TEAMS IN TRANSITION: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE-STUDY HIGHLIGHTING

COHESION AND LEADERSHIP IN A COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC TEAM

A Dissertation

by

BLAIR WILSON BROWNING

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2007

Major Subject: Communication

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ABSTRACT


Teams in Transition: An Ethnographic Case-Study Highlighting Cohesion and

Leadership in a Collegiate Athletic Team. (December 2007)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Charles Conrad

While a great deal of theoretical work has been conducted describing group

development, there is an underdeveloped area in the examination of the development of a

group or team that is faced with constant transition.  The purpose of this dissertation is

twofold.  First, this dissertation seeks to understand how cohesion is developed within a

collegiate athletic team that has players come and go each season and, at times, within a

season.  Second, this dissertation explores how the coaching staff sustained and managed

the cohesion within the team.

To explore these issues, an ethnographic study was conducted with a Division 1-

A, collegiate basketball team called Private U.  Over 50 practices were attended and 20

formal interviews were completed.  Results showed that cohesion occurred through social

and task forms and in varying contexts.  The coaching staff, and specifically the head

coach, used self-handicapping to protect his players and thereby potentially keeping

division from happening among team members.  The lens of Symbolic Convergence

Theory is utilized to discuss specific cohesion-forming moments during the season.

Communication about cohesion transpired through interactions between the

coaching staff and the players, and in fact, even between the coaching staff and prospective players who were being recruited to play for Private U. The coaching staff attempted to convey memorable messages and provided legal incentives to recruits because the importance of building cohesion begins with the players that the staff would get to come to Private U. Through on and off-court interactions, the coaching staff managed the cohesion on the team that had been created, but this was not always an easy task. Through the use of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory and Dialectical Theory, I examined how in-groups and out-groups were experienced by some of the players. The desires from Private U team members to compete with their teammates for playing time, but also to want the best result for the team created a dialectical tension for team members that is discussed through the Competition-Cooperation dialectic.

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Thank you to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Charles Conrad, for his guidance, support and encouragement throughout the process of researching and writing this dissertation. I was randomly assigned Dr. Conrad as my temporary advisor when I began the graduate program and I am grateful that I was so fortunate. His critiques throughout this study and my entire graduate career have been insightful and challenging. Further, he has always been supportive in allowing me to pursue areas that are of interest to me and pressed me to find applicability for these interests in the academic world. I truly do not know if I could have made it to this point without his friendship and humor throughout this time and I am forever thankful to him.

Thank you also to my committee members, Drs. Jamie Callahan, Marshall Scott Poole, and Antonio LaPastina, without whom this dissertation never would have gotten finished. Each of these individuals is a brilliant researcher and teacher and to have had the opportunity to have each of them on my committee has been incredible. They truly represent an "all-star" committee and my study gains instant credibility simply by informing people who is on my committee. Again, all three of these committee members played a pivotal role not only on this study, but even more so during my coursework. I had the opportunity to have classes with each of them more than one time and I am confident that I am much smarter as a result.

I am especially grateful to my family who has supported me throughout my graduate education. My mom and dad have been my biggest fans since…I was born!

Their encouragement helped me get to this point in my education, but their love for me has done much more. I have the confidence to be a good teacher because of the ways in which you have built into me throughout my life. I am thankful for my brothers and additional family members and friends who have stood with me as I have pursued this difficult and rigorous task. Most importantly, I am thankful to my wife, Jordan, and to my daughter, Keely, who make the end-goal worthwhile. Jordan has been the ultimate partner throughout this journey in my pursuit of being a professor. She is the love of my life and I am thankful for the balance she provided me in the midst of this pursuit to have fun and enjoy life alongside working hard.

Finally, I recognize that none of this would have been possible without the wonderful people involved with Private U's basketball program. Thank you for allowing me to be a constant presence among you for a time and share in your lives. Your generosity and access enabled this study to occur, and I am eternally thankful for the opportunity. Thank you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In one of the most shocking, unprecedented cases in collegiate athletics history, it was determined in the summer of 2003 that one Private University (hereafter referred to as Private U) basketball player had shot and killed his teammate.  The devastating after-effects from this event would carry over at the university long after the initial focus faded from the national stage.  Investigations of the team following the tragedy showed that the deceased athlete had actually been one of two players receiving illegal payments at Private U.  Teams are limited in their number of scholarships and these two players were receiving the benefits of a scholarship despite not being one of the listed scholarship athletes.  Consequently, these findings, along with the tragic events that had transpired led to the forced resignation of the head basketball coach, a resignation of the school's athletic director, and to numerous future sanctions of both the team and the university by the collegiate governing body, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

Meyer's (1982) study of environmental jolts – "sudden and unprecedented events" (p. 515) – described the impact of a doctor's strike on various hospitals as described primarily through a naturalistic field study.  Private U officials experienced a similar jolt when they were alerted that one of their student-athletes had gone missing and foul play was suspected.  Upon hearing that local police had apprehended and were questioning a fellow Private U teammate, it became apparent that the jolt would cause significant and long-lasting damage.

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This dissertation follows the style of *Management Communication Quarterly*.

The situation was compounded by the fact that the head coach of the basketball team was continually trying to shield himself from any blame.  Since an in-depth investigation would reveal the improper benefits that the deceased player had received, the head coach attempted to portray him as a drug dealer.  The head coach wanted to do so in order to help explain both why the player could be involved in a lethal shooting and more so, to provide an explanation for why the player had been able to pay for his own education at Private U when he was not a scholarship athlete.

This jolt to Private U, a medium-sized Christian university, seemed interminable and in many ways, the stigma and the aforementioned after-effects remain today, nearly four years later.  More of the sordid details regarding the events that transpired will be discussed in Chapter II of this study, but as I mentioned earlier, the event led to massive changes in personnel at Private U.

In this study, I explored how a team develops and sustains cohesion within an environment that is marked by transition.  Collegiate athletics offer an interesting dynamic in that rather than one-time, sweeping, revolutionary change that is often examined through organizational case studies, transition occurs in the collegiate environment at a more incremental pace.  Certainly there are times of significant change when a new coach (and their resulting staff) is hired, but whether there is a coaching change or not, there will always be annual transition with new players coming and other players leaving each season.  Thus, though the environmental jolt that shook Private U provided a compelling reason for a case study, it also provided the impetus for substantial transition on the team.  It created an opportunity to examine a team up-close and to see in the midst of transition how cohesion is formed and sustained.

While collegiate team membership changes each season, it could happen as a result of a variety of reasons such as a player coming in as a new freshman, transferring to/from the team, quitting the team, or being removed by the coaching staff to list a few of the possibilities. The make-up of the collegiate athletic team is constantly changing because athletes can participate for no more than four years (or be a member of the team for five years if they are "redshirted" for a season, which means that they do not play for one season of competitive games) at the collegiate level. In other words, there are many reasons for transition at the collegiate level as they are inherent to the way the organizations are set up, but transition obviously does not just occur in collegiate athletics.

Organizations of all types will have to deal with change and if they are lucky, the pace and magnitude of the change is limited and the changes are predictable (such as a player graduating). Realistically though, organizations and teams will also experience unpredictable and/or excessive change due to internal or external crises. Certainly, in the case of Private U, it did not mark a "normal" type of transition. Unfortunately, standard research on teams does not tell us much about dealing with change of this type.

This dissertation draws upon existing communication theory and literature along with an ethnographic study of an NCAA collegiate basketball team (Private U) to examine the concept of cohesion on the team as the players and coaches encounter various changes that were previously listed and others throughout the duration of the '05-'06 season. As a result of unusually close access to the scene (the Private U team), and as a result of an unprecedented situation and its after-effects (the tragic situation and the resulting sanctions), I realized that this case offered a situation that was ripe for what

Geertz (1973) referred to as "thick description." I will provide an up-close look at Private U and the ways in which cohesion and leadership were experienced in the midst of transition, as well as the role of communication in the scene.

As a result of being headline news for multiple negative incidents, Private U was in need of restoring their reputation as a school of integrity, values, and a "family-like" environment. At that point, the only type of family it represented was a tragically dysfunctional kind and with respect to the school's Christian heritage, they truly needed a "savior." Heath (1997) stated "Crisis response is the enactment of control in the face of high uncertainty in an effort to win or restore audiences' and publics' confidence" (p. 295).

Private U was in the midst of an environmental jolt, or a major crisis that had produced instability for not only the basketball team, but the entire university, which had achieved an organizational identity of which they were extremely proud. That identity was being challenged on a daily basis by the national media as people questioned how this program could have gotten so out of control. Benoit (1995a) discussed image restoration discourse for organizations and strategies for an organization to utilize. Though press releases and statements could help minimize some damage and strive to correct and repair Private U's image, one of the strongest statements the university would be making would be with the announcement of their new head coach.

The college coaching fraternity is a small world and one name that carries a lot of respect for both a high personal reputation, as well as for integrity in leading a clean program is the name Blue. While his father had coached at the collegiate level for over 25 years before retiring, the younger Coach Blue had just completed his first season

taking over for his highly-regarded father at a religiously-affiliated "mid-major" school.

Mid-majors are teams that are not in one of the most highly rated conferences, but still

compete at the highest level of NCAA athletics. When Private U began their search, it

did not take long for the younger Coach Blue's name to surface. When Private U hired

Coach Blue, they were lauded by national media outlets as having made an excellent hire

and were congratulated for bringing in someone who could restore honor to a fallen

program.

Since Coach Blue's inaugural season, Private U's practices have been closed to

the public, which remains a policy to this day. While it may have been ideal to observe

Private U during Coach Blue's inaugural season, there were many advantages to

conducting this study during his third season with the school. The fallout from the

NCAA investigation left the fledgling new staff with only eight scholarship players (one

of whom was kicked off for the team for "violating team policies" during the season).

Two years later, Private U would have a total of 12 scholarship athletes and would have

six freshmen beginning their playing careers.

During the '05-'06 season, I was allowed access to the team by the coaching staff

and observed a squad that faced unique circumstances of their own in that they were the

team that had to deal with the fallout from the tragic incident. As will be explained in

more detail later in the study, the NCAA levied a sanction that stripped all non-

conference games (more than half of a team's season) from the Private U squad even

though no coaches and only one player remained from the team that caused the sanctions

to occur. I engaged in interviews with the players, coaches, and support staff, as well as

observed the team during practices and at games in both the front-stage (on the court) and back-stage (in the locker room).

Everything about the young and energetic Coach Blue is conducted at a high pace from the way he walks to the way he talks, so it was no surprise that when we found ourselves walking from the concourse of the basketball arena down to the coaches' locker room, it was done at a brisk pace. In a rushed, but hushed tone, he described a common challenge that collegiate coaches face:

> You're just not always dealing with rational people – or at least with rational arguments. Tony's dad called me yesterday and said that we're not doing enough to prepare his son for the draft. I wanted to say 'What draft? The Army draft?' Because surely he wasn't talking about the NBA draft. See that's the thing, when you get parents talking about their kids, they tend to not be the most objective people and as a result, their arguments become less and less logical, at times. But, in Tony's case, he's been here a long time and big changes are coming his way and his dad is just looking out for him, but still, the NBA? He's been a great player for us, but that's just not logical.

For an entire season, I was privy to this type of conversation. At this point in our walk, we were entering the coaches' locker room downstairs just around the corner from where the players have their locker room. The court that the team competes on is just down the hallway in close proximity to both locker rooms. While the coaches have their own area downstairs, it is nondescript enough that it could be mistaken for a janitor's

closet.  Within these hallways and stairs that we had just walked and certainly within the wooden door that has just closed behind us, there would be many conversations shared that would not be repeated to another party.  There were many valuable interactions and situations that I was able to take part in, hear and/or observe that helped shape this study.  I am aware of only one other study that has involved a longitudinal study of a college basketball team and that was conducted in the 1980's (Adler & Adler, 1991).

Adler and Adler's (1991) study provided an excellent analysis of the roles experienced by the student/athlete as they examined the non-unitary self.  College athletes are forced to have multiple selves, as are many college students who divide their time between work, organizations, and school.  However, because of the public stage and the media coverage involving collegiate athletics, there is a marked difference between even the highly-involved student, and the student-athlete.  Adler and Adler discussed these various roles that athletes must take part in and named them the social, athletic and academic roles.  The researchers noted how a collegiate athlete must balance the required and diverse roles in their lives.  When discussing his up-close view of the team within his longitudinal study, Peter Adler wrote:

> From this vantage point, I saw a variety of complex, often conflicting forces pressuring players and coaches.  Some of these seemed structural and others situational. The more I saw, the more I wanted to get closer to the scene, learn who the significant individuals and groups were, and learn what motivated their thoughts, actions, and relationships. (Adler and Adler, 1991, p. 5)

Further, their study contained not only in-depth interviews with all 39 players who had participated over the 5-year period, but also included the observations from the researchers who had a backstage focus and knowledge of the team that was unseen by the common fan. These observations may have occurred in the locker room, during encounters with team members before or after the game, or even from conversations that they overheard or took part in by way of sharing a meal with the team.

Adler and Adler's (1991) study provided an eye-opening look into the landscape of college basketball and college athletics as a whole. While many things have remained the same about college athletics since their study, there have obviously been some significant changes since the 1980's when they conducted their research as well. Yet this rich area of team research has gone largely undeveloped and unexamined in up-close, longitudinal form. As will be discussed later, there are many different types of teams, but with more than 1000 colleges and universities participating in athletics and more than 375,000 student-athletes participating in NCAA sports (not to mention the thousands involved in high school, professional, and recreational athletics), it seems imperative that we have a better understanding of this type of team environment.

While my plan was to mirror Adler and Adler's (1991) approach by gaining access to an NCAA Division 1-A basketball team for an entire season, my study had a much different desired goal. More than simply a follow-up study to their work, this study sought to extend their work past looking at the roles the athletes must balance as individuals on a team. The importance of sifting through such a complex, challenging context necessitated a longitudinal study rather than a snapshot or even a series of snapshot views of Private U's team.

In this chapter, I begin by briefly highlighting backgrounds of various theories of group development, work conducted by McGrath and Tshan (2004) regarding the issue of temporal matters, and organizational transition. However, not all groups and teams are the same so I will then discuss the importance of examining teams and some of their distinctions. I offer that the area of research surrounding athletic teams, particularly through longitudinal studies, is underdeveloped and further studies are warranted to which this work will contribute. Drawing from the theoretical approach and literature review, two research questions are then posed.

In chapter II, I will discuss the methodology used in order to collect and analyze data relevant to the research questions. Chapter III will consider the results of the research by detailing how cohesion becomes communicatively manifest on the team and how a team develops "chemistry" both on and off the court particularly in an organization that continually must face transition. In chapter IV, the implications of leadership on a team in transition are examined as the study discusses how leaders can manage cohesion once it has been established on the team. In addition to presenting limitations to the study and areas of future research, the final chapter of the dissertation will discuss my reflections on my encounter with the scene as one who had a "biased" view since I am a "fan" of the particular team in study. Thus, chapter V will also reflect upon the idea of the concept of biased research and subjective positioning within ethnographic work.

**Theorizing and Exploring Group Development**

There certainly is no shortage of information and writings that exist on group development, which is a good thing considering that the compositional changes of the team are a significant factor with collegiate athletic teams. Yet, there has been a dearth

of research that has explored change when it is an inherent part of the organization. Poole and Van de Ven (2004) stated, "For the most part, there has been a bias toward stability in our thinking about change" (p. xv).

Arrow, Henry, Poole, Wheelan, and Moreland (2005) stated "The core theme in group-development research is that groups as a whole change systematically over time" (p. 324). When this occurs, the organization will obviously encounter new dynamics and this is particularly germane when dealing with teams and their development and specifically in gauging the development and maintenance of team cohesion amidst this development.

*Group development defined*

Due to the large amount of research that has been conducted in the area of group development, as well as the fact that a large number of disciplines are engaged in research on this topic, there are many views of what this term means. Bennis and Shepard (1956) wrote one of the seminal articles on the topic and stated "group development involves the overcoming of obstacles to valid communication among the members, or the development of methods for achieving and testing consensus" (p. 415).

Bennis and Shepard's (1956) explicit goal was to outline a theory of development in groups that would bring improvement to the group's internal communication systems. They also wrote "The very word development implies not only movement through time, but also a definite order of progression" (p. 426). Sarri and Galinski (1974) agreed with a portion of Bennis and Shepard's (1956) definition, but extended it by explaining group development as "changes through time in the internal structures, processes, and culture of the group" (p. 72). Kozlowski, Gully, Nason, and Smith (1999) later added that group

development is not just concerned with a groups' composition. They said "Knowledge, skills, and performance are not static; they build developmentally with experience: what teams know, how they learn it, and the performance of which they are capable changes over time" (p. 241).

## History of Group Development

Hill and Gruner (1973) found that there were more than 100 distinct theories of group development…and that was from a calculation based on a meeting from 1959! Therefore, as Smith (2001) noted, "Because of the long history of interest and research in group development, only crude estimates can be made as to the number of group development theories that exist" (p. 15). Consequently, it would be impossible to provide an exhaustive review of every significant or salient theory of group development.

However, I believe that there are some important theories or frameworks that are vital to highlight as they provide both historical and useful groundwork that is applicable to this study. There are certainly other important contributors to this area of research, as well as more recent contributions, but these provide a synthesis of some of the important findings from individuals who are well-noted and respected in multiple disciplines.

This is not to say that the six frameworks about to be discussed were the sole originators in this field of study, as Tuckman (2001) himself wrote that his former boss of his first professional job studying small group behavior at the US Navy had collected over 50 articles on group development. He turned them over to Tuckman to look them over "and see if I could make anything out of it" (p. 67). Upon hitting on four stages and cleverly naming them (forming, storming, norming, and performing), the theme of group development caught hold and has since been a widely researched topic. Yet, this was not

the beginning of group development's allure.  Prior to Tuckman, Smith (2001) noted that

"attention to group development issues and trends really only began to grow following

the publication of Bales and Strodtbeck's (1951) work examining phases in group

problem solving" (p. 15).

*Group development frameworks*

Bales and Strodtbeck (1951) proposed that groups work through a three-phase

development process when faced with a problem that necessitated resolution: orientation,

evaluation, and control.  Following this study, numerous frameworks, models and

theories were submitted that revolved around Bales and Strodtbeck's (1951) phasic

process or stage models that would later be developed by other researchers.

In addition to prescribing a three-phase path that group members will experience

regarding the task of problem-solving, Bales and Strodtbeck (1951) also highlighted the

relational aspect of members and their interactions with one another.  Interestingly, as the

group moved from the orientation to the evaluation phase, both positive (laughing, joking

around with fellow group members) and negative (overtly disagreeing with a fellow

member) interactions increased.  By the end of the third phase (control), though, the

comments and reactions were almost exclusively positive, which provided an interesting

stepping-stone to the concept of group cohesion that will be addressed later in this paper.

As Bales and Strodtbeck (1951) did before them, Bennis and Shepard (1956)

developed a phase model, which had two phases: dependence and interdependence.  They

claimed that dependence was observed by group members' orientations toward authority,

and that interdependence was observed by group members' orientations toward one

another.  They found that members are either "dependent" in the sense that they rely on

and are comforted by the established rules set by the leader or they are "counterdependent" as a result of feeling uneasy or frustrated by the authoritative structures in place. It is noteworthy that in their theory, they discuss the leader ("trainer") as one who is a peer rather than an authoritative figure.

Tuckman (1965) wrote perhaps the most widely used article on group development when he developed his sequence of four stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing. Following suggestions from later work by other researchers, Tuckman and Jensen (1977) later added a fifth stage, adjourning. The stages in Tuckman's (1965) sequence contain both task and social dimensions. For example, in the forming stage, the task dimension would see how the group identifies the task and how they will go about accomplishing the task. In the social dimension, the group is getting familiar with one another and they are in the process of building trust with those they have recently encountered.

Following a potentially tension-filled storming stage, the sequence continues to the norming stage. It is here that cohesiveness typically breaks through for the team as shared goals, interpretations, and perspectives arise. It is no surprise that the fourth phase, performing, is when the most work is accomplished. Jensen and Chilberg (1991) described the fourth stage, "With group relationships in a positive vein, the cohesive group can focus its energy on work" (p. 378). There is definite applicability of Tuckman's sequence to this study and in particular the fact that there is a specific stage in which he finds the development of cohesion to occur.

Again, these are only a few of the prominent researchers in this area and I am intentionally providing only a thumbnail sketch while passing over some other valuable

contributors including Fisher (1970) who came out of the communication discipline. He focused on the pattern of interacts, or the comments and the immediate following comment by fellow group members, and also presented a phasic approach that included orientation, conflict, emergence, and reinforcement.

Each of the above models presents a phase approach to group development that have been called unitary models since they represent members moving from one phase to the next in successive fashion. There are many similarities in these models as group members more or less move from orienting themselves to experiencing some conflict, to coming together as a group and gaining a shared perspective and finally, to performing the task before disengaging from the group experience.

While this was the dominant form of thought with regard to group development, in the 1980's, Poole and colleagues contrasted this notion by stating that while some groups indeed progress in this sequence of phases or stages, it perhaps represents an "ideal sequence" rather than the typical sequence. An ideal sequence is represented by groups systematically working through each phase in a linear process from one phase to the next (i.e. forming, storming, norming, performing, adjournment). Poole argued that many groups experience a more complicated path in group development and deviate from the ideal when certain contingencies arise.

