) all are pseudonyms as a measure to protect the identity of the research participants and organization.

The researchers and the Head Coach of the Court University Women's Basketball program reached an agreement in the fall of 2015. Prior to the inquiry, the Head Coach and one of the researchers had a professional relationship. Additionally, a second researcher had the same institutional affiliation as the Head Coach and basketball team. Due to these relationships, Court University basketball was the first choice as an inquiry site. After the researchers described the proposed peer mentoring group experience with the coach, she expressed her enthusiasm regarding the inquiry: "This is exciting and I am looking forward to getting started... Again, thank you all for your time and dedication to this! It will be amazing!" (Coach, personal communication, September 24, 2015).

Following approval by the Head Coach, each

individual athlete determined on her own accord if she would participate. Initially, the athletes received email invitations drafted by the researchers and via the Head Coach. In this introductory communication, the researchers described the intent of the peer group mentoring experience and research objective. Collectively, the athletes welcomed an opportunity to learn more via a face-to-face presentation delivered by one of the researchers. During that gathering, details were offered to explain expectations of their time commitment, best-practices of peer group mentoring, potential benefits of the developmental relationship based on previous studies, and how the research would be conducted. Before the conversation concluded, the athletes, in full, formally agreed to participate. The research team facilitated the peer group mentoring experience during the 2015-2016 academic year.

### **Peer Group Mentoring and the Court University Basketball Athletes**

The Court University basketball athletes were strategically arranged into groups of four. As peer group mentoring collaborators, they met bi-weekly at a group-determined and mutually convenient day and time—specifically in this mentoring context. These hour-long engagements were in addition to academic obligations, social experiences, and athletic practices and competition.

The researchers required a *Profile Document* from each of the 16 female basketball athletes. They were invited to share personal details including (a) goals for the academic year, (b) how they will work toward goal achievement, and (c) how they most appreciate being supported when working toward goal accomplishment. On the same document, they were offered the opportunity to privately detail which teammates they would prefer to avoid or with whom they desired a shared peer group mentoring experience. Participant reflections on the Profile Document were utilized by the researchers to establish the four peer mentoring groups.

The mentoring collaborators were empowered

to author their own peer group mentorship experience. Although they were encouraged to meet every two weeks in a private and quiet location, at a mutually-convenient time and day, no formal policies or rules were provided. As expressed during the interviews, these peer mentoring groups met consistently every other week from the beginning of the experience until the conclusion.

### **Data Generation**

Following the completion of the basketball season and prior to the conclusion of the academic year, researchers hosted confidential interviews. These were structured as face-to-face hour-long engagements hosted by one or two researchers in an academic-building conference room on the grounds of Court University. Reflective, semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010) were utilized to guide the participants through the interview process. This was purposeful and strategic. We wanted the athletes to reflect upon and explore with us stories from their peer group mentoring experience. When approaching these conversations, four principles were followed: (a) utilizing open-ended questions, (b) eliciting stories, (c) avoiding *why* questions, and (d) following up with further questions that applied the participants' language (Savin-Baden & van Niekerk, 2007).

Our interview protocol, although loosely structured, framed questions in four broad categories. This included our opening inquiry to better understand the student-athletes' experiences. Each interview began with the invitation for participants to "tell me about your experience as a participant in this peer group mentoring experience." We also asked about power (e.g., How was power experienced in your peer mentoring group?), relationships with teammates (e.g., If anything, what did the peer group mentoring experience do for your relationships with your teammates?), peer group mentoring practices (e.g., When your group got together, what did you do as part of your mentoring practice and process?), and closing questions (e.g., If you were to represent your



peer group mentoring experience as a metaphor or a symbol, what would it be?)

### Data Trustworthiness

Narrative research is evaluated by trustworthiness rather than definitive notions of truth. Although this research approach welcomes diverse and subjective perspectives, certain measures strengthen narrative research's trustworthiness. For example, the research team was able to capitalize on their extensive experience as qualitative investigators to host the interviews, determine codes, and identify themes. Prior to this inquiry, each of the researchers led their own as well as collaborated on other narrative studies. This peer group mentoring experience with student-athletes was not a 'learn-by-doing' research opportunity. This should enhance the level of trustworthiness of the findings. Other aspects of trustworthiness include data triangulation, transferability, and confidentiality.

**Data triangulation.** Data triangulation occurs when diverse sources are utilized to obtain varying perspectives of the same phenomenon (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). In this inquiry, the utilization of multiple autonomous peer mentoring groups supported the triangulation of our data. As a second layer of triangulation, we, the researchers partook in all aspects of the inquiry. This included conducting the interviews, engaging in data analysis, dialoguing reflectively, and producing this article. We attempted to be purposeful in raising potential biases and uncovering differences in how we interpreted the data.