It should be noted that not all of the researchers mentioned above viewed their models as purely prescriptive, but they are typically viewed as successive-sequence stage models. Scheidel and Crowell (1964), and Poole (1981) among others began work with nonphasic research and pointed out that groups are not always orderly in the way they reach decisions. In fact, groups may encounter periods where they are out of synch.

Thus, Poole (1983b, 1985; Poole & Doelger, 1986) proposed a contingency theory that set out to reconcile the unitary and multiple sequence findings.

Poole and Roth (1989) developed a contingency model of decision development and noted that groups have three potential decision paths that they could follow: unitary sequence, complex cyclic, and solution oriented. They wrote "Contingency theories are based on the premise that differences in development are caused by contingency variables that lead groups to take different paths."

Poole and Roth (1989) found that members will tailor the unitary models to fit their need at times by adding steps or taking ones away depending on the situation. Further, certain contingencies such as internal group conflict, too little time, or as in this study, an environmental jolt that brings about an unexpected crisis make the unitary sequence very difficult to carry out. As a result, the group may have to "double back" (p. 327) and re-visit a prior stage when these contingencies occur. Whether a group proceeds through a specific path or not in their development, each member goes through a socialization process as they enter the group. For Private U, new players arrive each season and it is thus relevant to briefly examine some of the group socialization literature.

In their review of the socialization process in groups, Anderson, Riddle, and Martin (1999) explain that "Historically, phase models have proven convenient for discussions of linear stages of socialization processes in organizations" (p. 144). There are many fine socialization models and the bulk of Anderson, et al.'s remaining review focuses on communication-based models, but they do mention Moreland and Levine's (1982) work as "one exemplary model of group socialization" (p. 142).

Moreland and Levine's (1982) model of group socialization examined small groups under the assumption that both the member and the group exercise a mutual influence on one another and that socialization is an aspect of development that brings a concentration to the relationship between the two. They explained and described the way that people passed through small groups. The fact that this model stresses both the group and the individual is unique and commitment levels are then established by both group and individual in light of this mutual relationship.

McGrath and Gruenfeld (1993) consider Moreland and Levine's model especially noteworthy for focusing on how group socialization develops and changes over time. Anderson, et al. (1999) noted that those considerations were missing from prior models such as Tuckman (1965) and Tuckman and Jensen (1977) among others. Throughout the duration of the individual's group experience, they may pass through five consecutive phases of group membership (investigation, socialization, maintenance, resocialization, remembrance), separated by four role transitions (entry, acceptance, divergence, exit). Moreland and Levine (1982) believed that the role transitions were particularly important, but had previously been neglected in past research.

Moreland and Levine (1982) did note the importance of longitudinal studies of natural groups in order to further evaluate their ideas found in the group socialization model. They believed that too much research had ignored that "real groups often exist for long periods of time and that important temporal changes occur in the relationship between groups and their members" (p. 183). Similarly, Gersick's (1988) punctuated equilibrium model suggests that a group exhibits long, stable periods interspersed with relatively brief, revolutionary changes. Further, she noted that transitions may occur

halfway through the calendars or at the mid-point of a group's life regardless of the lifespan. McGrath and Tshan's (2004) and Gersick's work regarding temporal matters are important due to the fact that collegiate athletic teams have life-cycles, but they are life-cycles for the players and not the team. The team is an ongoing entity, but the team members will change at various times over the course of every four to five year period.

McGrath has produced voluminous amounts of research regarding time and its importance within research. McGrath and Tshan (2004) explore the effects of temporal matters on the behavior of both groups and individuals. Arrow, et al. (2005) noted that most research involving groups neglects the role of time. They offer that this could simply be due to the fact that the study of groups is already resource-intensive and that time spent in a longitudinal study only complicates things.

Another component that is lacking in many of the group development models is that only a few researchers account for atypical development as a result of an organizational crisis. These "normal" groups have not faced an environmental jolt such as that experienced by the Private U basketball program. Weick (2001) said "Crises are characterized by low probability/high consequence events that threaten the most fundamental goals of an organization. Because of their low probability, these events defy interpretations and impose severe demands on sensemaking" (p. 225). Consequently, it is not surprising that group development models would not build crises into their models considering they are "low probability," but they are also "high consequence," according to Weick. Therefore, the Private U case study provides a rich context to examine the internal processes that a team experiences in the midst of both the regular change that all

collegiate teams will experience as well as the irregular change that has taken place as a result of the crisis.

## Teams

Working in teams is a common occurrence and the majority of people have probably had both positive and negative outcomes and impressions of groups in their own past experiences. Fiore, Salas, and Cannon-Bowers (2001) found that 80% of surveyed workers report they are currently members of at least one team and that this will continue to increase in step with evolving environmental complexities. The study of small groups and teams is something that is pertinent to most everyone as a result of their ubiquitous nature both within and outside of the workplace. Frey (1999) aptly writes that "The importance of small groups has never been more clear…small groups are woven into the fabric of our individual lives." He continued "The small group is, thus, one of the most important social configurations" (p. ix). Further, as organizations have turned more toward team-based approaches with regard to decision-making, problem-solving, and many other organizational activities, teams have taken center stage in the workplace, as well as in research. Salas, Stagl and Burke (2004) stated "The pace of team's research increased throughout the 1990s and continues to accelerate as we approach 2005" (p. 49).

While "teamwork" has been a consistent and possibly overused "buzzword" in organizational life for quite awhile, there is no question it has had a significant influence in the landscape of many corporations. In fact, Barker and Tompkins (1994) claimed teamwork to be "currently the most popular form of organizational restructuring in corporate America" (p. 224), and its popularity has only increased in the decade since their writing. Morgan (1997) noted that the early definitions of organizations revolved

around individuals working together in a coordinated way as they pursued task-related goals, which certainly meshes with our current understanding of teamwork.

Much past research states that teamwork can increase levels of measurable output, improve employee job satisfaction, improve individual performance, and aid in the creative process and a team's performance is assessed on their "collective work products" (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). Recently, however, Goncalo and Staw (2006) claimed that a collectivist team structure can actually stifle creativity. When it comes to athletic teams, there is an obvious need for collective goals to be met and yet the potential for groupthink (Janis, 1972) arises due to individuals fearing negative evaluations from other group members (Diehl and Stroebe, 1987). Goncalo and Staw (2006) noted that "The net result may be that many creative ideas are never expressed, nor acted upon" (p. 99). As organizations and teams experience transition and rotate members in and out, there are bound to be some complications when working in teams. Further, the "collective work products" that result from the teams may be impacted by these fluctuations in their membership.

However, before examining how transition affects teams and their development, it is important to note that not all teams have the same function or purpose. The idea of teams has great utility because they are a norm for most every setting, but this does not mean that they are all the same or that they all have the same goals. Larson and LaFasto (1989) posited three basic structures of teams: problem-resolution, creative, and tactical. Problem-resolution teams are marked by a focus on issues as the team must trust one another to resolve the problem at hand. "The quickest way to neuter a problem-resolution team is for individual members to become fixated on solutions before

identifying and understanding the critical issues contained in the problem" (p. 49). Thus, interaction between group members is vital as each individual attempts to keep any form of pre-decision preference out of the team dynamic and to engage in finding the proper solution, though this is an admittedly difficult task.

The second structure of team that Larson and LaFasto (1989) proposed were creative teams, which were focused on "exploring possibilities and alternatives," and had the broad objective of a team "to create something" (p. 49). They found autonomy to be the dominant feature of these groups as they stated "To be successful, the creative team must be set free of the control and potential rigidity associated with the more traditional organizational structure" (p. 53). The third structure of teams that Larson and LaFasto (1989) submitted was tactical teams, which consisted of those groups that had "high task clarity and unambiguous role definition" (p. 53). There are clearly stated performance standards, role expectations and clarity for what each member should be doing within the team. Frequently in athletic teams, recognition of roles will occur early in the team's season as a coaching staff develops a more sound understanding of the team's make-up.

Another typology of group structure is provided by McGrath and Argote (1993). They said that "Organizations create and use three kinds of groups, which differ in terms of whether the people, the tools, or the purposes have center stage at the time of its establishment" (p. 339). When an organization has a specific project that requires work, it assigns people to a *task force*. These individuals will then acquire the tools necessary for task accomplishment. When an organization specifically recruits certain people based on their skills and abilities and assigns them a task utilizing these things, they have

formed a *team*.  Lastly, an organization may acquire a complex set of tools and then recruit people to be a *crew* for using that technology (the tools).

Without question, this is a very generic interpretation of group structures as teams vary on both what they want and need in their team members.  For example, some teams specifically recruit creative, individual players whether it is to provide innovation for the team or excitement for the fans while other teams may specifically recruit players with a very collective mindset that will fit into a system of a team in which no one player is the star.  Crews are seen in other organizations such as a flight crew on an airline.  While each member of the flight crew has a specific set of tools and skills they have acquired, the actual members of that crew are quite interchangeable.

Each of the above mentioned structures of teams has certain functions and processes.  Regardless of the similarities or differences, the one commonality in all teams is that they have to manage changes in their membership. There will always be changes that a team has to deal with and disruptions caused by members joining or leaving the team. Granted, some of these changes are caused by the aforementioned environmental jolts from internal or external crises and others are merely anticipated changes, but the overarching reality is that all teams have to deal with transition.  Thus, we need to know more about how teams experience these transitions in membership, and the impact these changes have on cohesion within the team.  One place to observe this is within collegiate athletic teams. While the three structures of task forces, teams, and crews that Larson and LeFasto, (1989) and McGrath and Argote (1993) presented have vast application, this study will borrow aspects of these structures and discuss a hybrid of some of these team structures: athletic teams.

**Athletic Teams**

Athletic teams are assembled for a specific purpose like a task force, and its members have been specifically recruited for their skills and abilities as was described for teams above. A coaching staff may have their own offense or defense that they favor and in fact may recruit players that know how to operate within that offense over a better athlete that will not be as adept with the tools required for a crew. Thus, one can see that an athletic team borrows from each of the proposed structures, but it also has an additional facet in that the teams' success is directly tied to its performance. In a recent article investigating how the context of sport can contribute to an understanding of management and of organizations Wolfe, Weick, Usher, Terborg, Poppo, Murrell, Dukerich, Core, Dickson, and Jourdan (2005) noted:

> In Crown's (2000) model, sport teams represent a special type of performance team that can be compared to other types of organizational teams in a systematic manner. Performance teams are defined as teams producing the primary product of the organization – that product being a performance. Producing the performance (e.g., a concert, a play) is the primary task of team members. Within the context of sport, the principal performance is the game… (p. 200)

Athletic teams, particularly collegiate athletic teams, have a built-in transitional nature to them since players have a maximum, fixed amount of time that they can participate on the team. Further, these athletes may not even be a part of the team for that full, allotted amount of time due to various reasons. Since the objective of performance

teams is to produce the primary product of the organization, the idea of transition is particularly germane. Thus, collegiate athletic teams can be very useful to our understanding of the connections between teams and transition because of the temporal aspect that institutionalizes changes in membership within this structure of teams. Wolfe, et al. (2005) stated:

> The notion of time within the context of work teams typically refers to whether a team is temporary or permanent (e.g., Cohen & Bailey, 1997)…However, consistent with the definition of crews, sport teams can integrate new team members as the need arises…The recent increase in player mobility as a result of free agency increases the crew-like nature of teams. (p. 201)

Though athletics have had varying degrees of impact on individuals' lives, the majority of people have played on some level of athletic team in their life. It is a common and easily understandable area from which to attain knowledge at a more micro-level of intra-groups. Athletic teams present an opportunity to hear from and/or observe athletes who are in an organization that is faced with one constant – change.

Rather than looking at a static company that may or may not experience change, this study examined an athletic team at the collegiate level over the course of the season in which they dealt with compositional change. Since the maximum length of time that a team could be together would be for five years due to eligibility restrictions, a collegiate athletic team provided a useful context for the study. However, due to the way coaches

typically attempt to stagger player eligibility, turnover in membership in athletic teams rarely would be experienced all at once.

Following the '05-'06 season, a conference foe of Private U lost their top 6 players on the team, but only two losses were due to a player competing in his final season. Three players gave up their remaining eligibility and declared themselves for the NBA draft and the other player decided to transfer to another school. Thus, even when coaches attempt to balance when players will leave the program, unplanned departures still occur whether it is due to the draft, transferring, injury or disciplinary or other reasons.

As a result of coaches at least trying to balance the academic status of their teams though (in order to not have too many people leaving at one time, as noted above), coaches often try to have roughly the same number of players in each class (freshman, sophomore, junior and senior), which means that organizational transition will be experienced every year as some players leave and others arrive for the first time. A player may have one "redshirt" season in which they are a part of the team, but cannot participate in competitive games. Consequently, this is why an individual could be a member of the collegiate team for up to five years.

Outside of the athletic environment, this amount of time is certainly longer than the majority of organizational work teams that would be put together. At times, work teams are even assigned on a project-by-project basis. However, since there are still changes within athletic teams on an annual basis, this study does have strong relevance to the organizational setting.

Weick (1979) stated that communication is the core process of organizing, so it is natural to think that communication has a central role during times of transition. Leaders must navigate their teams through what are potentially uneasy and uncertain times. Thus, there exists a need to better understand the experience of transition and the communication that takes place on the part of both the leader and the members of teams that have transition built into their structure. There are many people who will benefit from research examining the role of communication on cohesion and leadership within an organization in the continual process of transition.

In addition to those directly involved with collegiate athletics, many organizations, especially those that hire a large number of people into entry-level positions, will be interested in this study since it deals with a subject that many employers are all too familiar with, which is transition. In 2006, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released the results of a study that showed "of the jobs that workers began when they were ages 18 to 21, 73 percent of those jobs ended in less than a year and 95 percent ended in fewer than 5 years" (p. 2). Consequently, companies are faced with the constant training of new team members as they attempt to shape an ever-changing team into a cohesive unit.

Since this study will utilize a case-study of an athletic team, it is important to highlight the fact that corporations frequently look to this arena when searching for comparisons or possibly motivations for their own organizational teams. Wolfe, et al. (2005) stated "Sport…has proved to be an effective setting within which to conduct organizational research. We are unaware, however, of any concerted, systematic effort to address the rationale, benefits, and potential of such research" (p. 183). Since athletics at

both the collegiate and professional level are billion dollar industries, one would think

they would provide excellent settings for research. Wolfe, et al. (2005) continued:

> A…rationale for studying organizational phenomena within sport is that examples
>
> from sport resonate with the practitioners [that] organizational/management
>
> research is meant to influence. Corporate executives appear to be fascinated by
>
> what they believe they can learn from the realm of sport. (p. 184)

I would add that many coaches are similarly intrigued by, learn from, and utilize

successful examples from the corporate world with their athletic teams making it a

mutually beneficial relationship in which the cross-fertilization opportunities abound.

For example, topics ranging from leader succession to the recruitment and importance of

team composition are all germane to both the athletic and organizational world. Thus,

there are definite opportunities for transferability for this study into the organizational

setting, as it seeks to better understand the experience of both the leader and the members

of groups

Poole and Van de Ven (2004) noted that time is often a backdrop for change, but

has rarely been utilized as a variable. Tsoukas and Chia (2002) observed that most

research views stability as the norm and change as the atypical experience – the departure

from stability. They argued "Change must not be thought of as a property of

organization. Rather, organization must be understood as an emergent property of

change" (p. 570). Private U, along with all other teams at this level must learn to achieve

balance between change and stability in order to operate successfully.

In order to gain insight into the leaders and members of a transitional team, I conducted an ethnographic case study of Private University's men's basketball team, which is a team that has undergone and will continue to undergo transition. Wolfe, et al. (2005) stated "A recurring theme in the sport studies literature is that sport can be viewed as a microcosm of the larger society" (p. 184), and "Dutton (2003) argued that we need to breathe life into organizational studies. The imagery that is evoked in a sport context may facilitate achievement of this goal" (p. 205).

Stemming from this encouragement by leading organizational communication scholars, this study examining Private U's basketball team will be relevant and transferable to the larger discipline of organizational communication. I will now review past research on transition and directly apply it to athletic teams. Then, I will highlight a few key frameworks within the group development literature, and finally, the chapter will offer the research questions that will be examined through this study.

### Athletic Teams in Transition

Teams in transition are simply teams that have recently experienced, are experiencing, or expect to experience change in their overall composition. Danish, Owens, Green, and Brunelle (1997) stated "A team in transition is a common experience and may even become something for which preparation is required…transition is better considered a process rather than an event" (p. 156). In an optimal setting, transition is quite predictable on college athletic teams as it would be known when players would leave, which would make transition more of an event than a process. However, as previously mentioned, there is an inordinate amount of uncertainty built into collegiate athletic teams because of the numerous reasons that a player may leave a team prior to

the expiration of one's full eligibility.

During the '05-'06 season, the NBA implemented a rule stating that no player may be drafted into the professional league directly from high school, and must now be at least one year removed from high school. However, even the most heralded athletes who are expected to stay only one season at the collegiate level have the potential of being injured, having a disappointing season, and/or getting into trouble academically or legally, among other things causing continued uncertainty about their duration with their collegiate team. All of these possibilities point to the fact that we must consider transition on these college athletic teams as a process.

Many researchers have studied transition or change in organizations. Though Schlossberg (1981) discussed transitions in an adult's life, her findings are pertinent and will thus be extended to this study as her model of transition has specific relevance to individuals and teams. When accounting for why differences exist between individuals as they respond to transition she asked "What determines whether a person grows or deteriorates as the result of transition? Why do some people adapt with relative ease, while others suffer severe strain?" She continued "…studying the transition process requires the simultaneous analysis of individual characteristics and external occurrences" (p. 3). Due to the unique external occurrences that Private U faced, Schlossberg's findings are quite germane to this study. Danish, et al. (1997) looked at transition specifically in athletics and stated:

Transition is the period in which athletes review their identity, roles, and motivation to participate in sport. For teams, this period may result in a review of

roles of all the other team members and the identity of the team. (p. 155)

Danish, et al. (1997) argued that an athlete does not have to be the team leader in order to have his absence felt. "In small teams, the absence of one member is an important factor. In all groups, each member holds a prescribed role." They continued, "With the loss of one member, other individuals must assume the missing athlete's role for the transition to be smooth" (p. 162).

Schlossberg (1981) posited three major sets of factors that influenced an adult's adaptation to transition: the nature of the transition; the environment before and after the transition occurs; and the qualities/characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition. "All three sets of factors interact to produce the outcome: adaptation or failure to adapt" (p. 5). However, Schlossberg (1981) also noted that "Often the outcome of a transition has both positive and negative aspects for the same individual…" (p. 6).

Interestingly, the timing of the transition could perhaps be one of the most important parts of the process. If an athlete leaves a team in the middle of the season for example, it will alter many things including the fact that other team members will have to adapt their roles on the team. Bateman, Karwan, and Kazee (1983) suggested that players who are traded between seasons have longer to adjust to their new environments than players traded during the course of a season (though in all likelihood, there would be more/less effect depending on the sport and the position the individual played). While players cannot be traded at the collegiate level, there are still ways that teams can suffer member loss in a similar manner. For example, a player can transfer to another school either during or at the conclusion of the season, so the suggestion of Bateman, et al. is

still valid in the college context. Schlossberg (1981) noted "Many, but not all, transitions involve role change" (p. 8). These changes would tend to be easier to absorb and learn if an "off-season" was involved for the players to re-define their roles rather than attempt this within the season.

Schlossberg (1981) stated "When a change occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, no such preparation or rehearsal is possible" (p. 9). Danish, et al. (1997) called these changes "off-time," and wrote "Off-time, external transitions are much more difficult to cope with for both an individual and a team" (p. 157). At the collegiate level, transitions of this sort could occur through a player being deemed academically ineligible (possibly at the end of a semester, which may be in the middle of a season), getting into trouble either with the coaching staff or the law that would require them to be unable to play, or one of the most common forms of a change in team composition that can not be anticipated: injury.

Injuries can alter team chemistry because an important cog of an interdependent unit has now been removed and this type of transition during the season can be difficult to overcome. Even if the player decides to play with the injury, it may cause a required adjustment to their role on the team. If the player does miss some time, he may return to the team at some point during the season after being out for an extended period, which will force the team to undergo yet another change with regard to the role each member plays and to their overall team make-up. However, an injury could also bring about positive outcomes for a team. For example, a player who had not formerly contributed could emerge onto the scene and perform adequately or perhaps even at a higher level than was previously being experienced.

Still, teams would rather be able to anticipate change and have it come at times in which they are expecting transition. In referencing collegiate teams that can anticipate transition due to graduation, Danish, et al. (1997) noted that coaches may be more skilled at negotiating their team through the transition process because they have had this experience before. Since the majority of collegiate coaches attempt to balance their teams based on classification (freshman, sophomore, etc.), coaches are required to deal with this type of expected transition on a yearly basis.

Danish and D'Augelli (1980) described the term "intra-individual similarity" as being the recognition of a past event or situation that is comparable to the one being experienced. Thus, those that have undergone transition in their lives prior to the current one taking place may be better suited to adapt to the present transition. Within teams, this could have a major effect on the way that different teammates may react to the transition process, as some will and some will not have had similar transition experiences. If a player has transferred to that school, he may be able to have a better understanding of a fellow player's discontent with the team or desire to leave since he has gone through that process himself. For those who have undergone change in the past, Danish, et al. (1997) stated:

> At the cognitive level, the individual knows he or she can deal with the event…Experience with a past situation enables an athlete or team to use skills that are transferable from one setting to another. (p. 158)

In other words, transferable skills have been gleaned from learned experiences

and help individuals to bridge past and current events.  However, in the case of Private U

or another team that faces what Meyer (1982) called "environmental jolts" in which

atypical situations arise, experience will offer little aid.

Schlossberg (1981) discussed the environment in which the transition is taking

place and how it can have a large impact on those involved.  She divided the environment

into three sections: the interpersonal, the institutional, and the physical setting.  Pearson

(1990) stated that social support is seen as a critical variable in how successful an athlete

or team copes with a transition.  Social support was described by Burleson, Albrecht,

Goldsmith, and Sarason (1994) as an interaction that is designed to communicate caring

and to contribute to the health and well-being of others.  Danish, et al. (1997) noted "The

more supportive the environment, the easier the transition is to negotiate for both the

individual and team" (p. 157).  Thus, the support that an athlete feels from the school,

their leaders, peers, and possibly even the comfort they have within their environment

will all aid in making the transition process more or less manageable.

It would be rare for collegiate athletes to have ever experienced another type of

transition that Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1985) later discussed: nonevent

transition.  Nonevent transitions "are the ones an individual had expected but which did

not occur, thereby altering his or her life" (p. 29).  Many young players anticipate having

to wait their turn for a year or two, but by the time they are upperclassmen, the majority

of these athletes expect that they will have significant roles on the team. Yet this natural

progression does not occur for some players as they await a "promotion" that never

arrives.  As a result, this nonevent transition will cause a different type of transition as it

may cause the player to leave the program.

When an athlete leaves a team, there is not only a transition experience that the team will have to encounter, but there is also the matter of how the functioning and cohesion of the entire team is affected. Danish, et al. (1997) stated "To date, most of the literature in athlete transition has focused on the impact of disengagement on the athlete. However, the team on which an athlete competes is also affected" (pp. 162-163).

Whether it is a positive or negative impact, the alteration of the membership of a team will inevitably have an impact on the team's cohesiveness. Further, membership is not limited to players, as there are other key members of the team such as the coaching staff, managers, and trainers among others, which adds to the likelihood of some type of transition taking place and the team being forced to adapt. Klein and Pierce (2001) defined team adaptability as "the necessary modifications in order to meet new challenges" (p. 3) while Kozlowski, Gulley, Nason and Smith (1999) said team adaptability is the "capability of the team to maintain coordinated interdependence and performance by selecting an appropriate network from the repertoire or by inventing a new configuration" (p. 29). Thus, team cohesion will be affected by how easily the group develops and adapts to transition, and based upon this review of literature, two research questions will now be posited:

RQ1: How does cohesion become communicatively manifest on a team over time?

RQ2: How do the leaders help manage cohesion on the team over time?

These questions will be explored through an ethnographic case study. In the next chapter, I will describe this methodological approach and the organizational context and

its members.  I will also discuss the collection and analysis of data relevant to these

research questions.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*"If we want to know how something is done and what it means, we have to know how it is talked about" (Lindlof, 1995, p. 234).*

A communication approach to a team in transition necessitates understanding the experiences of those involved and listening to the exchanges between all of the involved parties. Wolfe, et al. (2005) stated "Sport organizations are also particularly well suited to longitudinal studies as well as single industry case studies" (p. 199). While the Private U case study offered an opportunity to immerse myself in a fascinating context, there are multiple reasons that Wolfe et al. are correct in their encouragement of longitudinal studies.

In Private U's case, the situation surrounding the basketball team was complex, confusing, and convoluted as a result of the tragic death of a former player and the resulting sanctions, leading to a large transition of both leaders and members on the team. Ethnography provided a way to sort out and understand this scene through close observation. Further, there was not going to be a quick turnaround as far as success is concerned for Private U. Not only was Private U starting over with new players, but they also received harsh punishment from the NCAA which included a reduction in scholarships for the team. Thus, a resurrection of the program to respectability would only occur over a long period of time. Consequently, a longitudinal study was most

effective and beneficial since even a series of "snapshot" studies would have missed the essence of what was taking place in the program. Danish, et al. (1997) discussed the effect of transition on a team:

> Very little research or descriptive literature has considered the impact of an athlete's disengagement on a team…disengagement affects all aspects of team maintenance. However, the question of "how" the team is affected is pure conjecture. (p. 162)

One of the purposes of this study was to reduce the conjecture that Danish, et al. (1997) described by gaining an up-close examination of Private U's basketball team in the midst of transition and to provide descriptive results of how transition, such as disengagement, affected all of the parties involved. Thus, I engaged in a six-month ethnographic study with the men's basketball team at Private U during the '05-'06 season. An ethnographic approach was vital in order to truly observe the scene and to gain fuller understanding of the phenomena at work.

In this chapter, I begin by presenting the research design, and specifically the use and benefit of an ethnographic approach. I will then give details about the data collection process, and explain the methods and tools used for data analysis. Finally, I will describe the organizational context, as well as provide information about the research participants.

## Methodological Choices

Maxwell (2005) argued that if a researcher likes a particular type of research and if that type of research suits his/her abilities, then those are perfectly legitimate reasons to

pursue that methodology.  Becker (1986) discussed theory by noting:

> Trying to work within a paradigm (or theory) that doesn't fit your assumptions is
> like trying to do a physically demanding job in clothes that don't fit – at best
> you'll be uncomfortable, at worst it will keep you from doing the job well.
> (pp. 16-17)

Based on Becker's sentiments listed above regarding the costs/benefits of working within a certain paradigm, and Wolfe et al.'s (2005) argument that sport organizations are well-suited to longitudinal studies, I pursued a qualitative approach to this study. Utilizing a qualitative approach enabled me to focus on situations and people in the scene, as well as being able to place an emphasis on process and language.  In discussing research questions, Maxwell (2005) noted that in qualitative research, the questions tend to focus on:

> …a) questions about the meaning of events and activities to the people involved
> in these, b) questions about the influence of the physical and social context on
> these activities, and c) questions about the process by which these events and
> activities and their outcomes occurred. (p. 75)

Maxwell (2005) continued by noting that these questions lend themselves more toward an open-ended, inductive approach rather than the comparison and control that variance theory requires.  Poole (2004) noted that "The primary focus of a process theory

is a series of events that unfold through time to bring about some outcome" (p. 11). He continued:

> Process theories may incorporate several different types of effects into their explanations, including critical events and turning points, contextual influence, formative patterns that give overall direction to the change, and causal factors that influence the sequencing of events. (p. 11)

As mentioned in the prior chapter, Arrow et al. (2005) pointed out that "studying groups is a resource-intensive process…All group processes unfold in time…" (p. 314). This led me to believe that if I truly wanted to understand the construct of cohesion through a team's development while in transition, it would require this type of process approach. Consequently, I determined that an ethnographic methodology would be the best choice for this study.

*Ethnography*

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted that ethnography is a description of people, and "usually involves a holistic description of cultural membership" (p. 16). Geertz (1973) said that studying a situated culture enables the researcher to observe patterns of behavior that are specific to that setting. Through these observations, the researcher is able to develop interpretations about that localized culture. By immersing myself in the scene, I was able to describe these interpretations. In addition to the time and energy that ethnographic research requires, there is also a great responsibility that accompanies this type of research. Ethical questions frequently arise regarding the researcher's role in the

scene and whether he/she has the right/ability to tell the story of a culture of which they are not a part. This issue will be addressed in the final chapter of this study, but Geertz (1973) does discuss this when he stated:

> …writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot. (By definition, only a 'native' makes first order ones: it's his culture). They are, thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are "something made," "something fashioned" – the original meaning of fictio – not that they are false… (p. 15)

While "fashioning" meaning from the Private U situation excited me, it also brought about a great deal of respect for the process that I encountered and a desire to accurately portray what I observed. Goodall (2000) sees ethnography more as storytelling and compares it to being involved in a mystery. He stated "In this part of the process of finding the storyline, your job is to notice patterns. You will notice patterns of citations, then of themes, and then of specific issues" (p. 52).

While observing patterns is important to the localized culture under study, they can have larger implications as well. Geertz (1973) stated "The methodological problem which the microscopic nature of ethnography presents…is to be resolved by realizing that social actions are comments on more than themselves…small facts speak to large issues …" (p.23). Thus, as Lincoln and Denzin (1994) discussed, patterns within the scene can speak to larger issues in addition to highlighting structural rules within the observed culture which can lead to transferability.

Much of the sentiment regarding ethnography that has been discussed above is accepted, but Atkinson and Hammersley (1993) claimed that defining ethnography has not been without controversy. They said that ethnography usually refers to research that involves many of the following characteristics: a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular phenomena, working with "unstructured" data, investigating a small number of cases if not only one case, in detail, and involving an analysis of data that explicitly interprets the meaning and functions of human action. They define unstructured data as data that "have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories" (p. 248). When posed with the question "What should an ethnographer study in the field?" Charmaz (2006) replied:

> Whatever is happening there. By remaining open to the setting and the actions and people in it, ethnographers have the opportunity to work from the ground up and to pursue whatever they find to be of the greatest interest. (p. 21)

Charmaz (2006) continued by noting that an ethnographer's primary objective is to gain an insider's depiction of the studied world" (p. 21). Before describing how I mined through and analyzed the enormous amount of data that was collected, I will note how I arrived at gaining trust to enter this scene at the outset of the study. The procedures and data collection methods that follow are what enabled me to gain insider access.

## Data Collection

*Procedures*

After receiving IRB approval for this study, as well as gaining approval in writing from the coaching staff of Private U that acknowledged I had permission to be present throughout the '05-'06 season for the purpose of conducting this study, I began my six-month immersion into the situated culture of the basketball team. Since Private U has "closed" practices to the public, and considering the team was dealing with new NCAA sanctions, gaining access to the scene marked a significant victory in and of itself.

According to NCAA regulations, every collegiate team is required to have one day off per week, but they may have some type of meeting, practice, and/or weight room session on all of the other days. However, there is quite a bit of leniency on what is considered to be a "day off." Frequently, players are still at the gym shooting or playing games, in the weight room, but since coaches are not present at the time, it is essentially considered an "optional" workout period.

I attended the majority of the required practices on a weekly basis totaling over 50 practices during the season, as well as attending some of the "off" days. In addition, I attended every home basketball game and was able to view every road basketball game either on television or via the Internet. While it certainly would have been more ideal to observe the road games in person, this was impossible due to travel and monetary reasons.

Multiple methods were used to collect data at Private U including observation, interviews, and document review. The first steps to the research project were looking at the study from both an emic and an etic perspective. By doing this, it revealed what

meanings I already derived from the situation, and what the existing theory and research say about the scene. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) encourage this process of questioning oneself as well as questioning the scene in order to reveal any personal, pre-existing biases before fieldwork begins.

After the researcher has sufficiently questioned himself and the scene, the next step is contacting the scene. This may initially be done via a "gatekeeper" who often has the ability to grant or deny access to the scene and thus plays a vital role. Another individual who may be important when contacting the scene is a sponsor who may be able to serve as a gatekeeper as well. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted that sponsors are those who take a very active interest in the study. They wrote:

> In addition to granting access, a sponsor usually goes around to others and personally introduces the researcher, vouches for the project, and helps the researcher find informants or resources. Sponsors may even act themselves as key informants about the local custom, speech norms, history, power structure, and so on. (p. 104)

The head coach initially acted in the sponsor role by agreeing to allow me to conduct the study, and introducing me to the assistant coaches and the players that I did not know. In fact, at my first practice, Coach Blue called the team over and said:

Some of you guys already know Blair, but he's going to be doing a research project with us this season. You'll really like him so go shake his hand if you don't know him yet.

There is no question that this brief introduction brought a level of credibility to what I was doing and developed legitimacy to anyone questioning my attendance at practice. After the initial introductions, one of the assistant coaches, Coach Armstrong, took over the role of sponsor due to the time restrictions on the head coach. Coach Armstrong was an incredibly beneficial resource as he had me added to the "master" e-mail listed that included all players and coaches. This was vital to my study because I was e-mailed the weekly practice schedule, as well as any changes to that schedule if they arose. It also brought further credibility to me with the team members who welcomed me initially, but upon realizing I would be there for the long-haul, further embraced me. "I saw you on the e-mail list…you're official now!" yelled one of the players to me as he shot free-throws before practice and as I was taking my usual seat in the stands.

Coach Armstrong not only enabled me to be informed of when all practices took place, but also helped me determine interview times for the team members based on their school, meeting, and weight lifting schedules. Additionally, there were times when we would be talking and a player would enter the coaching offices and he would ask me if I had interviewed that player yet. If I had not, he would yell for him to come back and ask if we could conduct the interview right then and there.

Coach Armstrong has a very positive relationship with the players so his pressing them for an interview with me was never perceived by the players as their coach putting

them on the spot or intimidating them into being interviewed. In fact, most of these players have been interviewed so many times since they began playing basketball that participating in an interview is almost second-nature to them and they were all more than happy to sit down and answer questions. Coach Armstrong's watchful eye on the players is important because they are kept to a busy, scheduled life and to have someone else staying on top of things for the athletes provides "an added layer of accountability," according to Armstrong. Thus, Coach Armstrong was an invaluable asset during my research and he certainly validated Lindlof and Taylor's (2002) claim that, "Sponsors are key figures in many studies" (p. 105).

Finally, Coach Armstrong was a great asset to my study because he is one of the coaches and could thus also serve as an "informant." Lindlof and Taylor say the informant role is of importance because informants speak the language of the culture and can help discern meaning from the events that take place. I found myself frequently writing down terms overheard during practice such as "bounce and fan" and "false hustle," and I would later follow-up with Coach Armstrong who would explain them to me.

These references were foreign even to me though I consider myself very knowledgeable of the game, which made Coach Armstrong's role an important one. He described "bounce and fan" as simply having each defender bouncing up and down waving their arms in a jumping-jack motion that looks like a fan to make it more difficult for the opposing team to see their teammates and make passes to them. He said that "false hustle" is when a player had been beaten by his opposing player, but would dive at the pass even though he knew he could not reach it thus making it appear that he had

been hustling on defense even though his poor defense moments earlier necessitated this "false hustle" moment. These are a couple of examples when the "informant" defined terminology unique to this localized culture that was necessary in addition to access to the scene. Now that I had acquired both access and an informant/sponsor, I needed to establish my own role within the research.

*Role of researcher*

Gold (1958) highlighted four different roles that a researcher can play within their research: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and complete observer. The complete participant and complete observer roles are not highly recommended nor are they frequently used by qualitative researchers. Though I entered the scene as an observer, rather than as a "volunteer assistant" or some other position that required participation, it may appear that I was an observer-as-participant. However, Gold defined this role as one in which researchers were involved in "one-visit interviews" (p. 221), and noted the potential problems of misunderstanding as a result of such brief contact with the informants. Thus, within Gold's framework, I acted as a participant-as-observer. Gold pointed out that each party is aware of the researcher and their purpose, which "tends to minimize problems of role-pretending" (p. 220). Everyone in the setting knew that I was there for a research purpose.

The participant-as-observer role was beneficial to me because I was privy to information that provided much more understanding than someone on the outside of the organization could gain. As mentioned earlier, practices were "closed" to the public so the only individuals in the arena were the players, coaches, trainers, and me. Periodically, a recruit, a newspaper reporter, or another visitor would attend a practice,

but it was typically a small, consistent group of people at the practices. After a couple of practices, I would walk in and the players who were closest would yell "Blair!" with a wave. Due to my regularity at practice, the awkwardness of having an "outsider" in attendance was quickly alleviated, and in fact, I quickly became as close to an "insider" as one could without formally being a part of the team.

Early in the observation process, I began to not only be seen as a pseudo-insider, but also felt like one as well. The coaches were going to scrimmage the managers after practice one day and told me to play with them. Since I was wearing improper shoes for playing, they gave me a brand new pair of the team's shoes to keep. I have also been given other paraphernalia such as a t-shirt and collared shirt with the Private U emblem. I genuinely enjoyed going to my research site each day and believe the feeling was reciprocated.

The coaches did not hesitate to take advantage of my role as a professor at Private U when a recruit would come into town. For example, I received multiple phone calls throughout the season from the coaches asking if I could meet with a recruit so they could meet a professor and discuss any questions they may have about the academic aspect in the life of a student-athlete. I was more than happy to do this as it is an aspect of my job that I participate in with prospective students who are non-athletes, as well as being something that I enjoy doing. I also did not feel like it negatively impacted the existing study by engaging in these visits with prospective recruits, and it may have even helped me by providing further access to a scene that is not easily entered. Further, it showed that the coaches viewed me as an ally in representing Private U. Also, it showed that the coaches believed in the entire University and not just in the basketball team, or at the

very least, they saw the value in the academic side and made it a point of emphasis to include it in their recruitment of a player.

Throughout these practices, meetings, and informal time with players and coaches during the observation process, an important aspect was taking field notes. Van Maanen (1988) said field notes are recollections of events, people, and cultures that are from the researchers' perspective. With all of the formal and informal interactions and practices that I attended throughout the season, it would have been impossible to recall all of the events I observed without the use of field notes.

Sanjek (1990) stated that field notes are the "raw data of ethnography," and Geertz (1973) noted that ethnography can provide "thick description" and avoid "thin conclusions." Realizing that writing field notes would not always be plausible, Sanjek (1990) said they could be scratch notes, which are written down on whatever is available and can later, through researcher reflection, be put into field notes. A similar transferal of knowledge must take place when a researcher is only able to take "head notes," whether that is a result of not having instruments available or due to the situation that would not allow writing field notes to take place.

I ran into the necessity for head notes numerous times during my research with Private U. It would frequently result from an informal conversation I was having with someone involved with the team. For example, one day I left my seat during practice to use the restroom and on my return I ran into the trainer of the team in the hallway. We ended up having a 25-minute conversation that was rich with data. While it would have been ideal to be furiously writing some of his stories down as he told them, or to have had an audio-tape recording each word, it was a prime example when head notes were

necessary. I followed Lindlof and Taylor's (2002) encouragement to record these head notes as soon as possible following the conversation.

In addition to observation, I reviewed various organizational documents from the basketball newsletters that were provided to team boosters (financial supporters of the team), and the team media guide in order to see how the team talks about incoming and current players. Lastly, I interviewed both the players and the coaches of Private U in order to obtain specific data. These multiple methods provided significant amounts of data that required analysis. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) divided this process into three main areas: data management, data reduction, and conceptual development. These areas are simply to help maintain some type of control over the data as it is rapidly obtained.

Interviews offer a potential problem for qualitative studies with what has been called "key informant bias" (Pelto & Pelto, 1975, p. 7). Maxwell (2005) stated:

Qualitative researchers sometimes rely on a small number of informants for a major part of their data, and even when these informants are purposefully selected and the data themselves seem valid, there is no guarantee that these informants' views are typical. (p. 91)

Though my number of participants is small in this study, it is very thorough in that it includes all of the key participants in the scene. The potential for bias, whether it is from the researcher, the key informant, or anyone else is why so much importance is attributed to triangulation, or collecting multiple forms of data. Fielding and Fielding

(1986) said triangulation is the collection of information through the use of a variety of sources and methods.

Maxwell (2005) noted that triangulation "reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method" (p. 93). He continued by noting that triangulation also brings "more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating" (p. 94). While I felt very comfortable that my key informants were giving accurate information to me during their interviews, I also knew that I would have "back-up" data coming due to the information gleaned from other forms of data collection.

The mentality of utilizing multiple forms of data collection is what prompted Lincoln and Denzin (1993) to consider qualitative researchers bricoleurs. Levi-Strauss (1966) stated that bricoleurs are "jack of all trades" intimating that qualitative researchers will use whatever they have available to them in order to get information that they need. Whether it is triangulating the data or simply collecting multiple forms of data through the use of multiple methods, sources, or at times, even researchers, the end result is a bricolage, which is a collage-like combination of the understanding the researcher has acquired.

*Multiple forms of data*

As mentioned earlier, in this study I took the role of a "participant-as-observer" and thus, I had many opportunities for observation, which was a primary method that was utilized. Observations occurred at varied places such as practice, during pre-game periods in the locker room, and during games as I watched team members participate. However, while the data that I received through observation was quite rich with detail,

much of it would have been useless without the opportunity to follow-up on, build upon, and/or to clarify the information through the use of interviews. Therefore, the second method that I utilized along with observation was the use of interviews.

I had the opportunity to conduct an in-depth interview with each of the 13 current players. While they provided an essential component to achieving knowledge of the scene, I realized that the athlete's perspective was not the only important one to examine. Thus, I also interviewed each of the six members of the coaching staff. Consequently, this achieved an important goal of data collection, which is the use of multiple sources.

Along with the head coach, there are three full-time assistant coaches, and two other members that are essentially assistants, but have titles such as Business Coordinator and Video-Film Coordinator. While the latter two individuals do indeed plan the trips, work on the team's scheduling, and prepare video footage for the team to observe, they are also important cogs of the coaching staff during practice, and are called "Coach" by the players, so both of the above mentioned coaches were interviewed.