**Transferability.** Generalizability is not the pursuit of qualitative research approaches. The data only are intended to be representative of those particular participants, in those particular experiences, and at that particular point of time. Notwithstanding, a trustworthy qualitative study illuminates findings that can be applied to other contexts. Although we believe the data to be too premature for transferability, we deem the findings are illuminative and useful for the development and deployment of peer group mentoring experiences.

**Confidentiality.** Narrative researchers must navigate the delicate balance of maintaining a professional responsibility to the scholarly community while establishing an intimate relationship with their research participants (Josselson, 2007). Researchers understand the participant's willingness is essential and rooted in free consent.

During each of the seven interviews, the athletes expressed concern about the Head Coach. More than half (9 athletes), possibly due to fears concerning potential breaches of confidentiality, opted out of the interview. We believe this to be the case due to comments made by the student-athletes who did volunteer to share their experiences during the interviews. (More on this is shared in the Limitations section of the paper.)

### Data Analysis

Once the narrative data was collected, a thematic analysis was utilized to explore, analyze and unpack it. Thematic analysis is a research approach designed to identify, analyze, and report themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Patterns found within the data are understood as *themes*. It is "a way of seeing" the data (Boyatzis, 1998, p.1) in an organized fashion. Our thematic analysis unfolded by first becoming familiar with the data through an intentional listening to the audio-recorded interviews. We then generated initial codes via a line-by-line reading of the transcripts. Based upon these codes, themes were developed to provide a grand perspective of the codes. Finally, we produced a report—this article—to share our findings pertinent to the developmental impact peer group mentoring can have on university basketball athletes.

### Findings

The seven female basketball athlete interviewees represent three autonomous peer mentoring groups. The data from individual interviews were initially coded, then compiled into themes, and com-

bined in this paper for this particular audience. Specifically, the peer group mentoring experiences were found to (a) nurture synergistic relationships among the athletes; (b) cultivate athletes' resilience; and (c) develop athletes' self-efficacy.

### Synergistic Relationships

Peer group mentoring experiences can serve as important containers that enable the cultivation of synergistic relationships. Synergistic relationships are energizing and critical in galvanizing relational connections of meaning, depth, and flow. They are created and sustained when individuals engage in concert with others (Mullen, 1999; Creary & Roberts, 2017). Through their participation in peer mentoring groups, the Court University basketball athletes cultivated powerful and synergistic relationships.

Kristen offered that her peer group mentoring experience "made a world of a difference in terms of really bringing us together." Hope offered that her peer mentoring group experience "definitely helps build team chemistry and team cohesion...it helps build relationships that I wouldn't have built had it not been for this." Robin, during her interview had this exchange:

*Robin:* Well, there was an incident where it really showed how everyone came together. Coach told us four players could not suit up for a game because of an incident that happened. We came together as a team in a meeting, and we all decided that if those four aren't going to suit up then we're all not going to suit up...you knew that everyone had each other's back and how passionate they were about the situation. It made everyone else feel great—especially those four girls.

*Researcher:* So how did the group mentoring contribute to this one incident?

*Robin:* Since we've opened up about

a lot of things, it got us closer together and got us to know each other in a different perspective. It made us closer.

### Cultivating Resilience

Resilience is understood as healthy resistance to a potentially debilitating adversity. Being resilient is not imperviousness from these adversities. Rather, resilience is the ability, while being deeply affected, to carry on with the important facets of our lives despite trauma. The most resilient among us often recognize these events as growth experiences laden with meaning-making opportunities (Southwick & Charney, 2018).

The Court University basketball team fared poorly during competition. During their conference play, they won a total of one game. Of the 12 conference teams, they were the worst-ranked. For these basketball athletes, continually losing was a hardship. Rachel reflected on the team's undesirable win-loss status by proposing:

I think we wanted to see our group as more of a source of positive reinforcement. We recognized...that we weren't doing as well or producing as well as we needed to be, but it was nice to keep that as a positive, safe haven where you could say anything you wanted and not have to worry.

Hope echoes this sentiment and believed they cultivated resilience by "having that supportive environment and having that team chemistry off the court." Robin confirmed this sentiment, "If someone needs something, we're there. Whether it's basketball, life experiences, classes, whatever...everyone's talking to each other and helping each other out and all that good stuff." Following her response, she was gently pressed to explain what she meant by what 'all the good stuff' included. She responded by sharing that her peer mentoring group collaborators "encouraged me to work harder, to be the best that I can be, reach my potential, and obviously help my teammates



reach their potential”—even with consistent basketball games that resulted in a loss.

### Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is recognized as the strength of convictions in one's own effectiveness (Bandura, 1977). In the context of the Court University women's basketball team, the athletes utilized their peer mentoring groups to develop self-efficacy and strengthen their voices. Robin plainly articulated that “I definitely developed more confidence and I'm actually willing to voice my opinions and help people out.” Reflecting on how peer group mentoring can be beneficial to others, Hope offered that “I think it's also just helpful to know that people can really benefit from things like this and someone who is really shy—it can actually be really beneficial to them. Renee offered her perspective of the peer group mentoring experience:

It's having that support group...can really build up your self-esteem and self-confidence and make you less insecure. Not only can that help you on the court, but that can help you in life too. If you're going through whatever—knowing that people support me, people have confidence in me, I should have confidence in myself—I think most importantly, yeah on the court is important, but most importantly building you up as a person. I think this mentoring group did more for me as a person than as a basketball player. I think that's really important and really beneficial.

The findings suggest peer group mentoring can result in constructive outcomes for the basketball student-athletes. These findings are based on what the participants offered during their interviews. We did not specifically ask them about their positive experiences, nor did we ask them to share with us about nega-

tive experiences within their peer mentoring groups. We simply encouraged them to share stories about their experience—and then strategically followed-up with further inquiries based upon their responses.

### Discussion

Peer group mentoring can serve as an important relational and developmental experience for basketball athletes. Specifically, this paper suggests that these peer group mentoring experiences (a) nurtured synergistic relationships; (b) cultivated resilience; and (c) provoked the development of self-efficacy among the athletes.

In the context of a basketball team, this experience indicates that the traditional mentor role for a coach or senior-status athlete may not be necessary. Rather, the student-athletes, in peer groups, can have a powerful and developmental experience by offering support and healthy challenge to one another.

Synergistic relationships are recognized by their high-quality connections of depth and meaning. These are life-giving relationships.

Like a healthy blood vessel that connects parts of our body, a high-quality connection between two people allows for the transfer of vital nutrients; it is flexible, strong and resilient. In a low-quality connection, a tie exists (people communicate, they interact, and they may even be involved in interdependent work), but the connective tissue is damaged. With a low-quality connection, there is a little death in every situation (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003, p. 263).

As Dutton and Heaphy (2003) indicate, high-quality synergistic relationships result in people feeling more alive and healthy (physiological benefits); having greater psychological safety and emotional capacity (psychological and emotional benefits); improved self-purpose and developmental

pursuits (developmental benefits); an expansion of the knowledge of oneself, their relationships, and the world (learning benefits); and a strengthened flow of information and resource exchanges (interactional benefits).

The Court University basketball athletes, through participation in peer mentoring groups, established synergistic relationships. These meaningful relationships, especially in the context of a difficult losing basketball season and a trying coach-athlete affair, would not have necessarily occurred were it not for the peer mentoring groups and structured bi-weekly engagements.

Resilience is the ability, while being deeply affected, to carry on with the important facets of our lives in spite of trauma and tribulation. The most resilient among us often recognize these events as growth experiences laden with meaning-making opportunities (Southwick & Charney, 2018). The two most important factors that determine and predict resilience are the capacities for perception and response (Graham, 2018). The key to coping with any challenge—including a failing basketball season—is to shift perceptions and response to it. Those who are notably resilient have successfully shifted from a *poor me* and/or *it's all my fault* attitude to an empowered mindset.

These athletes, through their participation in peer mentoring groups, seemed to avoid self-pity in the midst of their losses. They provided constant and consistent support, encouragement, and empowerment as they navigated a losing basketball season.

Self-efficacy is understood as the strength of our convictions in our own effectiveness (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) suggests there are four ways to cultivate self-efficacy. Foremost amongst these is performance accomplishments. Besides that, self-confidence is enhanced through vicarious experiences, emotional arousal, and verbal persuasion. It is evident that the athletes did not increase self-efficacy through their basketball performance accomplishments based on a significant losing record and season. Based upon our data, the key factor was their voiced support for

one another. Their encouragement seemed to have significant positive implications for their sense of self. The vocal praise and reassurance offered within their peer mentoring groups significantly altered their sense of self and self-efficacy. As evidenced by the voices of these participants, basketball athletes can develop self-efficacy through their participation in peer mentoring groups.

This study illuminates how significant developmental outcomes are the result of these student-athletes' peer group mentoring experiences. As coaches, athletic administrators, and parents seek developmental outcomes for athletes, peer group mentoring may be an important medium. By coordinating and hosting athlete-centered peer group mentorship opportunities, a gap can be filled that may produce a long-term positive impact on the development of athletes' self-efficacy and resilience. More so, these peer mentoring group experiences may generate synergy among team members leading to higher-quality relationships and healthier, more affirmative athletic experiences. These outcomes are important and relevant for team-sports across the athletics spectrum.