Finally, collecting data from multiple sources was completed by a third group of individuals who were interviewed that I will call "support staff." These individuals included the teams' graduate assistant, one of the student managers (who happened to be a former player on the team the previous season, but whose playing eligibility had expired), the academic advisor to the basketball team (with whom I watched many of the practices), and two other individuals: one who served as the team's trainer and one as the strength and conditioning coach. While some collegiate athletic teams share the latter two roles (trainer, and strength and conditioning coach) with other university athletic

teams, both of these individuals were specifically assigned to the basketball team, which meant that they attended every mandatory and voluntary practice.

All of these support-staff interviews were more informal in nature (except for the student manager who was formally interviewed). These interviews were more of an extended conversation than a formal interview would be, but each still provided information that was beneficial to the study. Further, this information was from a unique perspective since it came from a member of the team community, but not directly from a player or coach. It should be noted that while each of the players and coaches were formally interviewed only one time, there were multiple informal interviews similar to what I have described with the support staff with them as well throughout the season.

Members of the team had various roles whether it was as a player, coach, or support staff, but each of them spent extended time in the localized scene that was under study, as well as extended time with the other team members. As a result, each individual had the opportunity to be able to contribute to the study with a unique perspective as "members" of the team who traveled to road games and attended every practice, despite the fact that some may not have been in a player or coach role.

In addition to acquiring data through observation and interviews, the final collection method entailed the use of documents and other artifacts. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, there were some organizational documents that were given to me at the outset of my study such as the team's media guide. Media documents and artifacts were important in my collection process as I read over 100 articles on the team and/or the coaching staff over the course of the season. These articles ranged from newspaper articles, primarily in the local paper, but also in various national papers, such as the *New*

*York Times* and *USA Today*, to web sites (multiple featured articles on espn.com, for example), to national magazines (a featured article in *Sports Illustrated* on the head coach, for example).

The media reports that I utilized were not just accounts of the team as described in print. I listened to and transcribed the post-game audio-report of each basketball game between Private U's announcer and a member from the coaching staff. Primarily, this involved an interview between the announcer and Coach Blue, but on a couple of occasions one of the assistant coaches would come out of the locker room after the game to give feedback and a recap of the game to the listening audience. Many of these quotes were seen again in the newspaper write-ups about the game the following day, but some were not, so these transcriptions of post-game interviews enhanced my overall data.

Lastly, as mentioned above, the team's own archived reports such as team media guides were utilized to unearth more personal information about members of the team and coaching staff. Familiarity with information that was specific to an individual or to an interest or hobby of a team member helped develop rapport between myself and these individuals. Without the media guide, I would not have been aware of these topics of interest. Therefore, my forms of collecting data included observation (in multiple settings), interviews (which consisted of multiple sources: players, coaches, and support staff) and both organizational and media produced documents.

*Interviews*

Ethnographic interviews should establish an explicit purpose, engage in ethnographic explanations, and employ ethnographic questions (Spradley, 1979; Stage and Mattson, 2003). My goal within each formal interview was to follow the standards

of ethnographic interviews. I will now highlight the interview process with the participants.

The explicit purpose my study was explained to the interviewees as soon as we sat down, or at times, as we walked toward the interview room. I explained that this study was for work to complete my PhD. This actually was a very important step because the individuals that I would be interviewing were used to being interviewed except for a very different purpose. I conducted many of the interviews in the "press" room, which is the room where the players sit down with a newspaper reporter or television analyst to discuss the team. Due to excessive experience, the players and coaches were not threatened by an interview environment in the slightest, but it was also imperative that I established my explicit purpose. I had to make sure they understood that I had a different intent than what was most likely sought during their past interview experiences.

The second step was to engage the participants in ethnographic explanations, which meant that I discussed the structure of the interview. I explained the informed consent form and asked if they had any questions about it before they signed. This form highlighted the fact that their coaches would not be told their responses, and in fact, nobody other than the researcher and possibly a student-assistant (due to the possibility of having assistance in the transcription process) would hear what they said. The interviewees were also told that they could choose to not answer any question and were asked whether the interview could be audio-recorded. Every interviewee agreed to be recorded, which allowed me to focus more on some of the nuances of the interview like tone and nonverbal behavior rather than trying to accurately account for their words by taking notes.

The final step in conducting ethnographic interviews is asking ethnographic questions. The interviews were intentionally spread out throughout the season so that I could gain perspective from both players and coaches throughout the year instead of just at the beginning or end when the outlook or retrospective look could be quite skewed. Thus, I interviewed two of the coaches after practices began, but prior to games beginning; two of the coaches during the season, and two of the coaches after the season was completed. I utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews, which was important because through the constant comparative method, some issues became more or less important as the season and as the interviews continued.

At the outset, I developed an interview guide, which contained an outline of questions that would guide the interview rather than conducting the interview from a list of pre-set, static questions. My desire was to talk to the individuals rather than interview them and I believed that the semi-structured interview approach would be of greatest benefit toward that goal. This was very important because the individuals I interviewed have somewhat unintentionally been trained to speak and respond to questions with sound bites, or brief, one-sentence responses that will be good for a blurb in the newspaper or a brief showing on the television.

Therefore, the advantage that I had gained through the players and coaches having had experience with interviews which made them comfortable with the setting was now countered by the fact that they were not used to giving much detail in their responses. Many of the interviewees required being prodded to give additional information despite being asked a broad, open-ended question. Since the interviews were spread out over the observation period, I was able to add questions as a result of observations, or even as a

result of other interview responses. At the conclusion of my study, I had conducted

twenty formal interviews. I transcribed fourteen of the twenty interviews, and a student-

assistant transcribed six of the interviews.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Initially, I did open-coding, which is essentially a broad categorizing of data.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) distinguish coding and categories by saying that categories

represent a more broad term that coded acts are placed within, and during the data

management phase, the researcher is coding each of these acts through the use of open-

coding. Charmaz (2006) stated:

> Coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously
>
> categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data. Coding is the first
>
> step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic
>
> interpretations. (p. 43)

There are various types of coding that are implemented beginning with the initial

coding that enables a researcher to study one's emergent data (Glaser, 1978). There are

various ways to continue coding within the data management and reduction process.

Data reduction begins to narrow the areas into what I am specifically finding, which was

done through the use of grounded theory, and the coding was done incident to incident.

While some researchers choose to code word-by-word or line-by-line, Charmaz (2006)

noted that especially with observational data, "Making comparisons between incidents

likely works better than word-by-word or line-by-line coding, in part because the fieldnotes already consist of your own words" (p. 53).

Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and its methods provide an opportunity for the researcher to have a flexible way of collecting and analyzing data and then constructing theories grounded in the data. Charmaz (2006) stated "Grounded theory methods foster seeing your data in fresh ways and exploring your ideas about the data through early analytic writing." She continued "By adopting grounded theory methods you can direct, manage, and streamline your data collection, and moreover, construct an original analysis of your data" (p.2).

By utilizing grounded theory, data can be reduced because while coding could be an endless process, since it is constantly being compared to that which the researcher has already collected, it helps contain the findings. The benefit of this process is that errors during the early stages in coding are eventually canceled out as the results continue to be compared. In line with the constant comparative method, my interview schedule of questions that I generated was refined along the way as certain areas emerged that were previously unexpected. In other words, grounded theory enables a researcher to adapt "on the fly" in a way that would not be possible with other approaches in research.

Charmaz (2006) noted that focused coding (such as coding by incidents) enables a researcher to "separate, sort, and synthesize large amounts of data" (p. 11), and that it also "aids you in discovering patterns and contrasts" (p. 55). She stated that grounded theorists often follow Blumer's (1969) depiction of sensitizing concepts, which give a researcher "initial ideas to pursue and sensitize you to ask particular kinds of questions about your topic."  (p. 16).

In my effort to accurately represent the scene and the participants, I wanted to rely heavily on the members' words and language. This can be attained by using in vivo coding, which refers to specific terms or words that participant's use. Charmaz (2006) stated "In vivo codes help us to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself." She continued "Using these terms provides a great opportunity to understand implicit meanings and actions but also to make comparisons between data and with your emerging categories" (p. 55). Thus, in vivo codes enabled me to achieve a deeper understanding of what was happening by relying on language or terms from the source – the participants.

During data collection and analysis, the researcher must discern at what point saturation arrives. Saturation reflects a time in which no new data is being observed or that the researcher is no longer surprised by any of the new data since it is able to fit into categories that have already been created. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted that at this point, the researcher has gone "about as far as the analyst can go in 'explaining' the data. The next phase is the construction of interpretive claims" (p. 222). The following two chapters will reflect these interpretive claims, but I would now like to point attention to the research context and its participants.

### Organizational Context and Participants

Private University (Private U) is more than 150 years old and is a private, mid-sized, southwestern university that has been playing collegiate athletics for over 100 years. They are a member of the NCAA Division 1-A athletic association and a member of a major conference in which they field multiple athletic teams. Although the school has many different teams that play a variety of sports which could be analyzed, this study

examined the men's basketball team. The transition that is experienced at the collegiate level could be analyzed on any of the teams that compete at the Division 1-A level, but the events that the basketball team experienced provided the impetus for selecting that specific team.

In the summer of 2003, a Private U basketball team member was killed, which resulted in the arrest of another player on the team who was later charged with murder. The situation continued to unravel when it was found that the deceased player had been paid illegally by the coaching staff to be at the university. Further, many additional, disturbing facts were brought to light following the athlete's death. These facts eventually led to sanctions against the team from the NCAA.

The head basketball coach at Private U at the time intentionally lied to all constituents from his players to the administration and alumni, as well as to the media about key facts in the case. He attempted to smear the deceased athlete's name by accusing him of dealing drugs, which is how the coach accounted for the athlete paying his school tuition and fees (which were paid in cash by the player). The head coach was caught on tape by one of the former assistant coaches saying:

> Our whole thing right now, we can get out of this. Reasonable doubt is there's nobody right now that can say that we paid the player (name removed). Because he's dead. So what we have to do is create the reasonable doubt…I think the thing we want to do — and you think about this — if there's a way we can create the perception that the player may have been a (drug) dealer…even if we had to kind of make some things look a little better than they are, that can save us.

The former head coach also attempted to use current players on the team by suggesting that players tell investigators they had previously seen the deceased player with a "tray" of drugs and with a roll of $100 bills. The coach said the athlete couldn't deny the allegations because he was dead (AP, 08/17/03). While this may read like a soap opera, these events all actually happened and damaged the image of Private U as an upstanding, Christian university.

As a result of this information becoming public, the coach and his entire staff were dismissed from the university. Additionally, Private U worked with the NCAA to enable any current players who wished to transfer schools the opportunity to do so without penalty since typically an athlete must sit out of competition for one full year if they transfer schools. Three of the current players chose to do this and the lone recruit that the coaching staff had signed that year did as well. It should be noted that the players who chose to leave were the top performers on the team and all three transferred to very competitive schools in excellent conferences. Two of the three would go on to be named Player of the Year in their conferences during their senior season.

The entire ordeal left the university in a very difficult situation that required image repair since Private U has consistently promoted and portrayed itself as a "family." It would be a monumental task to overcome not only the current perception that Private U had suffered nationally, but also to overcome some of the sanctions that would later be dealt to the school's basketball program both from the internal investigation and the NCAA investigation that would follow. Private U needed to find someone who was both

reputable in the national eye and willing to take on the immense challenge that he would inherit.

Private U interviewed and hired a young, energetic coach within the same month of the former coach's dismissal. Coach Blue was the son of a respected collegiate coach and his selection was lauded nationally by the media. Though Coach Blue only had one year of head coaching experience, the media noted his integrity (and that of his father), and the repair process for Private U was underway. It would take more than integrity to turn around the program though as the basketball team Coach Blue inherited had only a few returning players. Further, the majority of players who remained were still there because they had for the most part not found better options. However, Coach Blue quickly assembled a staff of equally upbeat coaches, none of whom were older than 35 years of age, and they began the rebuilding process.

The first two seasons did not offer much in terms of wins and losses and the coaches even had to have an "open-tryout" at Private U's recreation center for any intramural players to help fill their roster (they did select one player who actually played a significant number of minutes that season and received an athletic "letter" for his effort). The NCAA had decided that they would agree to Private U's self-imposed sanctions, which were quite significant, while they reviewed the case.

A press release from Private U's President noted that within 19 days of the internal investigation, the school had self-imposed sanctions of major, if not unprecedented, severity. These sanctions included: a two-year probation period in which the team would file written reports throughout the season of all compliance-related activity with "checks" coordinated with the conference as well as the school; no post-

season play during the '03-'04 season, including the conference tournament; and the previously-mentioned immediate release of any scholarship player along with the president's assistance in working with the NCAA and the conference to obtain a waiver from transfer restrictions. However, the president would later add:

> We knew at the time I imposed these sanctions that they were significant and could be devastating. They were the right thing to do. I said at the time I imposed these sanctions, however, they were only preliminary and, after the investigation was complete, I may impose additional sanctions. Having completed the internal investigation, I am now imposing these additional sanctions. (University Press Release, 02/26/04)

As a result of the internal investigation, the president added multiple sanctions for the team including: the total number of scholarships being reduced from 13 to 9 during the '04-'05 season and 13 to 12 in the '05-'06 season; expense paid recruiting trips reduced from the NCAA-allowed 12 to 8 for '04-'05 and 12 to 9 for '05-'06; and the number of coaches permitted to recruit off-campus would be reduced from three to two during summer evaluation periods for the next two years.

During this two year period of time during the '03-'04 and '04-'05 seasons, I got to know the coaching staff and saw their tireless efforts to turn around Private U's program. However, these self-imposed sanctions by the University truly hamstrung the coaching staff in their rebuilding efforts. One asset that Private U was able to offer a recruit more than most other schools was immediate playing time because the majority of

players that stayed with the team were only with the team during the coaching staff's first season.  In fact, only one player would remain for two years after Coach Blue's arrival from the players that he had inherited.  Even though the real opportunity for immediate playing time in a major conference existed for prospective players, recruiting was still difficult for the coaching staff.  As a result of the sanctions, they were neither able to bring in many prospects to campus to see Private U, nor were they able to have as many coaches on the road to visit or watch prospective players as other schools.

The first two teams led by Coach Blue and staff exceeded most rational people's expectations by competing hard each game, though being obviously undermanned in both talent and depth.  Thus, their seasons ended with few victories.  However, the third year under this staff offered excitement, because Private U would have depth for the first time under Coach Blue as they were back to 12 of the typical 13 scholarships.  Coach Blue noted "Now, some of those 12 wouldn't be recruited by us today and some aren't really guys that have this conference-type of talent," he said.  "But at least we have enough to scrimmage if a guy or two gets injured.  More than anything, it was basically a fresh start because they were our guys."  By this comment Coach Blue was alluding to the fact that he and his coaching staff were now responsible for all of the players on the team at that time except for one remaining player, Tony Mack.

*Tony Mack*

Only one player remained on the '05-'06 Private U team who had experienced the tragedy first-hand, and his name was Tony Mack.  He had just completed his freshman season when the tragedy occurred and three years ("but it seemed a LOT longer," said Mack) later he was now entering his senior and final season at Private U – his third

season under the current coach.  Tony was named one of the team captains heading into

his final campaign and was a respected veteran by the other players and coaches.  Coach

Caff said "If Tony hadn't been who he is, he wouldn't still be here.  He bought into us

and we bought into him and now he's one of our best leaders."

As one of only two seniors (the other had transferred in from a junior college,

which is why Mack is the only player who had been with the '02-'03 team) on a team

with six freshman, the coaching staff desired for him to not only be a major contributor

on the court in his final season, but also for him to be a leader off the court as well.  They

wanted him to assist the younger players in their assimilation to the university and to life

as a student-athlete.  Mack could help integrate the "rookies" as Coach Blue referred to

the freshman players.

Coach Blue and the rest of the coaching staff needed Mack as much off the court

as on it during his senior season.  Throughout each interview his name inevitably came

up when teammates were referencing who helped their transition process to a new place.

Mack had been named team captain and was regarded as the team leader by most

everyone, but the announcement from the NCAA the summer before his senior season

was almost too much for him to handle.

After two years of reviewing Private U's case, the NCAA had finally come to a

conclusion – that further punishment was necessary.  Prior to the beginning of the '05-'06

season, Private U had nearly fulfilled their self-imposed penalties, and it was unknown

whether the NCAA would find further punishment necessary with the results from their

ongoing investigation.  The head of the committee positively noted Private U's self-

punishment in their review and stated that the self-imposed sanctions had possibly saved

the program from the "death penalty," which he said had been considered by the committee. The death penalty would have meant that Private U would have no longer been allowed to have a program – at least for a certain amount of time.

There were a few additional sanctions from the NCAA that included an extension of the team's probation period through the 2010 season; an extension of the paid recruiting visits for an additional year (making it three years total that Private U would have their visits reduced from the 12 visit maximum to 9 visits); and a few additional smaller penalties. However, there was one additional sanction for Private U that was a devastating blow and "something totally unheard of and irrational", according to one person associated with the program – the loss of Private U's entire non-conference season.

The team would not be able to play any exhibition or pre-season games, and the 16 non-conference games on the schedule would have to be canceled. Thus, aside from literally losing half of their season from this announcement, the team would also enter into conference play with no actual game experience. Since Private U currently had a 13 member squad that featured six freshmen who had not only never played together, but also had never played a collegiate game at all, this was a substantial blow. While youth would have been a factor throughout the season anyway, it was magnified as a result of the NCAA finding.

Private U would still not have had their full complement of scholarships until the '06-'07 season, but they had been able to fill most of their bench with scholarship players for the first time under this coaching staff. Consequently, instead of Tony Mack's senior season being a reward for his perseverance through his experiences at Private U, he had

now been relegated to half of a senior season.  This was not only a season in which he was to be team captain and show his leadership on and off the court, it was also a chance to excel and gain exposure for a chance to continue playing basketball at the next level.

Tony Mack was on track to graduate and had already submitted his application to graduate school so regardless of basketball, his future was looking bright.  However, for many players, their existence on a university campus revolves completely around their participation in their sport, and in their identity as a collegiate athlete.  Thus, the NCAA's announcement that Private U had just lost half of their season was not welcome news to put it mildly.  Further, instead of working out many of the problems that come from playing competitively as a team against lesser competition in the non-conference schedule, Private U and their young team would begin their season (and their careers for six of the players) against a rigorous schedule of conference opponents.

Private U would not begin their season until January on the road against Tech, which boasted one of the all-time greatest coaches in NCAA history as far as winning games was concerned.  Coach Riv said that "We felt like Daniel being thrown into the lion's den."  The freshmen had entered Private U during the summer so that they could gain experience with the team system, with the coaches and other players, and with the campus.  Now, all of that preparation only meant that the players would be ready for the first three months of the "season" in which they would do nothing but practice.  Once the season began, each day offered more of the same for the Private U players: sprints, routine drills that they could do blindfolded, and scrimmaging against their teammates.

While Private U's team from the two previous seasons dealt more directly with the emotional aftermath of the tragedy and the resulting turbulent transition of players,

the '05-'06 team faced different challenges. The current coaches and players were faced with the reality of the NCAA punishment stemming from an incident in which they had no role, and the result was a mixture of sadness and boredom. Again, when these players' whole world is based on their status as an athlete and that status is essentially taken away from them, it makes more sense that the players would react in this manner. I heard reactions that ranged from "depressing" to having a player say to me, "I'm grieving, man." One would hope that a tragic murder and the loss of participating in a basketball game would not be so easily equated, but this was the reality for the '05-'06 Private U team.

Other than Tony Mack, none of the current players knew the deceased player, the arrested player, or anything outside of what the media had reported about the event that led to Private U's current condition. All they knew was that the game that they loved and the playing time that they had been promised had just been taken from them in an instant. "We're getting punished and disciplined for something we didn't have nothing to do with," said one player. The unusual predicament for Private U brought a circumstance that enabled a rare insight into the life of a team at a unique time in their development.

The NCAA's ruling brought about a crisis of sorts for the coaching staff, and while it was certainly a different type of crisis than two years prior, once again the staff was forced to deal with the potential of players leaving the program, negative recruiting taking place against Private U, and many other potential problems. One of the hardest hits to the squad was that they would miss the actual experience of playing together as a team against an opponent. "Practice is only able to prepare you so much, because you see, game speed is just a different gear and that's just a hard thing to create…even in a

scrimmage," said Coach Caff.  In addition to being in shape for the regular season, the importance of the team gaining experience during games is essential prior to when the conference season begins.

*Rationale for team selection*

There were many reasons why the basketball team was chosen for this study in addition to the added interest that would be generated from conducting a study with the team that experienced the fallout of a murder and unprecedented sanctions.  For example, when thinking about the importance of cohesion, it is easily recognizable that there is a great amount of teamwork required in basketball, which separates it from some other collegiate sports, such as golf.  While each player's score is combined to form a team score in golf, the players are actually performing as individuals.

There are also elements in a basketball team that separate it from other interdependent sports that I could have examined.  While a football team would certainly fit the interdependent aspect, there are 80 players on a Division 1-A team on scholarship alone, and that does not include the numerous "walk-on," non-scholarship players.  This number would have made it extremely difficult to truly observe the team's development due to numbers since most teams typically carry 105 players when walk-ons are added.  Further, there are more sub-groups within a football team as players are divided daily into workouts and meetings based solely on their side of the football (offense or defense) and further by their positions.  On a basketball team, the group is small enough that every player knows every other player and they are rarely divided up into positions since more players play multiple positions in basketball.

As a result of individuals learning more than one position, players become interchangeable for one another at positions aside from their primary role.  Other than baseball, which has utility players on a team that can often play more than one position, basketball is quite rare in that a player could be asked to learn up to three positions, such as the point guard, shooting guard, and small forward positions.  These individuals are often called "swing" players.  They must effortlessly step into the game at any time into any of the three roles and unlike in baseball (except in the rarest of occasions), it is quite possible that they will play all three positions in one game.  Certainly not every basketball player has the skill sets to play multiple positions, but those who do can contribute greatly to the team's success.

Basketball is also the sport that has the highest amount of participation as far as pure quantity of programs nationally in the NCAA among its members.  Out of the 1024 schools that make up the NCAA, 994 of them have a men's basketball team (1022 out 1024 have women's teams).  No other men's sport has more than 900 schools that field competitive teams.  While this is not reason alone to study basketball over another sport, it adds popularity to the reasons mentioned above that further legitimate this study.

Finally, and most importantly, the primary reason that the men's team served as the context of study rather than the women's team was due to my access to the team.  I was granted access by the men's coaching staff which I explained earlier in this chapter, and I am uncertain whether I would have had the same opportunity with the women's team.  Further, I had more access to the men's team because quite simply, I am a man and this meant that I was not restricted from a certain area in which the team would be.  For example, if I were to have used the women's team (assuming access was granted), it

would have hindered my observation in that I would not have been able to be in their

locker room.

The final portion of this chapter is to give a brief explanation of the make-up of

the team and the participants of the study.  A men's collegiate basketball team is only

allowed 13 scholarship players.  While many teams have a couple of "walk-on," non-

scholarship players, those who participate as "walk-ons" are required to pay for their

education on their own or through scholarships apart from basketball.  A team may

practice more or less than 15 players, but that number does represent the maximum

number of athletes permitted by the NCAA to be in uniform during a game.

The Private U basketball team for the '05-06 season consisted of 12 scholarship

players and one walk-on player (who actually attends the Private U on a football

scholarship and competed in both sports) to nearly fill the full complement of roster spots

for games.  Two of the scholarship players were brought to campus as "walk-ons" yet

they were able to attain a scholarship during the '05-'06 season.  The rest of the team was

comprised of those in non-playing roles: the head coach, three assistant coaches, and two

other "coaches" who have different titles, but essentially serve as additional coaches.

The latter two "coaches" have job descriptions that include putting together video footage

of recruits and opposing teams, scheduling team travel, etc.  Thus, there are a total of 13

players and 6 coaches who directly participated in this study.  Other indirect participants

that I had contact with ranged from the team's trainer, the strength and conditioning

coach, the graduate assistant coach, the student managers, and the team's academic

advisor.  Following my immersion within this team for an entire season, I left the scene

and I will now present the construction of my "interpretive claims" (Lindlof and Taylor,

2002, p. 222) in which I address the research questions that guided this study.

CHAPTER III

COHESION AND CONVERGENCE

*"…belonging precedes believing.  We try and consistently show that with our actions, whether it's having them out to our homes, making sure they know they can come to our offices, any type of outside of basketball activity.  The more they feel a part of the team, and that we're all on the same team, the more they will buy into our concepts and game plans."*

*-Private U Assistant Coach Armstrong*

As mentioned in the above quotation, the idea of belonging and becoming a cohesive team is crucial in the eyes of the coaches at Private U.  In this chapter, I will address the first research question: How does cohesion become communicatively manifest on the team?  In the following chapter, the second research question will be addressed: How does leadership help manage cohesion on the team?  In order to assess the first research question I will highlight two different areas of research.  I will examine Private U's team in light of past research on social and task cohesion, and then look at Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory.  One of the most intriguing aspects of this study was the manipulation of time; team cohesion was a desired goal from the coaching staff, but they were bound by a finite period of time for this development to occur.

## Cohesion

Carron and Brawley (2000) stated "Historically, cohesion has been considered to be the most important small group variable" (p. 89). They continued "To understand the nature of groups, we must gain a better understanding of the nature of group cohesion" (p. 103). There are numerous definitions of cohesion, but the overall meaning is essentially the same in each as researchers focus on the idea of a group or team coming together.

Bollen and Hoyle (1990) defined cohesion as "an individual's sense of belonging to a particular group and his or her feelings of morale associated with membership in groups" (p. 482). Others, such as Carron, et al. (1998) defined cohesion as "a dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united…" (p. 213). Carron and Spink (1995) said cohesion is a cognition that exists in the minds of individual group members. The idea of a team "sticking together" or of an individual feeling more closeness to other team members is a constant in most definitions of cohesion, and these are concepts that were very relevant to this study.

Team cohesiveness has a rich research history and has been studied in a variety of ways. One of the most commonly explored topics is the linkage between cohesion and performance and most researchers have noted a positive relationship. Martens and Peterson (1971), who conducted one of the first empirical examinations of the relationship between cohesion and performance, indicated that highly cohesive teams were more successful than teams with low levels of cohesion. While this correlation has not been definitively resolved, Mullen and Copper (1994) stated "most subsequent research on group cohesiveness has tended to accept this description" (p. 210).

Matheson, Mathes and Murray (1995) stated that within sports, there has been a specific interest on the "influence of cohesion, i.e., teamwork, unity, togetherness, on performance success. This work has demonstrated that the cohesion-performance relationship appears to be moderated by the structure of the team" (p. 38). In their article, they distinguish between interacting teams and co-acting teams.

The distinction that Matheson, Mathes, and Murray (1995) make between types of teams is an important one to mention because it highlights the differing task characteristics of some sports teams, which can increase or decrease the importance of cohesion within that team. For example, in chapter II it was mentioned that basketball is a highly interdependent sport. As a result, the importance of having a cohesive team is believed to be much higher in this scenario than it would on a team within a co-acting sport.

Examples of co-acting sports that are played at the collegiate level are golf, tennis, equestrian, gymnastics, wrestling, track and field, and swimming and diving. While there is a team component at the collegiate level for all of these sports, each of them accrues team scores based on the performances of their team members' individual efforts. Therefore, though they operate under the team name, in actuality, the athletes are operating very much as individuals, which will decrease the necessity and importance of cohesion in their performance.

Another example of a study concerning cohesion in sports is found in Bloom and Stevens' (2002) examination of collegiate equestrian, which is "generally considered to be an individual sport, (but) at the intercollegiate level of competition points are awarded for team and individual performance…" (p. 3). As a result of more studies looking into

team cohesiveness in athletics, Carron, Widmeyer, and Brawley (1985) proposed a model that measured cohesion in sports teams, and developed the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ), an 18-item inventory to specifically measure cohesion in sports teams. It included items such as "Our team would like to spend time together in the off-season," and the team member would rate the item from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (9). Cohesion questionnaires could be used for a multitude of teams or groups, but the GEQ developed by Caron, et al. is geared toward athletic teams. For example, the questionnaire included references to the "off-season."

Due to prior knowledge of the GEQ, I kept many of the items in mind when observing Private U's team. When team members talked about the importance of being a teammate and the team working as a cohesive unit, it was apparent that they truly believed that these things were important and that they were not merely spouting out frequently rehearsed clichés such as "You're only as strong as your weakest link" (though two team members did use that statement). Thus, while many of the players would agree with the above cliché, there was genuineness in the way they discussed their team camaraderie and its importance. Regardless of the age classification on the team, or the status (starter/non-starter) of the team member, every guy was seen equally (according to the players) as a teammate. Separating what the players felt I wanted to hear and actually observing their actions was the benefit of my extended time with the team. While I observed instances that would contradict the statement that each player is perceived and/or treated the same as any other, I found the statement to be mostly true throughout my time. One of the freshman players said:

When I think about my team, I think about the fact that these guys are now my family. I know that word gets overused when you hear players talk, but I really believe it. I guess it's just hard being away from home...sometimes I just…I don't know…I need these guys, you know what I'm sayin'? They're my brothers.

In their popular book, *In Search of Excellence*, Peters and Waterman (1988) described that employees of "excellent" organizations often use the family metaphor to describe their work environment. Recruits are peppered with the "family" label from the time they step foot on Private U's campus. The school at-large is frequently referred to by all constituents as the Private U family. Further, the coaching staff has welcomed the use of the "family" term with regard to their program.

There's no question that we want kids to feel like we're a big family. The thing is – every coach in the nation would tell you that – where we try to differentiate ourselves is that we actually try to live that word out and not just say it. Don't just talk the talk, but walk the walk, right? Well, we want these recruit's moms and dads to know that they aren't sending their kid off to a place where nobody cares. Again, this isn't just for a nice recruiting pitch, though it does help our recruiting…see, that's the effect of our true action to be a family for these guys. Look at our foreign kids – do you think they can go home for Thanksgiving? No, so we make sure that they're going to spend it with another guy on the team or a guy on the staff. If we show that we really are looking out for our guys, then our guys will tell that to recruits, and you know that players are the best recruiters. So

we can tell them with a clean heart, 'Come join our family!'

One of the most enjoyable and heartwarming experiences I was able to watch unfold was the arrival and the assimilation of a touted recruit from overseas nicknamed the Governor, and to view his development as a person, student, player, and teammate.

*Governor*

A unique feature of this team is that of the scholarship players on Private U's team, three of them are from foreign countries. One of them, the Governor, was Coach Blue's first recruit to commit to play for Private U. Both of his parents are deceased and at the time of this writing, he still had not been back to his home country since he came to the United States in January '05. Further, he does not anticipate any such travel until at least after graduation. When he uses the term family, you realize that the idea that this term is just a cliché quickly fades. The coaching staff and his fellow players have not only had to become his home away from home as they are for many of the players, but they literally have been his family.

He got the nickname "The Governor" (or "Gov" as he will be referred to from now on) because of all of his friendships on campus. "He runs the school, it seems. Walk around with him for a day and see how much fun you have – everyone that passes him says 'hi' to him," said Head Coach Blue, who gave him the nickname. "He's the only guy on our team without a cell phone so he's actually looking up as he walks to his classes and people just yell "Gov!" and he's beaming," Blue continued. Gov appears to agree with this notion as he was quoted in one newspaper as saying "I've made a lot of friends here," Gov said. "A lot of people know me."

When Gov arrived, he had recently overcome his fourth bout with malaria ("Oh yeah, everyone has malaria over there" he would later tell me), and at 7 feet tall, he weighed just under 200 pounds. When he arrived, the coaching staff had three people pick him up at the airport and they took him to a local fast-food chain where they ordered him a triple cheeseburger – Gov thought it was for all of them to share. Nine months later as the '05-'06 season approached, Gov weighed 240 pounds and as I now type, he weighs almost 260 pounds and the staff is now refining his weight so that it is "good weight" and not just weight, which initially was the sole objective. However, this weight gain has not gone without its challenges. For example, Gov did not understand United States currency (I rode in a car with him as a friend explained the amounts of the different coins in his hand) and it was challenging for him to stretch his stipend money that the players received each month. The players are given a check that is to cover their expenses for the entire month, which includes their rent, bills, and food. However, Gov would visit fast food chains daily when he first arrived and ran out of money before the next check was set to arrive the first two months. Needless to say, he quickly discovered the term "buffet" and the neon sign from these establishments were the places that became the "X" on the map for Gov's eating destinations.

As I watched how the team helped Gov assimilate into American culture over the past year and a half, I saw the best description of the term "family" at work. One day, a guy would be telling Gov about the different values of each coin and the next day he would be shown how to play an on-line video game. There were many things that Gov's teammates realized they took for granted. Another Private U assistant coach echoed the family sentiment:

He (Gov) really is a sponge just absorbing everything. He's a really bright kid, but I think maybe it was even better for our other new guys than Gov. When they looked at him and saw a guy with no parents and a million miles from everything that he knows, it not only made them want to help him, but it also made them realize that they almost couldn't be homesick. It was like, not allowed when you're measuring your own situation up to Gov's. So our guys, even the freshman, somewhat took a big brother approach with him and helped him adjust. When they did that, it made them forget about the tough adjustments that they thought they were experiencing. Well…and not just Gov, but also once the season started with what happened with Plant.

*Plant*

Plant is a very happy-go-lucky, loveable guy who actually had the opposite problem of Gov. When he first arrived, he needed to lose all of the weight that Gov needed to gain. Through a lot of hard work and a prescribed diet from the staff, Plant dropped over 60 pounds. He transferred from a southern school in a major conference where he tired of listening to the head coach yell at him every day. He began searching for a new location to call home and came across the Private U situation.

When I first came to visit, it was exactly what I had heard from my old coach about being close-knit and whatnot. But, for some reason, he (Coach Blue) just seemed more real about it – much more genuine. I took a chance and left the

comforts of being closer to home and it's been a great situation. Of course, it turned out that I'd end up with my family close anyway.

Plant is from New Orleans, Louisiana and it just so happened that during late August at the beginning of the '05-'06 school year, Plant's family would be one of the many displaced families as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Plant's parents, along with three brothers and two sisters moved to the town where Private U is located. Including his extended family, there were 12 relatives total who arrived in early September. Plant told one local paper that he "felt an enormous sense of joy and relief when his family drove up." However, Plant's paternal grandfather died in a New Orleans hospital after the hurricane hit, and this loss was extremely hard on Plant. He said:

> That whole week until my family arrived was a blur. I just watched tv and tried to talk to my coaches and teammates and find out what we could do for my family. Between hearing about my grandfather and my family showing up it was just highs and lows, man. My sister said that everyone making them feel so welcome, it was like they had come to a second home. Some churches really helped us and it just further showed me that Private U had been the right choice for me – even the town was like an extended family to me.

When I prompted Plant to expand on the impact his teammates have had on him he replied:

At my old school, I never saw the guys outside of the gym.  Most of the guys I

never even saw them outside of practice and games because they had their own

lives, they did their own thing and had their own set of friends.  I think that on this

team – it's just so different – we do most all things together, you know?

Plant echoed some of these sentiments prior to the season-opening game when he

told a local newspaper "On a lot of teams, you spend enough time together to become

buddies," said Private U player Plant. "But we've had enough time together to become

best friends. I've really relied on my teammates' support after my family moved here

(from New Orleans) after the hurricane.

<div style="text-align:center">**Social and Task Cohesion**</div>

The stories of Gov and Plant really confirmed what Bollen and Hoyle (1990)

stated when they defined cohesion as "an individual's sense of belonging to a particular

group…"  In fact, the idea of belonging is something that resonates deeply with the

coaching staff.  Coach Blue has borrowed a phrase from an author named Brian McLaren

(2002) who primarily writes about Christian life and who stated in one of his books that

"Belonging precedes believing."  As mentioned in the previous chapter, in vivo coding

was used and Coach Blue's repetition of this phrase provided a code when he stated:

If guys can feel a part of something, if they can really feel like they belong, then

they will not only begin to believe in the idea of team goals – which is really

saying something in this generation – but also, when they feel like they belong,

they think that with the help of the other guys that are a part of that team, they can

do anything…that's the thing we've talked about before, belonging precedes

believing.  We think that these guys connecting with one another is imperative to

them playing well together.

*Belonging precedes believing (social cohesion)*

Coach Blue's statement regarding this sense of belonging that he desires his

players to experience is captured by the term social cohesion.  There have been

contrasting conclusions among researchers about whether a team's social cohesion will

lead to successful task completion.  Katzenbach and Smith (2003) would tend to agree

with Coach Blue's sentiment as they wrote that the primary difference in teams that

achieve the best results is the "degree of commitment, particularly how deeply committed

the members are to one another.  Such commitments go well beyond civility and

teamwork.  Each genuinely helps the others to achieve both personal and professional

goals" (p. 65).  At Private U, there were intentional efforts by the coaching staff to build

this commitment to one another or to build this overall sense of belonging.

When asked about time off the court together, the players shared many examples

and a few stood out.  All but one player mentioned going to a coach's home for dinner

and viewing a sporting event such as a boxing match or a football game.  Many of the

other players mentioned how the team would go to church together at the beginning of

each school year, and/or how the team had Bible studies each week led by the coaching

staff.  Even Gov, who is of a different faith than what Private U claims attended the Bible

studies each week and said:

Basketball is not your whole life, so you need to know about each other. Some

people are different off the court than they are on it and you always find out some

of those things at our Bible studies.

Tony agreed about the importance of the time spent with teammates off the court

and the positive effect it could have on the team as a whole when he noted:

We had Bible study every Sunday night and kinda grew spiritually as a team

together and fed off each other to see where each guy is coming from and how

they are spiritually. I think that helped with our overall chemistry as well because

we knew each other better.

Interestingly, one of the most prevalent responses for where guys hang out

together off the court is in the locker room. While many collegiate athletes begin to see

their favorite sport and hobby shift into more of a job because of the required time and

energy they must dedicate to it, one would think that the players would want to vanish

from the arena as soon as practice ends. However, because of a major remodeling and

upgrade of the locker room, it now includes five flat-screen televisions, a Playstation at

each player's locker, leather couches and a massage chair. In addition, there are two

computers so that the players can study or write papers (theoretically, at least – usually

these were used for e-mails, surfing the Internet, or playing computer video games).

Because of all of these new amenities, there was little need for the guys to leave their

comfortable surroundings. Coach Armstrong said:

We'll talk to some of the leaders on the team and encourage them to hang out

with or talk to a guy that may be on the fringes more, take him to dinner or get a

group of guys and go to a movie, but really, a lot of that bonding takes place

before and after practice in the locker room.

Assistant Coach Ruff stated that it is important to keep the guys around each other as much as possible because the more identity that they have as teammates, the more that that cohesion will carry over onto the court. He described:

Most of the off-court stuff we do is a continuation of the on-court. We're a group

and we need to present this. When we have a booster club meeting, we invite

players. When there is a football game and we can go up and eat lunch or dinner

before the games with donors, we go and we bring the players. When there is a

community service opportunity at a school or a hospital, we take our players. It's

more like, we're Private U basketball and we need to present ourselves as a group.

Put on your jersey, suck it up and let's do it. Almost to the point where teammate

orientation is enforced around the clock, 24/7, 365.

When I asked Coach Ruff if the coaching staff saw actual benefits from some of these functions, particularly if the team may feel forced by the coaches to do them, he replied:

Even though sometimes they might be saying something that they really don't think on the inside initially, in the process of acting like it, they really do start to believe it. Causing them to be a Private U team outside of the gym, whether they believed it or not, they kept saying it and acting like it, and then, they actually started to be it. Maybe that sounds manipulative, but I think it's just finding things for them to do together as a team and through that time together, friendships develop…you know, when JC (a freshman player) got here, I'm not sure he really thought that much of Harrison, but now they've been together for a year and they've figured out 'hey, he's a good guy and I like to hang out with him. I think I want to room with him next year.' Through the course of the year this team did develop a team personality and a team identity. There are some things over the past year where I think that, without even consciously knowing it or writing it down, they've developed 'Okay, this is who we are,' and I think that's good.

There are certainly challenges that arise with a philosophy that encourages teammates to become close off the court. As one assistant coach noted, "You can't force guys to like each other." There will be certain issues that arise simply because of cultural or spiritual differences, let alone personality differences. Considering that there were three international players on the team, not everyone had been socialized into American norms in the same manner. While Coach Ruff's belief is that guys can be socialized into this sense of belonging, this positive change does not always come easily or without resistance.

For example, at the beginning and ending of each practice, Private U says a prayer. Since it is a Christian school, the prayer is obviously directed to Jesus, but not all of the players believe in Christianity. Moreover, Gov is a practicing Muslim, so during the prayer he had his hand in the middle with everyone showing solidarity, but his eyes were open and he was frequently looking off into the stands rather than listening. Thus, while the coaching staff is trying to build a ritual into their practices of praying together because they believe it can get the team closer, perhaps this could have an adverse effect by making some players want to distance themselves from portions of what the team represents. Hardy, Eys, and Carron (2005) found:

> …under certain circumstances, increasing social cohesion could lead to the formation of cliques or social circles within the team…the construct of cohesion is considered to represent unity within the group as a totality. Thus, it would be a contradiction in terms to have a high socially cohesive, clique-filled team. (p.178)

Despite a well-intended goal of pursuing a "We" approach instead of an "I" approach with regard to the team, there may inevitably be some bumps in the road for the team to encounter. Consequently, some researchers have found that achieving cohesion within the actual assigned tasks should be the primary goal, and further, that this task cohesion will lead to greater success and goal achievement regardless of what the team members think of one another socially. Moreover, Hardy, Eys and Carron (2005) noted that "despite the almost universal belief – and supporting evidence – that cohesion is a highly desirable group property, a contrary perspective also has been advanced" (p.167).

They discussed Buys' work (1978a, 1978b) which highlighted deindividuation and groupthink as possible negative outcomes from social cohesion and therefore believe that task cohesion is what will ultimately lead to team success.

*Winning makes people happy (task cohesion)*

Carless and DePaola (2000) concur as they found task cohesion rather than social cohesion to be the determining dimension with regard to the impact cohesion has on performance. They stated "Improved group performance is more likely to accrue from targeting behaviors that enhance commitment to the group task rather than behavior that increases people's liking for one another" (p. 72). Widmeyer, et al. (1985) stated task cohesiveness is the extent of "motivation towards achieving the organization's goals and objectives" (p. 17). For Private U, the team's task, as it is at every school they compete against, is to win basketball games. Coach Caff described:

> Look, what is it? The line – 'Winning cures everything, or all things'…winning makes people happy? Let's go with that…winning makes people happy – players, coaches, and fans. I want our guys to like each other and I think it can help them on the court, but I'm interested in "W's," (wins) and if that means I've got to play the biggest loner on the team rather than the most popular guy on the team because he has a beautiful shot and I know he is going to make it in the clutch, I'm playing the loner every time. Because you know what, after he hits that shot, every other guy is going to have him on their shoulders and going crazy over him – winning makes people happy.