### Practical Implications

The outcomes of this study elucidate practical implications for university athletes, coaches, and university administrators—as well as others who are invested in the holistic development of those with whom they engage. For athletes, peer group mentoring can serve as an engaging developmental experience laden with life-giving outcomes and nourishing relationships. By participating in such an experience, university athletes can cultivate resilience, self-efficacy, and synergistic connections that will reap benefits well beyond their sport competitions. The *peerness* of the group mentoring encourages participants to—especially developmentally younger athletes—nurture their voice and encourage self-authorship.

Coaches and athletics administrators can find peer group mentoring rewarding as well. Rather than carving out valuable time to mentor their athletes one-

to-one, this arrangement enables the traditional “mentors” to spend time on their other essential responsibilities. More so, the outcomes indicate enhanced synergy among the athletes—an important ingredient for developing healthy teams and long-term sports programs.

We also believe that although the participants all were women and basketball athletes, the practical implications for peer group mentoring expand well beyond these individuals. Although more research is advised among diverse participants and in differing contexts, we believe the benefits of peer group mentoring would mirror these results if conducted with other university student groups and in professional contexts. For example, students engaged in Student Athlete Advisory Councils or Captains across an institution may find value in peer group mentoring. Coaches, especially assistant and associate coaches who are invested in their professional growth, may find peer mentoring groups a worthwhile investment of their time and energy.

### Limitations

Our intent, as researchers who designed and deployed a qualitative inquiry into peer group mentoring, was to contribute to the scholarship and fill a gap in the mentorship literature. Although we believe this research is useful because of how it illuminated the positive impact of peer group mentoring for university basketball athletes, we also recognize there are certain limitations.

We are a diverse research team. As collaborators we hold multiple perspectives. Our complex identities inform our worldviews, reflections, and contributions to this work. For example, the lead investigator, a male, conducted a significant portion of the interviews. All of the participants identified as female. We recognize that because of these gender dynamics, information may have been withheld or the researcher potentially may have misunderstood what was trying to be communicated by the interviewees. Similarly, the other two researchers identify as female. Insights

from the interviews and further reflections on the data may have resulted in incongruencies due to our varying perspectives, multifaceted identities, comprehensions of the world, and how we live in and understand our lived experiences.

The three outcomes revealed these athletes: (a) nurtured synergistic relationships; (b) cultivated resilience; and (c) activated self-efficacy. Future inquiries into group mentoring should replicate this study to determine if the findings are consistent with other athletes’ experiences as well as to determine if peer group mentoring can result in negative or limiting developmental outcomes.

Additionally, these findings only express the experiences and reflections of these particular seven participants. It does not represent nor is it indicative of diverse populations, other localities, or non-athletic peer mentoring groups of different structures or models. Furthermore, the interviewees represented the original 16 basketball study group participants. Nine participants ultimately opted not to be interviewed. We, as the research team, based on offerings provided by those who did participate in interviews, believe these particular athletes would face repercussions by the Head Coach for what they would have expressed.

Although at no time during the study were we, the research team, aware of the faltering player-coach relationships, upon further reflection we believe players opted out of the interview due to a reasonable, yet false understanding of the relationship between the research team and Head Coach. We believe this is the case for the following reasons.

When the research team approached the Head Coach with the opportunity, she welcomed it and served to introduce the opportunity and research team to the athletes—via email and then the in-person preliminary gathering. It was only during the interview process that this discovery was revealed by the athletes. For example, Rachel offered this statement during her interview: “There have been issues...with the satisfaction with the coach.” Hope was much more elaborate in describing the player-coach relationship:

I think there's pretty much, if you want to call it a coup, call it a coup...it's a lot of the junior class, almost all of the freshman class and the two sophomores—they've met and had a tape recorder...they recorded all the stories that went on with what transpired in practice, what went on behind closed doors, what happened in individual meetings. I think in an attempt to get our coach fired. Because the way that she treats some people...is not okay. A lot of people were like our coach has struggled with the fact that we're a division three program...Something we have noticed is she wants to make us a D1 team and we're like it's not going to happen.

Following the conclusion of the study, we learned that the Head Coach was ultimately terminated from her position at the close of the academic year.

### Conclusion

Our research was strategically designed to explore the lived experiences of university women basketball athletes through peer group mentoring. Their commitment to the peer group mentoring experience and to one another proved to be enriching and developmental. They (a) nurtured synergistic relationships; (b) cultivated resilience; and (c) activated self-efficacy. Based upon previous studies of peer group mentoring, this unique research population (i.e., university basketball athletes) has led to new insights on the powerful developmental outcomes of participation in peer mentoring groups. Moreover, these outcomes particularly are powerful due to the context of the student-athletes' collective poor basketball performance and losing season as well as a contentious relationship with their Head Coach.

We advocate for continued peer group mentoring research and scholarship. By studying the participatory experiences of athletes, university

students, and other populations, we—as scholars and practitioners—will be better positioned to understand the benefits and challenges of peer group mentorship. We believe that peer group mentoring can serve as an impactful, inclusive, and developmental relationship.

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