However, in the midst of a losing season with fans (fairly or unfairly) questioning everything from specific coaching moves to the coach's overall competence, the coaching staff is frequently challenged to go back to the proverbial drawing board. The tone of the practices shifted depending on the outcome of the previous game. The coaches lived and died with each result. After one loss, Coach Blue e-mailed me because we hadn't spoken in two days with the comment "Sorry…I've been in mourning – nothing that a win at Smokey East can't cure though, right?!" The e-mail "Time sent" log read 1:34am, and I knew immediately that it had been sent from the office and not flippantly from his home before he went to bed. The coaches were determined to figure out how to achieve task cohesion so that it could lead to more victories for Private U. They regularly stay at the basketball gym (where there offices are also located) until 1-2 in the morning. "Our goal is to have this place staffed and open from 7am-1am," said Coach Armstrong who continued, "But you can usually find someone up here during a few of those off-hours, too. We're working hard to figure out the right combinations to get us wins."

As I examined the practice schedule for each day of the '05-'06 season, there are many similarities from day to day. Each day began with stretching, the zig-zag drill, the man-to-man dribble, the shuffle-and pass drill, etc. Thereafter, changes in the daily schedule takes place based upon which player is matched up with which player or who is scrimmaging on the same teams and who those teams are competing against. When asked about this, Coach Blue said:

Well, the NCAA kind of limits the things that you can do as far as paying for team-building stuff. So, when we do practice plans, a lot of times, we'll do things

where…maybe someone's not playing well. We'll put him on a winning team to help build his confidence. Perhaps it's putting someone who is not going to start with the starters – 'Oh, Coach *does* think I'm a starter' – just little things. One kid might not be going as hard as he needs to so we'll put him against a kid that goes real hard so that will make him go harder. Those are things…people aren't just randomly put on teams, or randomly going against certain people. Everything is done with an intention, a motive, and we try to make it where when you win, you're rewarded, you lose, punishment. So, you know that losing is not acceptable and you strive to win. At the same time, the winners, instead of going and getting a drink, stand and there and clap while the losing team runs lines because eventually, they're going to be running too. That teaches sportsmanship, but more importantly, that we're a team and we're all in it together.

Social and task cohesion are certainly not mutually exclusive. Coach Caff's example of a player making a shot and being carried off on his teammates' shoulders described how social cohesion can even result from task cohesion. Though many players have remarkable individual talent, basketball is a very interdependent sport and the odds are that even if the "loner" makes the winning shot, it was a result of multiple players contributing to make that play successful. For example, a teammate may have seen him come open and completed the pass to him, or a teammate could have freed him by setting a screen by sealing off a defender so that he could shoot it without pressure from the opposing team. Thus, by working together as a unit on the task of making the winning basket, it additionally provides the opportunity for the team to become closer socially as a

result. Granted, there is an obvious counter argument to this example which is, "What if the 'loner' missed the shot?" One way this threat to the team's overall cohesion is deflected is through the use of self-handicapping.

*Self-handicapping*

The term self-handicapping was first suggested by Carron, Prapavessis, and Grove (1994) and Hardy, Eys, and Carron (2005) noted it is used "to represent the strategies people use to proactively protect their self-esteem by providing excuses for forthcoming events by adopting or advocating impediments to success. Carron, et al. (1994) said:

> …individuals in highly cohesive groups…should experience greater pressure to carry out group responsibilities and satisfy the expectations of highly valued teammates…As a result, the need to proactively set out reasons for potential failure (might) be increased. (p. 248)

Private U's team experienced something unprecedented in NCAA history regarding the sanctions that were levied against them which resulted in the loss of their non-conference schedule. Further, they had six freshman and three sophomores out of the thirteen available players, which meant they were an extremely young team. Finally, they played in one of the strongest athletic conferences in the country that routinely has teams competing deep into post-season tournaments.

Each of the listed reasons, as well as some others, served as legitimate reasons for why the '05-'06 Private U team faced an uphill battle…and the coaching staff did their

best to repeat these reasons every opportunity they could to the fan-base and to the media. The self-handicapping by the coaching staff provided opportunities to inoculate the media so the stories would be positive about the team in victory or defeat, as well as giving rationale and perspective to Private U's fans about proper expectations. While the majority of people understood the monumental task Private U faced and were very forgiving of the team's play throughout the season, there was a breaking point for some. On one Private U "fan" message board someone posted "How many excuses are we going to hear about this team?" These "excuses" or self-handicapping began prior to the first game. Coach Blue made numerous statements that could be labeled self-handicapping at his press conference before the team's first game when he said:

> We're still very young and the teams that win are usually the most experienced. We're going into league play with a disadvantage since we haven't played. But I'm very pleased with the way we've progressed in practice.

When asked to address individual players, Coach Blue was quick to compliment their strengths, but was equally quick to temper those comments with an opposing trait, which also served as self-handicapping. For example, when speaking about Keith (a touted freshman), Coach Blue noted "Keith can do things with his athleticism that you can't teach," and then continued by saying "He's developing his strength…" This is how many of the comments were framed so that one could see that Keith is not there yet as a player – he is "developing his strength." Similar statements such as "he's developing his skills" and "he continues to improve" were used in general forms for various players, but

there were other statements that were more specific.  When discussing Gov, Coach Blue

said "Our biggest concern is how he responds in game situations since he's only 18 and

has only played basketball a few years."  Before he closed, Coach Blue said:

> We feel like we've accomplished some good things in practice. But there are
>
> certain things you can't practice like going against the lineups of different
>
> teams…Tech is about to play their 16th game and we're about to play our 1st.
>
> Hopefully, we won't show too many of those first couple game jitters. Otherwise,
>
> those Tech front row fans better keep their hands up or they might get hit in the
>
> head with an errant pass early in the game.

After falling in this first outing, Coach Blue noted in the post-game radio show

"Our layoff didn't seem that bad at the beginning.  We had adrenaline going for us. But

it's obvious these guys need game experience and have to get into game shape."  He

continued, "You're going to have a lot of ups and downs with freshmen in the lineup."

This type of self-handicapping was evident throughout the season as Coach Blue gently

reminded fans that his "rookies," as he would refer to them at times, were improving with

each game of experience.  He said numerous times in both public and private that the best

thing about freshmen is that they become sophomores.

The trumpeting of youth and inexperience was a common theme that continued

throughout the season.  I believe that this self-handicapping protected the team from

some possible interpersonal problems between teammates. As Coach Blue couched

mistakes by individuals as being mistakes made by the coaching staff rather than the

players, such as putting a young player in a situation he wasn't ready for, Coach Blue

created a way of deflecting blame from his players.  Through the use of this self-

handicapping strategy, I believe that both task and social cohesion were preserved as the

season continued.  As losses mounted for Private U, the strains that most teams would

experience to their team cohesion did not occur or at least frustration did not boil over as

it may have had this strategy not been used.

Chansler, Swamidass, and Cammann (2003) stated that group cohesiveness is the

primary affective dimension of social integration.  When examining Private U, it was

interesting to note their emphasis on social integration for the incoming players, and since

there were six freshman on the '05-'06 squad, there were multiple individuals to observe.

Private U had 89 days from the time the NCAA officially allowed a team to begin

practice and when their first game occurred.  Most teams had already played between 12-

15 games at that point, which meant that Private U had an inordinate amount of time

together before officially competing.  Coach Blue noted the importance of that time from

the beginning by stating that how the team responds to that much practice time, how they

come together as a unit, and how much they can avoid being restless for games will

dictate how their season will play out.  A theory that highlights what Coach Blue

referenced about his team coming together and their development toward cohesion and

group consciousness, is Borman's Symbolic Convergence Theory.

**Symbolic Convergence**

Borman (1982) developed the Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) as a general

theory of communication.  He stated:

Symbolic convergence creates, maintains, and allows people to achieve empathic communion as well as a "meeting of the minds." It is symbolic because it deals with the human tendency to interpret signs and objects and give them meaning. This human tendency also carries over into the interpretation of the things people say and do…Convergence refers to the way, during certain processes of communication, two or more private symbolic worlds incline towards each other, come more closely together, or even overlap. If several or many people develop portions of their private symbolic worlds which overlap as a result of symbolic convergence, they have the basis for communicating with one another to create community, to discuss their common experiences, and to achieve mutual understanding. (p.51)

Since its initial construction, symbolic convergence has been applied in a multitude of areas. In a recent article, Olufowote (2006) noted that "SCT has had a significant impact on communication scholarship, appealing to those examining communication in areas as diverse as intercultural communication, mass communication, organizational communication, and rhetoric" (p. 452). SCT is an extremely appropriate theory in the examination of Private U because they are a team in a competitive, results-based context that is ripe for the "communicative force of fantasy (fantasy-sharing and fantasy-chaining) on human action" (Borman, Cragan, and Shields, 2001, p. 273). However, despite its wide-ranging appeal and interdisciplinary application in the past, I am unaware of SCT being extended to the field of communication and sport. In their review article, Borman, Cragan, and Shields (2001) noted:

SCT accounts for the use of imaginative language. It also accounts for the

development of shared fantasies that coalesce into a rhetorical vision (the shared

symbolic ground exhibited by a vision's participants). As well, it accounts for the

creation, rise, and sustainment of a group or community's

consciousness…Humans share such symbolic facts as fantasies, cues, and

types…SCT explains how humans come to share a common symbolic

consciousness…It allows us to look at human talk and explain how collectivities

of people build a shared consciousness that provides emotion, meaning, motive,

and value for human action. (pp. 273-274)

The majority of people would agree that a basketball team must be able to build

the shared consciousness described above in order to achieve great success. With SCT,

the basic concept is the fantasy theme – "a dramatizing message that depicts characters

engaged in action in a setting that accounts for and explains human experience" (Borman,

et al., 2001, p. 282). Fantasy themes consist of dramatizing messages and typically refer

to "an incident or a series of incidents in a setting other than the here-and-now of the

people involved in the communication episode" (Borman, 1982, p. 52). The fantasy

themes do not have to directly involve the community, but they are themes that the

individuals can relate to and form a convergence around. Borman (1982) continued "A

fantasy theme is a way for people to present or show to the group mind, to make visible

(understandable) a common experience and shape it into social knowledge" (p. 52).

The '05-'06 Private U team offered a rare chance to observe the convergence of different individuals as they came together around a common goal. I saw the development of shared goals, shared vision, and an understanding one another's verbal and nonverbal cues among teammates throughout the season. However, there was obviously a learning curve, particularly with so many new, first-year players. There are two ways that I will highlight in which the coaching staff intentionally tried to enhance this cohesion and convergence through Private U's time off the court: a pre-season road trip, and through the team's chapel services before games.

*Road trip*

Since Private U was facing the disadvantage of not having any non-conference games, the season was rapidly approaching and the coaches thought that a "dry run" would be beneficial for the team with so many new players. The coaching staff made arrangements with an NBA team that is in relatively close proximity to Private U's campus, and decided to mirror a typical road-trip for the team. In addition to the break of routine that everyone was growing weary of after so many days of consecutive practice, the trip also provided the team a chance to bond with one another as they got out of their normal environment. When asked why they took the team on this trip, Coach Armstrong said:

> We didn't want when we went to Tech to be our first time on the road for the
> freshman. It was as close to the first game as we could get, and we wanted them
> to know what it was like to pack their bags, get on a bus, go on a trip, scouting
> report, go stay in a hotel that night. You know, inevitably, somebody will forget

something and get there and say "Gosh, I should've brought this…" so they go through that.  They can get to feel comfortable, get up the next morning and go through a shoot-around, pretty much, you know.  They come back, eat a pre-game meal, have chapel, and have the time-space between then and the game.  It was the exact layout as a game.  You know, go play the game, get done, get on the bus, ride back home.  That kind of thing and we didn't want Tech to be the first time they went through that.  Plus, it gave us an opportunity to play on the court that we would eventually play the conference tournament on at the end of the season.

In fact, Coach Caff highlighted the fact that they would play on a "Pro floor" as being a great experience for the guys, but more importantly, it would give them a tiny advantage at the end of the season because they have been on that floor before.  Coach Caff said "Hey, especially this season, we're looking for any leg up we can get!"  The day after the team returned from this "road game," I was at the basketball arena and was talking to one of the assistant coaches, a student manager, a graduate assistant, and a player in one of the coaches' offices.  They were recounting the trip and the assistant coach noted the advantages of having a "dry-run since we've got six guys that have never done this before."  When I asked how the bus ride was, smiles came upon all four of their faces.  Quickly realizing that I had definitely missed something and prompting them with "What did I miss?" the student manager replied, "It was fun – tell him, Coach Riv!" as they all began laughing.

Essentially, I had missed typical junior high, bus-trip standard fare of telling Coach Riv to "sit-up, we can't see you!" (Coach Riv is relatively short) and other similar comments. However, recounting the line about Coach Riv led to a fantasy-chaining process of the four discussing each funny line, story, etc. that occurred following that or stemming from that line that appeared to begin it all. The student manager exclaimed in a high-pitched voice "Coach Ruff got headlights!" They all burst into laughter, and I silently lamented the fact that I had missed observing this incident on the bus. Borman (1982) said "Once the dynamic process of sharing a group fantasy creates symbolic convergence for a group of people, they will exhibit the 'inside joke' syndrome" (p. 52). In a later writing, Borman (1985) stated:

> … 'fantasy' refers to the creative and imaginative shared interpretation of events…The process of sharing fantasies was uncovered in the course of studying the effects on groups of dramatizing messages – those containing a pun or other word play, double entendre, figure of speech, analogy, anecdote, allegory, fable, or narrative. (p. 130)

Since the game that Private U played during this road trip was a scrimmage against one another, they were obviously in good spirits en route back home. A bus ride following a defeat would have brought a much different attitude on the ride, but on that particular night, one pun, anecdote, inside joke or whatever else led to another. After a few minutes of what sounded like normal horseplay and joking, Coach Ruff stood up and said, "Alright, guys, let's settle down," which led P.K. to shout (in his normal, excited,

high-pitched voice) "Coach Ruff got headlights on!" The team erupted because they had

been discussing Coach Ruff's new glasses throughout the day. Coach Ruff had begun

wearing his new glasses that morning, and they were quite large, but according to the

player in the coaching office, "When he stood up, it was just two big circles lit up in the

dark," said the player. "You could see the reflection of a reading light on his glasses and

when P.K. yelled that, everyone just lost it!" Coach Riv tried to contain his smile, but

then he looked at me and said, "It was pretty funny."

*Chapel services*

The second way that the coaching staff attempted to bring about team unity was

through a chapel time before each game that the entire team would attend. Due to its

status as a private, Christian university, Private U is able to have a required chapel time.

The majority of schools typically have an optional chapel time for their players, but they

certainly do not have a mandatory one such as Private U's.

The chapel time, typically a 5-10 minute talk by the volunteer chaplain or

someone that the coaching staff had asked to come in and talk to the team preceded the

final scouting report of the upcoming opponent so it was obviously essential that

everyone would be in attendance. By linking the chapel service to a vital item like the

scouting report of their upcoming opponent, the coaching staff was showing the

importance and weight that they put on this time. Coach Armstrong said:

> Chapel times and Bible studies are times where we can let the kids know that life
>
> is about more than basketball, but also that God can work through basketball,

which shows that what is ahead of them during this week of practice or this game

is important.

As I mentioned in chapter II, I was able to be in the locker room prior to games

and it was definitely one of the most fascinating areas in which I was allowed during my

time with Private U, both from an observational/informational purpose and from a

personal interest purpose.  During this time, more than any other in my time with Private

U, I saw the team's collective consciousness created, raised, and sustained.

*Glory road*

Private U had faced their early opponents with great effort, but the team was

ultimately overmatched and overwhelmed and they were sitting with an 0-4 record on

their young (and short) season.  Coach Blue brought in a speaker from a Christian group

called Athletes in Action to be the guest speaker before Private U played a home game

against a large state school in their conference.  The speaker was introduced and stood in

front of the 13-member team, coaching staff, and myself and said:

> Men, I hear all the time that kids don't know history.  Today, I want to give you a
>
> little history.  Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the great civil rights leaders
>
> as you know and is one of my personal heroes.  A couple of weeks ago we
>
> celebrated the man, as his accomplishments were so historic that we now have a
>
> day in his honor.  One of the songs that was frequently sung during this period of
>
> time was "We shall overcome."  How many of you have seen the new movie,
>
> Glory Road?  I saw it and loved it – it was about a team that had to overcome.

Overcome prejudice that you or I have never encountered. The Texas Western

squad was the first team to ever field an all-black team and they went on to win

the national championship against an all-white team, the University of Kentucky.

The significance of their victory is still recognized and talked about today and is

now told through this movie.

(The speaker then pointed to a framed picture of Indianapolis that hangs on the

wall with an NCAA tournament bracket superimposed over the fans inside the

arena)

All of you are on a glory road and all of you have had to overcome a lot this year.

In the face of what I've described, it humbles one to think about what trials others

have experienced and how ours typically pale in the face of them. But you are on

what you hope is a glory road – you have had to overcome a lot this season.

Some of you have had to overcome a lot to get to Private U and have a chance to

compete. My hope though is that you will not just be on a glory road as a team to

Indy, but that you'll be on a road to glory individually that includes much more

than just life on a basketball court…

At that point, the speaker continued by briefly encouraging the players to glorify

God with their efforts, by working hard to build and refine the talents that He gave them,

and to realize that while basketball is a great thing, it's not the only thing. I noticed the

players were paying rapt attention as he discussed Glory Road, but their attention

wavered once he moved on to the "spiritual" part of his talk.  This is not surprising based upon what SCT tells us about fantasy themes.

Borman (1982) asked "Why do some fantasy themes spark a chain of participation and sharing while others fall flat?"  He continued "Because of their (small group) common fate as part of the group, members have common experiences that predispose them to share fantasies which relate symbolically to their concerns" (p. 55).  For Private U's team, the idea of "overcoming" something resonated with the players.  From the situations described earlier of Gov and Plant to the fact that these 13 guys had been blindsided with sanctions that took away half of their season, they felt they had overcome a lot.  Tony understood this concept more than anyone as the lone remaining holdover from the team that led to the sanctions (he had no involvement in any of the problems from that team).  "It's not the way I imagined my senior season, that's for sure…I guess I felt like if I hung with it, good things will happen," he said.  "I hope they still will, but losing those games, I mean, not even playing those games, was tough."

In addition to the idea of overcoming something, the way that the speaker used a recently released movie (about basketball) and compared it to a framed photograph in their locker room that they saw everyday also developed a connection.  The Private U players were obviously predisposed to care about a basketball movie, but more specifically one pertaining to an all-black team defeating an all-white team.  There were never any racial problems throughout the season, at least above the surface, on the Private U squad, but the fact that 10 of their 13 players were black brought about another predisposition to this film for many of the players.  However, Private U may have appeared more like the all-white team considering that only 7.3 percent of the Private U

student population is African-American. Finally, Glory Road was a story of an underdog team that nobody expected to win, which sounded extremely familiar to the players in their current situation.

Prior to leaving the room, each player touched the picture and said "Glory Road!" as they left. Initially, I had the feeling that I may have just observed the dawn of something very special. Flashes of Notre Dame football players smacking a sign as they went down the hallway ramp to the field were the images I had in my head at the time. However, after watching the team get blown out by the state school they were playing that evening and seeing their record drop to 0-5, I never heard the term "Glory Road" or saw any team member touch the picture again. However, for a brief (albeit, very brief) moment, there was a specific consciousness-creating incident that I witnessed. More importantly, when these consciousness-creating experiences start adding up, it becomes more likely that they will eventually lead to a team with high group consciousness and that it will be sustainable. Another such moment occurred in a similar situation at the chapel service before the game against a conference opponent the next week.

*Men of faith*

Private U was still winless and the team's volunteer chaplain who is himself an alumnae and former basketball player at Private U stood before the team. When he stands in front of a group that is sitting, it usually silences the crowd since he is an imposing 6'9 inches tall. Pastor W has been the team chaplain since Coach Blue took over the coaching job and conducts the majority of the chapel services for the team. Rather than giving a long sermon or even reading a couple of passages from Scripture, he told the team that he had a simple message for them that evening:

Guys, nobody likes losing games.  But today is a new day and the opportunity is there for us.  But do you believe?  Al Michaels said the line "Do you believe in miracles?" when the U.S. hockey team beat Russia for the gold medal (it should be noted that the particular game he mentioned was not actually the gold-medal game in the 1980 Olympics – the U.S. did go on to win the gold medal by defeating Finland two days later).  Well, some people think it will take a miracle for our team to win a game considering all that's happened to us.  I don't think so.

I think it's time to show a little faith…I just have one verse for you today: Luke 17:6 and it says "And the Lord said, 'If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you.'"

Do you guys know how little of faith God is talking about there?  What did he say, P.K.?  How much faith do you need?  (P.K. replied, "a mustard seed").  That's right.  Let me show you what that is…(Pastor W pulled out a little, plastic container of mustard seeds.  I want everyone in this room to take one of these…I'm passing these out right now.  (Each person proceeded to shake the container until one, tiny mustard seed fell into their hand).  I want you to put it in your mouth and eat it – seriously, eat it – nothing bad will happen to you!

(Everyone in the room proceeded to place the mustard seed in their mouth and awkwardly tried to chomp the tiny seed.  Eventually, the majority of people, including myself realized this was futile and simply swallowed the mustard seed).

You now have faith inside of you.  You have faith in you, but it's up to you whether you want to believe and be men of faith or be men of fear.  You can get caught up in the fear of losing another game, the fear of not playing as well as you would've liked or as your coaches would've liked, fear of what will happen in the future for you based on your performance.  Or, you can go out there and play together as men of faith.  Every one of you now has faith within you, which leads me back to my one question.  Do you want to be men of faith or be men of fear?  (Everyone replied "Men of faith!").  Then go show me!

Admittedly, I am a sucker for pre-game pep talks and speeches like this that can get a team excited to go play a game, but this was undeniably a very special moment, and I believed instantaneously that it was a poignant moment for a young team as they were struggling to reach their goals.  Realizing that the intensity of a small room before a game cannot possibly come across in writing, I need to emphasize that this team believed what they were saying when they proclaimed "Men of faith!" loudly back at Pastor W.

There was little else to say following the Pastor's "Then go show me!" instruction so Coach Blue simply said, "Let's hit the court" and the guys went flying out of the locker room.  Coach Blue raised his eyebrows at me and we bumped our clenched fists together – it was apparent that he too realized that had been a special moment.  As I said,

I was feeling the same way, and it was a fun moment to share with Coach Blue as we followed the team out of the locker room. I had little doubt as I sat in my seat to watch the game that this would be the night of Private U's first victory.

Private U went out and played an incredible game which did indeed finish with their first victory of the season. It was an overtime victory that snapped a 20-game losing streak dating back to the prior season. As the team members coalesced around the fantasy theme of "men of faith," it brought about what Borman, Cragan and Shields (2001) noted as the "causative component that ignites the creation, rise, and sustenance of symbolic consciousness" (p. 274). Private U fans experienced this as well and poured onto the court in celebration with the team following the final buzzer. This storming of the court could certainly be dubbed an overreaction considering that the team Private U had defeated was not a strong opponent and one that would eventually fire their coach at year's end (in fact, 3 of the 4 coaches who would lose to Private U during the '05-'06 season were out of work at the end of the season!), but it was a welcome sight for everyone nonetheless. The players, coaches and fans were smiling and swarming one another. High-fives were being liberally handed out to those known and unknown alike.

Was there a way for Private U to capture this moment and bottle it up? These moments would prove to be aberrations during this season, but the overriding ideology of building a tight, cohesive team remained. While winning certainly does make people happy as proven by this event, the staff applied a personal philosophy that "belonging precedes believing" to this young, Private U team and assisted that with the concept of self-handicapping. The task of building social and task cohesion and creating an environment in which a team can experience symbolic convergence was and will

continue to be on the shoulders of the coaching staff.  Thus, in the next chapter I will

strive to answer the second research question:  How does leadership help manage

cohesion on the team?

CHAPTER IV

A FREAKY WAY TO ANALYZE LEADERSHIP

*"The old stereotype is that you've got to get in a guy's face to get the most out of him,"*

*Phillips said. "I've always believed that good guys, or nice guys, can finish first."*

*-Wade Phillips, Head Coach, Dallas Cowboys*

Cummins (2007) has recently written that he believes modern media (television, movies, and literature) can and does inform the practice of leadership education and development. Callahan, Whitener, and Sandlin (2007) agreed with this sentiment as they discussed the concept of using artifacts from popular culture as one approach to teaching leadership. Recently I read the wildly popular, bestselling book by Levitt and Dubner (2005), *Freakonomics*, and realized that there is a connection to this study. The communication field and others, has long examined the power of incentives with relation to leaders and subordinates. *Freakonomics* discussed incentives in a similar manner as it has been written about in communication literature. Specific dimensions of transactional leadership (as well as transformational leadership) were derived from Bass' (1985) study. He stated that with regard to transactional leaders, a leader's action toward a subordinate is contingent upon whether they have met prescribed goals the leader has assigned. From those goals, rewards or punishments are dispersed contingent upon performance. As evidenced by the opening quote, leaders have different beliefs regarding the most effective methods to gain desired performance.

Robbins (2003) said transactional leaders "guide or motivate their followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying role and task requirements" (p. 343). There are certainly differing philosophies on how to best "guide or motivate" among coaches, and there are numerous individuals in the collegiate coaching ranks on each side of the spectrum who have had success motivating with contrasting leadership styles. Regardless of how they guide or motivate though, coaches typically have incentives built into their approach.

One would not have to search for very long to see that incentives are used in athletics – especially at most athletic practices. The majority of people can still remember a time in their past where they had to run extra sprints during a practice because a goal the coach had set out for the team had not been accomplished. Despite the fact that Levitt and Dubner (2005) playfully note that *Freakonomics* has "no unifying theme," (p. 188) they do explicitly highlight three types of incentives: economic, social, and moral. The authors noted that it is typical for an incentive scheme to include all three varieties, but later in the book stated "Any incentive is inherently a trade-off; the trick is to balance the extremes" (p. 19).

Gibbons (1998) discussed relational incentive contracts by contrasting them with formal contracts. He said relational incentive contracts are "agreements enforced by the parties' concerns for their reputation" (p. 121). The Private U coaches had to balance how they portrayed the incentives to both prospective recruits and current players on the team because if they misled these players, it could lead to distrust from future recruits and create a negative reputation in the basketball community. Thus, I will examine how the

Private U coaching staff implemented economic, social, and moral incentives into their leadership style during the '05-'06 season.

Another book from the popular press that reached #1 National Bestseller status is Malcolm Gladwell's (2002), *The Tipping Point*. In this book, he noted that while the messenger (in this case study, the coaching staff) matters as they are what makes something spread, "the content of the message matters too. And the specific quality that a message needs to be successful is the quality of 'stickiness.' Is the message…memorable?" (p. 92).

Gladwell, perhaps inadvertently, mentioned in this sentence an area of communication research that strongly resonates with his concept of "stickiness" that is appropriately called memorable messages. Stohl (1986) defined a memorable message as a message that individuals remember for a long period of time that had a major influence on their life. Barge and Schlueter (2004) used the notion of memorable messages to explore what kinds of messages new members attuned to during organizational entry and how those messages "would influence the way they construct their relationship with an organization" (p. 234). This research applies nicely to this study as every coach wants to offer some type of message that will stay with the recruit, and one that will ultimately affect their entry into the team the coach represents. A message that is memorable to one recruit may not be so to another, which creates a difficult task for the coaches. By examining Private U's coaching staff and the content of their messages to both prospective and current players and how much "stickiness" they possessed,as well as observing their use of incentives, a clear window into the Private U basketball team will be opened.

In addition to the ideas introduced by these works of popular literature, I will utilize two specific theories to assist in the description of my observations: leader-member exchange theory and dialectical theory. These theories will not only provide frameworks from which to analyze the data, but will also help answer the second research question: How does leadership help manage cohesion on the team? In this chapter, I will describe leadership and the managing of cohesion beginning with the recruitment process, continue by describing interactions between the players and coaches off the court, and culminate the chapter by describing how the leaders are managing cohesion with the players on the court.

## Incentives and Memorable Messages

*"We need great players, but more importantly, we need great people that are great players. See, we spend a lot of time finding out who these kids are and what we want are good kids. Great people make great programs, not great players. You know there are a lot of programs that have great players, but they're not great programs because they are not good people so they can really play, but they will destroy you…what you need is great people who can play. Then, that builds your program and you know I pull for you and you pull for me – it's like Scripture says, 'iron sharpens iron.'"*

*-Private U Assistant Coach Armstrong*

The most glaring differentiation between collegiate athletics and all other levels of athletic competition is seen in the area of recruitment. A coach may possess an unbelievable knowledge of the game, but because of the way he treats his players, a high

school kid may not want to attend that school.  In contrast, a different player may believe

that the aforementioned coach could be the exact person to maximize his talent and will

therefore choose to play at the coach's school.  Free agency has added a dimension of

recruitment to the NBA, and high school sports have faced an increase in the recruitment

of athletes due to open-enrollment (that allows players to enroll in a school outside of

their designated living area), private schools, and prep schools.  However, there is

nothing like collegiate recruiting, which is so intense, full-time, and complex that athletic

departments at universities have entire compliance departments in order to ensure that

their schools are abiding by NCAA policy (though plenty of folks remain suspicious

about nefarious activity during the recruiting process).

Before understanding how Private U's leaders can manage the cohesion within

the team, I'd like to start by examining the recruitment process.  By overlooking this

important area, I would be leaving out the ground-level of who comes to play for Private

U in the first place and what type of person will come as well.  Further, Private U's

coaches have consistent messages that they want the recruit to understand, and it was

interesting to see if their desired "stickiness" of their message was retained.

It is imperative for coaches to work hard in the recruiting area so that despite the

constant change that teams face due to graduation, there will continually be new players

who are on their way to help develop a consistently winning program.  Consequently,

when Coach Blue arrived to Private U, he was determined to find a coaching staff of the

"hungriest guys" who would work tireless hours recruiting kids.  Coach Blue believed

attracting the right player to Private U is what would be essential to turn them into a

winning team.

The area of recruitment is one in which Levitt and Dubner (2005) as well as

Gladwell's (2002) points are most salient in that the coaching staff has to find the right

incentives to sway a player to come to their university.  Further, the messages from the

staff must possess the required "stickiness" that will take root in the individual's mind in

the midst of multiple other messages from and about competing schools who are also

trying to recruit that player.  "Recruiting is where it all starts" said Coach Caff.  Thus, a

major aspect of leadership in collegiate coaching occurs within the recruitment process

since coaches have direct control over the types of players they will be leading.

Levitt and Dubner (2005) wrote that all individuals respond to economic, moral,

and/or social incentives.  Thus, if the point of recruiting is to persuade a player to come

be a part of Private U's team, how would the staff present their message to the

prospective player?  Despite the best efforts of the NCAA and school compliance

officers, economic incentives do occur at schools from time to time.  In fact, paying two

non-scholarship student-athletes in 2002 (under a different coaching staff) is one of the

violations that brought the sanctions against Private U in the first place.  With a close eye

on Private U both internally and externally from the NCAA, the conference, and an

internal auditing team, economic incentives were obviously out of the question.

However, just because Private U could not offer monetary assistance directly, it did not

mean that the promise of future economic prosperity could not be used in their

recruitment.  Coach Ruff said:

The one thing that was good, or I guess the one benefit we had over every other

team that we were out recruiting against was that we could offer playing time.  If

a guy can't get on the court, he can't show what he can do and if he can't show what he can do, he's not going to be playing basketball after college. That story resonates with these kids…they want to come in and play. Let's be honest – not many kids are as good as they think they are – but, because they all think they're ready to step in and play, the fact that we could offer them that opportunity – since we were basically starting over as a team – was a really powerful message that we had on our side.

Due to the nature of Private U's sanctions, which led to their top three players leaving school and their top recruit choosing to enroll elsewhere, Coach Blue's first two years leading the team offered one of the most effective messages that he could "sell" to a recruit – playing time. If players believe they can step in and play early and often at the beginning of their collegiate career, they believe they will have a better chance of being noticed by scouts from professional leagues. In fact, one of the more popular discussions that I overheard during my season with the team involved players discussing *how long* they thought they would stay at Private U.

The players believed that they were getting such a good opportunity to showcase their talent that they would have a chance to leave school early as a draft pick in the NBA because of the early playing time they would receive. Regardless of the fact that the realistic chances of the players leaving school early ranged from quite possible to ridiculous, these conversations were constant. It showed that both the future-based economic incentive as well as the "stickiness" of the coaches' message of early playing time during the recruitment process had been successful. The message had not only

proven very successful as an attractor to Private U, but it had also been the type of memorable message that Stohl (1986) discussed – a message that individuals remember for a long period of time that had a major influence on their life.

However, just as the positive message of early playing time had resonated and been retained by the players, there were some negative memorable messages that had obtained some "stickiness" as well. Barge and Schlueter (2004) noted that memorable messages are important to the study of discourse in an organization because they "transcend the container metaphor of organizations as they may come from individuals or groups inside and outside the organization," (p. 238).

Just as the coaching staff at Private U was trying to emphasize the positive aspects of the university, they had to combat other messages about the school from those outside of the Private U organization, such as an assistant coach from another school. One player said that an opposing coach asked him why he would want to go to Private U – and said, "That's where they kill black people." Since this prospective recruit happened to be black and was so extreme, the message obviously stuck with the recruit. "Distorting truth is common practice in the recruiting world and you have to hope that kids are smart enough to listen to the right things," said Coach Caff.

Levitt and Dubner (2005) described other ways that messages and incentives tie into the recruiting of prospective players such as with social incentives. Though universities are not able to pay their players, they are able to pay for one on-campus "official" visit that a recruit may take to their school. During this visit, they are able to receive free travel to the school, accommodations, and meals provided by the university.

At a typical Private U recruiting visit, the prospective player competes in practice with the current players even though coaches can not be in the gym when this occurs.

During this official visit, the intent is to make sure that the recruit feels comfortable socially and that he believes that Private U will be a place where he can quickly assimilate himself into the culture and feel at home. The "family" metaphor discussed in Chapter III is frequently used during these visits because it is imperative not only that the recruit feels like he will be taken care of, but also that the parents of the recruit feel this way. Coach Riv said "Sometimes you can tell that if you can get the Mom, you can get the son…sometimes it's the Grandma, the Dad…you're not just recruiting the kid – let's put it that way."

Becker and Gerhart (1996) argued that an organization's human resources system can be a unique source of sustained competitive advantage over their competitors if they can make it difficult to imitate. Uhl-Bien, Graen, and Scandura (2000) wrote that one critical area of HR systems that is underdeveloped in literature regards interpersonal relationships. They discussed the impact of social capital and the neglect of these relationships might be "a critical oversight, since relationships are an essential component of the 'social community' that organizations represent" (p. 139). The emphasis on the team being a family is part of the social capital that Private U hopes may be the trump card on a recruit choosing to join their team over another school.

At Private U, the coaches assign one or two of the current players to be the "host" for the recruit for the weekend (it is very rare for a recruit to come during the week because of their own schooling), and the host(s) will be in charge of the recruit and will be responsible for taking him to dinner, a movie, and/or another Private U athletic event

if there is a home game that weekend.  Frequently, they would proceed back to the

players' apartment to see if the recruit has the mandated skills he needs to possess in

order to compete on Playstation or some other video game console.  Not surprisingly,

basketball is the favorite game for most of the players, and many of the guys on the team

own a basketball video game in which you can actually play with Private U's team.

Freshman J.C. said that he knew he wanted to come to Private U after his visit because of

what a great time he had with the players on the team.  He said, "It was cool because they

wanted to play ball and everything, but they were also really like me with other stuff."

He continued, "We just got food, played video games, and also went to the football game

– that was fun, too."

Interestingly, the coaching staff believes that one of the most important selling

points for their program is to have *other* good athletic programs at Private U.  Coach Ruff

said:

> One of the things that could help us immensely would be if our football team
>
> would win.  Guys want to go to schools that have good reputations as sports
>
> schools.  It's easier to attract a kid here if he has a great time seeing our fans out
>
> at the football game and seeing our team win.  If you have a good atmosphere out
>
> there, it only helps what we're trying to do.

> It's like with Gov – granted, I don't think he knew what baseball was when he got
>
> here, but he doesn't miss a game now…it's his favorite thing outside of basketball
>
> and he's even said that he wants to be an umpire someday.  Can you imagine a 7

foot umpire?  But, the baseball team loves it that he's always there and he loves being there.  He got to throw out the first pitch at one of their games last season and all of the coaching staff went.  We took pictures and video and now it's one of the things that we show to recruits when they come to visit.  The fact that Gov is throwing out a pitch at a baseball game brings a smile to every recruits face and that is something that you can't underestimate – it also helps that we can tell them how good our baseball team is, too.

For some guys, even if they could care less about baseball, the fact that Gov is at the games and that we all went out to watch him throw out the pitch…it just shows that family atmosphere we try to tell them about.  You never know what will be the difference-maker, or what the kid will end up basing his decision on, but it's something else that we can show them during their visit, and again, you never know.

It is apparent that interpersonal fit with the team is an important aspect and can provide a strong social incentive for a recruit to attend Private U.  The coaching staff and players are trying to gain social capital with the players during their visit.  However, the concept of social incentives at other schools, or the social capital that a team tries to create clearly moves beyond time between the recruit and the team in some instances.

Private U is in the difficult position that they are currently in due to bending and breaking NCAA rules in the past.  Thus, Private U is certainly not exempt from error, but the coaches are very steadfast when they say that they have cleaned up the program and

have strictly abided by NCAA policy during the recruiting process and everything else during their tenure.  For example, there is a limit to the number of phone calls they may make to a prospective player.  Also, there are rules with regard to a players' recruiting trip, such as how that recruit's time is spent while on campus, etc.  The coaching staff makes sure that everything is documented from each visit regardless of whether the recruit is on an official or unofficial visit.  However, the coaching staff mentioned episodes multiple times regarding other programs and their less than clean methods with the recruiting process.  One coach did not speak kindly about some of Private U's competitors with regard to how recruiting visits may go on other campuses and said:

It's really difficult.  Let me tell ya…we're going against Stony Oaks who brings in recruits and marches out their women's swim team into the room during the visit and these girls come out in bikinis.  Right there I have a problem – where is the compliance staff there…are we just marching girls out or are there more strings attached or what?  Well, come to find out that guess what?  Stony Oaks doesn't HAVE a women's swim team!  I mean, I'm not naïve enough to think that this stuff doesn't happen, but to hear it directly from the mouth of some guys that we're competing for too makes us mad – this is borderline prostitution!

In fact, there was a conference opponent that was sanctioned by the NCAA as a result of hiring both prostitutes and strippers for recruits during a major recruiting weekend for their football team so there is some precedent with these types of recruiting tactics.  While frustrating to Private U's coaching staff because "We're trying to do it the

right way," the recruit who will be persuaded to attend a university because of this female social incentive is not the kid that Private U's staff wants to attract anyway. One Private U coach said:

> Look, we know girls matter…we have so many pretty girls at Private U and we actually need to get more of them on the cheerleading team because we're kind of hurting there right now, you know? But, while girls make a difference and guys want to know that there are cute girls at your school, we don't want a guy that is going to a place because they basically find a girl for him to 'hook up' with for a weekend. That doesn't tell me a whole lot about that kid's character – we're not the moral police, but this kid has a chance to affect his entire life over the recruiting weekend. I don't think it's unrealistic to expect a kid to think basketball first.

It was interesting that this coach was vehemently against Stony Oaks' practices of marching the "swim team" out to meet prospective players, and yet in essentially the same breath was highlighting the fact that Private U needed to get more of their cute girls onto the cheerleading squad. Granted, cheerleading is a much more structured, formal team at Private U than the "swim team" at Stony Oaks, but the idea of showing girls off to recruits is actually quite similar. This leads to the final category of incentives and also the predominant one at Private U: moral incentives.

Echoing the quote by Coach Armstrong earlier in the chapter, Coach Caff

discussed what Private U looked for in a player during the recruitment process,

particularly when the coaching staff first arrived:

I think we were looking for guys who had character because we knew that that

was something that we couldn't screw up on.  On the flipside of that, Stanford,

Duke, Kentucky…those schools had guys who had character *and* they could play.

So, just because a guy has character doesn't mean he is just an okay player.  So,

then we say to ourselves, 'let's recruit all of the best players, let's find out about

all of the great players who are ranked in the top twenty of every pool.  Let's find

out if they have character and if they have some kind of Christian relationship that

we can use as a relationship with Private U because we're obviously a Christian

institution.'  So, that's what Coach's philosophy was: character and Christianity –

if they have both, bonus…let's see if there is a niche there and start from there,

you know, at that point.

Coach Blue similarly stated:

With us, the important thing was to bring in players that were not just good

players, but good people because when others come to visit, if you feel good with

the teammates and you like the team, you're more likely to go to that school.

Now, we can take a chance on about one guy a year, but that's it.  And, I don't

want that chance to go to a thug if I can help it.  I'd rather go after a good kid who

is a grade risk and take a chance on him because if he's a good kid, he can work

hard and we can work with him to get his grades up, but just like good kids can

rub off, so can the bad ones.  That's why we start so early.  When it comes to

recruiting, we try to outwork everybody.  Coach Riv can tell you off the top of his

head the top 50 8th graders in the state and we already know about them and have

invited them up to our summer camps because we want to identify the good

players and the good people early.

Though moral incentives would obviously be attached to the recruiting strategies

listed above by the coaches as far as recruiting Christian kids and players with strong

character, another coach added desire to the list of necessities in those that he is

recruiting.  Coach Riv stated:

> We want good kids that are high character guys.  We also want tough guys that
>
> want to win and will do what it takes to win.  You know, I think the biggest thing
>
> is to get them captivated by the vision.  The movie Glory Road just came out and
>
> it's about the impossible becoming possible.  And people are drawn…you know,
>
> stories like that thrive.
>
> We sincerely believe, and it's almost become a conviction around here, that we'll
>
> be one of the best in the country.  We tell kids that it's going to be the greatest
>
> story ever told in college basketball.  And the opportunity of being inserted into
>
> the greatest story and coming from nothing and having achieved greatness…not

because of any great coaching staff, or anything that we do…you'll find that

we're obviously very faith-oriented people.  But you really try to get that vision

across.

One of the quotes we use a lot, and I forget the author, but it says 'don't go where

the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and create your own.'

There's an opportunity for whoever comes here to create a legacy that will always

be looked upon with a great deal of admiration not only by Private U people, but

by people across the country.  And I think that challenge appeals to people.

If you're talented enough to accept the challenge…we put it in front of ourselves

as a great challenge so therefore, we have to pursue kids who can meet that

challenge.  So we really try to spell out that vision.  And I think once they get

here, they can really see how genuine we are.  We're authentic about who we are,

what we believe, and what the University has to offer.  It's really selling them on

the vision and how they can be a part of it.

It was interesting throughout this study to hear how many Christian themes,

sayings, etc. came out during a conversation about something that to most recruiters

would be unrelated.  For example, in Coach Riv's statement it is interesting that he uses

the term "greatest story ever told," which is commonly used as a descriptor for the life of

Christ.  Further, when describing the vision the coaching staff has for the team and how

they want to be the best, he refrains from elevating the staff as the reason for why this

could happen. Instead, he actually distances the staff as the primary reason and notes that they're all very "faith-oriented people."

Coach Riv mentioned authenticity and being up front with the recruits about who they are as a coaching staff as well as what they are looking for in a player on and off the court. It is apparent from the interviews that the staff is looking for players who will respond to a moral incentive whether it is playing for upstanding coaches, or for a school that has Christian values, or simply responding to a bold and daunting vision that will require faith to believe it can be attained.

Obviously the coaching staff wants players who are capable from a skills perspective, but every coach desires this from a recruit. So the question is what is the message that the staff hopes will have the desired "stickiness" that will prompt a recruit to want to play for Private U? "I'd say our 'walk-away' points that we want them to have are that we want guys with character," said Coach Caff. He continued, "They will play for coaches with integrity, and they've got a chance here to play early. Those are three biggies that every recruit should've heard the past couple years."

The coaching staff was very successful luring talent to Private U in their first two recruiting classes, and current players frequently referenced the factors Coach Caff listed above as reasons for why they chose Private U. However, another item that was mentioned was the "energy and enthusiasm" of the coaches – "They're crazy," as one player laughingly stated. This leads into a discussion of the relationships and interactions between the coaching staff and the players off the court and how the staff can manage cohesion during those times. I will preface this discussion by briefly examining the literature on leader-member exchange (LMX) theory.

**Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory**

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory has received a lot of interest in research since it was first investigated in the early 1970's. Gerstner and Day (1997) found that interest in the LMX model has increased substantially over the years. LMX argues that leaders have a limited amount of resources and thus, tend to distribute these resources to their members rather selectively (Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, Lee, 1997). Consequently, leaders have relationships and interactions with members that fall into one of two types: high-quality LMX and low-quality LMX. This forms two types of groups: in-groups (those with high-quality LMX), and out-groups (those with low-quality LMX). Obviously, this can create very problematic situations in a team context between members of the in and out groups – particularly in a team in which interdependence is necessary for successful task achievement.

Lee (2001) noted if there is better rapport between a leader and a follower, it may be represented as a "high-quality LMX – often called in-group, or partnership relationships – characterized by a high degree of mutual positive affect, loyalty, professional respect and trust" (p. 576). There are also members that have experiences that entail a low-quality LMX, which Lee said are "often described by the terms out-group, or managership" (p. 576). Low-quality LMX has opposite results than high-quality LMX such as having a lack of loyalty and trust between the member and the leader.

Prior to its existence, researchers had primarily examined leadership as something leaders did toward their followers. Northouse (2004) stated "LMX challenged this assumption and directed researchers' attention to the differences that might exist between

the leader and each of her or his followers" (p. 147). LMX has now been a salient area of research for 25-30 years.

In other words, the primary focus of this leadership theory is the dyadic relationship between leader and member rather than having the sole focus on the leader, which is a central aspect of many other leadership theories. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) stated "LMX clearly incorporates an operationalization of a relationship-based approach to leadership. The central concept of the theory is that effective leadership processes occur when leaders and followers are able to develop mature leadership relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring" (p. 225). Burns and Otte (1999) refer to LMX relationships as a social exchange or transaction. Examining both sides of the leader-member relationship will provide more rich insight into the transition process.

Fairhurst (1993) stated "effective leadership is defined in terms of 'incremental influence,' which is interpersonal influence that is earned beyond that which accompanies one's formal position" (p. 321). For example, Coach Caff describing the ways in which he can get to know his players outside of practice actually has the overarching goal of earning him some "incremental influence" in their lives. Fairhurst said that in relationships "where the leader and member exert high levels of incremental influence (high LMX), mature 'leadership' relationships develop because there is mutual trust, internalization of common goals…mutual influence and support" (p. 321).

Private U is an excellent example of a team that requires interdependence and I will now examine how the coaching staff managed the relationships between players and coaches off the court. Not surprisingly, the way players viewed these interactions with

the coaching staff off the court was often a result of how the players felt they were treated on the court. Thus, the idea of in-groups and out-groups within the Private U team was both imperative and fascinating to examine and analyze.

Northouse (2004) stated a "leader should strive for high quality exchanges with everyone, so that everyone feels valued. This takes away the elusiveness of an "in-group." If situations do arise where members feel slighted, he noted "If a leader does not intentionally keep out-group members 'out,' and if they are free to become members of the in-group, then LMX theory may not create inequalities" (p. 156). The role development that occurs for the players on the team will naturally result in some players feeling slighted and could lead to a different relationship than they have previously had with the coaching staff.

There is no question that a coach's time is limited and there is only so much of it that he can commit to each player both on and off the court. Fairhurst and Chandler (1999) stated "Leader-member exchanges will vary in quality because members differ in their needs and contributions and because a leader's time and resources are limited" (p. 215). In Chapter III, I described the hours that the coaches are at the office working. While they gave each of the recruited players the same pitch about having a staff that cares about them and wants them to succeed, college basketball is a results-based business and Coach Blue would inevitably spend more time with the starting unit of players and top reserves than the "back-up" players or those who would not typically play in games.

*Off-court relationships and interactions*

There are multiple stakeholders in a collegiate basketball team that a head coach must be concerned with: administrators, alumni, fans, boosters, reporters, recruits, parents of players and recruits, and of course, the assistant coaches and the current players. Despite the fact that Coach Blue himself was stretched too thin to allocate his resources evenly among each player, it did not mean that he did not want time to be invested in each player. In fact, each coach was assigned several players to be "his guys," which included the coach discussing not only basketball-related issues, but also issues outside of basketball such as schoolwork and their personal life. These "match-ups" were typically done by assigning the coach who felt most comfortable with the player, which usually emerged naturally because of the recruitment process.

Though the recruitment efforts are shared between the staff, due to the high number of prospective players, coaches inevitably divide the labor. It is not atypical for a certain coach to become the primary recruiter and as a result, for the player to feel most comfortable with that coach who spent the most time with them during the recruiting process. The recruitment period is a bonding time due to the extensive amount of interaction, which means Coach Blue rarely has to "assign" a player to a coach. Rather, it is quite natural for the player to assimilate into a relationship with the coach who was his primary recruiter.

*Coach Caff*

Coach Caff provided about the most common sense pseudonym possible for my study because he averages 14 cups of coffee a day. It is exhausting to watch him for more than 10 minutes due to his inability to sit still. He roams the offices with a headset

around his ear for phone calls while he has a second phone that is continually in use for text messaging. "I think I was one of the first people to learn the 'touch system' on a cell phone for texting," he proudly noted. Caff loves his job and he loves investing in the players. "Time with the guys off the court is vital. That's where so much of the teaching can happen – off the court…in our office, outside of official practice time," said Coach Caff. He continued:

> The greatest thing in the world that Coach argues with me about right now, but he is not going to win it, cause I am going to get it…this is something that I am *going* to do is that with our new practice facility we're going to get new offices, and, yeah, there are only so many things that I will fight for, but I am going to get the *last* office…the furthest one away from Coach Blue. I'm going to have a couch in it because I can't tell you how much guys come to my office, they love coming to my office right now because it is the furthest away from Coach Blue and they know that they will never accidentally bump into him.

> I don't want to lose that. And there is a couch so they can come in and lay down; there is a pillow I have for their head. I did it on purpose…but in the new place…another coach wants it, because he knows the value of it and he said 'Coach Caff, I am going to have that,' and I said, 'No you are not, you are not getting it because I love it and it is going to be my office!' When I was at another school, I was right next to the head coach's office, and all of the guys would want to come in and share things and talk but they would never actually come in.

I asked Coach Caff if there was an intentional distance that is created by the coaching staff between Coach Blue and the players. He replied:

That is exactly right, and that's what we're for, but you want to watch how you bridge that gap with them. You know, Coach (Blue) will bring guys in and talk to guys and do a lot of his own manipulating or support with them, but in reality, when a guy feels like Coach doesn't like me, maybe he thinks he can tell in practice that Coach doesn't like him…well you want that guy to feel like he is able to come in and share that with you. Then we, as assistants, can go to Coach and say, 'Hey, you know, you need to work on this guy a little bit and maybe build him up a bit because he is really feeling, you know…whatever, fill in the blank' and then Coach will do what he deems necessary.

But if they walk in to talk to you and the first one that they see is him (Coach Blue), now they are going to go and act like they are getting a drink out of their locker and you say 'Hey, what are you doing?' and they say 'Oh, just getting a drink,' when on their mind they wanted to come in and say 'Hey, here is what's up.' So, I don't know if there is any merit to that but at my prior school, there weren't any offices like we have where they're all housed inside one primary office. They were in a hallway so if you kept going down the hallway you ended up being at the soccer offices. But our players would always go to this one guy and I couldn't figure out why and finally I realized that it was because he was the

furthest one away. They would all go to his office…so you better believe I'm

going to battle for location – I like being the guy they come to and they like

coming to me because they know I have Coach's ear.

Now, every guy is different and they may want to go to another coach, and that's

fine, but I want to at least have the best accessibility.  You know, it's just different

with different guys.  Like with Ace – I have a different relationship with him, I

can get away with stuff like…I don't know if I should say this…but I have no

problem telling Ace when he acts like a little two-year-old 'cause that is what he

needs…he needs to be kicked in the butt.  And guess what, that is when he plays

his best – when he feels challenged as a man.  But, first of all, you have to have

that relationship and second of all when they come to you, you have to listen to

what they are saying.  But you *cannot* give them the 'Maybe if I just tell them

what they want to hear they will start playing better. You have to give it to them

straight and most of the guys respect that and usually respond to it.  And if they

don't respond to it, I'm going to keep giving it to them.

It is apparent through Coach Caff's comments that he and Ace have a high-quality

LMX relationship that is marked by trust.  There is trust that Ace will receive critique

from Coach Caff as loving admonishment and encouragement to better himself not only

as a player, but also as a person.  There is also trust from Ace that is shown by his going

to visit Coach Caff in the first place.  As Coach Caff mentioned, every guy is different

and as a result, "you've gotta push different buttons on some guys than others," he said.

The line between confidante and coach can be a blurry one and Coach Blue feels the strain of straddling it at times. He said:

> That's where your assistants really make their money. That's what their important thing to do is – they should have those relationships with the players so that when they're done, they know the staff cares. They (assistant coaches) talk to them (players) and they get them excited and they express their possibility for the future – for them having a part on the team. And I guess that's where sometimes I'm involved, other times I'm not involved. What I try to do is primarily focus on the court, but I think honesty is really important. Treating people fairly is really important, and if you do that then everybody can be on the same page, or I guess, get on the same page.

When I asked Coach Blue why he feels the need to delegate this responsibility to his assistants particularly considering that he, too, has established relationships with the players during the recruiting process, he replied:

> Yeah, well, that's a fine line, you know, because if you become too 'buddy-buddy' then you don't have that authority. I think it's kind of like every parent has to deal with this. They have to be friends with their child, they have to get along with their child, but at the same time they have to be parents to their child. So I think that's exactly the same as a head coach or even an assistant coach. And I think that's a very good analogy as far as what this would be like.

Zorn (1995) described this tension between superior and friend in his essay, *Bosses and Buddies...*, as follows:

Many organizations discourage personal relationships between supervisors and subordinates because they assume that such relationships threaten organizational efficiency. It is often assumed that supervisors' objectivity in decision making will suffer…Personal relationships have the potential to enhance or jeopardize trust and openness between supervisors and subordinates…Although organizations have typically frowned on the development of personal relationships…positive effects may accrue from such relationships in some work situations. There may be greater understanding between the two persons involved, and the subordinate may be more satisfied and communicatively open. However, other subordinates may respond negatively to a personal relationship between a supervisor and one of her or his subordinates. (pp.125-126)

Throughout my observation during the '05-'06 season, I saw numerous occasions of interactions between the coaching staff and the players that would fall closer in line with friendships than with superior-subordinate relationships. This ranged from a coach having the players over for dinner and to watch a game at his house, as mentioned in Chapter III, to a coach "juggling" a basketball (soccer-style, by keeping the ball in the air through kicks to one another) with two of the players during a break from practice. The latter was marked with laughter and a big, congratulatory "high-five" between the players

and the assistant as they kept the ball from touching the ground throughout the entire break, though not without a couple of close calls. These repeated windows into player-coach interactions that I observed typically led to high-quality LMX relationships.

In the case of Coach Caff and Ace, the value of a strong personal relationship between the two was quite apparent when Coach Caff said he can simply tell him when he's acting like a two year old. However, though many positive effects can be seen in the examples listed and many more not written here, there were also some accompanying detrimental effects that can be seen in the responses of a couple of other Private U players who did not believe they had the same camaraderie with the staff.

Thus, one of the most vivid points within LMX theory surfaced in that within teams, both in-groups and out-groups will form. In a basketball team, and in the case of Private U, not surprisingly this stemmed from playing time. The two examples that I will provide were the exceptions rather than the rule considering they were the only two relationships that would fall into the low-quality LMX area. Because out-groups are undesirable on teams, it is vital to see how these took form.

*P.K.*

P.K. was a senior on the Private U team and signed in the aftermath of the initial NCAA sanctions during the '04-'05 season. He felt strongly that he had gambled on Private U by choosing them and said he was promised a great opportunity and a lot of playing time. He started for Private U for much of his junior season after spending his first two seasons at a junior college in the state, but with the influx of new talent, his role as a senior dramatically changed. P.K. said:

My senior year I thought I was going to play more minutes than my junior year,

but they brought along more people and it kind of upset me in a way, but I knew

that, you know, that was the coaches' decision.  From the beginning, the decisions

in practice the head coach would make, being kind of…like, he would talk to me

some times, but it was about academics – not basketball.  I understand academics,

but I came to play ball and – it was such a major part of my life, so I took a major

setback in not playing a lot of minutes, or actually just not playing  as much.  I

would still compete in practice and go as hard as I could to try and  impress coach

and let him know that I could play.  There were some people on the team that

were saying that "P.K. is shooting the ball very well – why isn't he…?" and this is

like, people on the team.  I'm kind of – not an outgoing, outspoken person and not

going to jump down anybody's throat.  You know, I want to earn it, I thought I

earned it, but they thought, you know, otherwise.

If I was in junior college or high school and that had happened, I probably

would've been kicked off the team.  I actually don't know how I took

it…sometimes it comes back to me and I think about how they treated me

and…but I just try to look forward in life and not behind.  Now that the season is

over though…I mean, I like Private U – the people and the teachers, but I just am

not going to talk to them (the coaches) a lot anymore.  I don't go up to there office

anymore because the situation that they put me in this year…I just don't talk to

them about like playing overseas or anything because I just don't know if they

will do what's best for me with like, getting the best agent, and everything.  So, I

don't have anything against them, I just…I just remember how they treated me.

I remember the first game against Tech, the head coach said "You veterans, you

all had your chance last year" – my junior year so I was thinking "How can he say

something like that?"  So, during that time, I was wondering what he was saying

there, and it made me realize that I wasn't in his plans…he never told me that

directly, but it made me realize how I was going to be treated that year.  I never

got the opportunity to play – at all – this year.  The coaches just need to be honest

to the team – even before the season.  Tell them before the season, like how many

minutes you're going to play, and all that…just tell them the truth before the

season.

*Rick*

Rick is a sophomore on the Private U team and interestingly wants to be an actor

after college making him the only player on the team who does not have future

aspirations in basketball.  However, this does not mean that he does not possess good

skills as he played a significant role on the court for the team in the previous year.  The

'05-'06 season marked a similar change to what P.K. experienced as Rick also faced a

change in his responsibilities with the team.  The LMX relationship was perceived quite

differently between the coaches and Rick because of the disparity in the role that the two

parties envisioned him playing on the team.  Rick described it like this:

I've had such a strange journey.  Everything seems like it's been backward ever since I arrived at Private U as far as basketball is concerned. Well – let's start off with last year…I was expecting it to be how it is this year.  The first game of the season I had 5 points and I was excited…5 points in 5 minutes.  I didn't really come here with the mindset of playing 40 minutes, but I got better, I was focused, and I got more time…FLIP IT…I mean, just completely flip it to this year.

Start off with the first scrimmage, I led in points, rebounds, steals, hustle plays, all that – things our coaches emphasize.  The next night, same thing, and on and on and on, but now I can't get on the court.  I don't know if it's because they (the other players) have higher rankings than me coming out of high school – I mean, so what, right?  But, maybe that's it…so…oh yeah, so my role now is…get this…

My role is to be a spy for Coach Blue and find out what's going on in the team as far as how people are feeling about the situation and our team.  And, I mean, I'll do it, but at the same time, I'm tired of hearing the coaches saying 'why don't you work hard like Rick?  Or 'You know what?  Rick would've been on the floor diving for the ball in that situation.'  Well, if you put me in, I'll do it…don't come in at halftime and say my name 8 times and then just sit me.  I've graduated from the floor now…soon I'll have towel-duty.

When I asked Rick about whether the coaches had ever communicated anything about a role-change on the team this season, he said:

They gave me the responsibility of Scout team this year (the Scout team runs the upcoming opponents' plays in practice to prepare the players who will most likely be facing that particular game-plan), which in one sense is just completely embarrassing in the sense that 'This is your team – this is where you belong for the rest of the year.'  At the same time, it's a very important element for preparing for the game and for them to put that responsibility on me rather than PK the senior, Mac, or someone else.

I've improved so much with my leadership and that's been pretty big…I keep my guys motivated – that's my job.  I yell in the huddle, I dive on the floor in warm-ups.  I kind of…I mean, I want that leadership role for the team, but it wouldn't be well-perceived for me to get it.  Like, if I got up in front of the team at halftime and tried to talk they'd say 'you're not even out there – what do you know?'  So…last year is last year…we're here now and maybe it is different this year.  Maybe everyone did get faster and stronger since last year – I don't know…so, I have to be quiet at halftime.  My whole team – my whole team is quiet at halftime…what can you say?

Noting P.K. and Rick's language is imperative when examining their stories.  P.K. mentions the "head coach" twice in his description of the ongoing events and was the only player that did not mention Coach Blue (or any other assistant) by name.  This distance that he felt from the coaching staff and his relationship was so de-personalized

that he did not even use the coaches' name.  Rick talks about "my team" and the separation that exists between the regular players and the guys on the bench that make up the Scout team who will more than likely not play during the game.  Rick has self-censored himself in the locker room even while the coaching staff is still using him as the example.

There is a stark dichotomy in the perception of the quality of LMX between the coaching staff and Rick.  In Rick's mind, he had been relegated to "spy" status when he came to Private U to compete and to play, and to do those things in actual games – not just in practice.  However, from the coaching staff's perspective, the clandestine role they gave Rick of "spy" shows an immense amount of trust in him.  Further, by awarding Rick the responsibility of leading the Scout team, the staff was honoring his approach to the game and his commitment to bettering Private U in any way possible.  "When I think of Rick, I think of hustle and a kid playing ball the right way," said one assistant.  Unfortunately, Rick and "his guys" provide a clear example of an out-group not only because they are on the Scout team, whose main role is to portray the opponent, but also because they have had to band together and create a new identity where Rick is essentially the head coach.

Yrle, Hartman and Galle (2002) stated "indications that assignment to in-group or out-group status may occur early in the life of the dyad and may be resistant to change" (p. 261).  There is also a distinct possibility that these initial experiences and exchanges between the leaders and members will dictate how the group will be shaped since these initial assignments are resistant to change.  This reality was expressed by Rick who said that he has graduated from the floor to the bench and is afraid that before too long, he

will be passing out towels.  Similarly, P.K. said that he figured it out during the first

game against Tech that he wasn't in the plans this year.  Both players felt like they were

not only in an out-group, but also that they will be trapped there for the duration of their

remaining time at Private U.  For other players, it could be that they got off to a poor start

and landed in the proverbial "doghouse."  It may be hard for them to recover from this

initial labeling, which will have an obvious effect on their playing time.  This recurring

idea of playing time obviously leads to how the coaches are able to manage cohesion on

the court.

*On-court relationships and interactions*

> *"There's an 'I' in team the way that I spell it!"*
>
> *-Talk show host, Stephen Colbert*

In the '05-'06 season, Private U received two of their three scholarships back

from the NCAA that had been part of the sanctions from the prior year.  As a result, the

team had 13 players and 12 of them were on scholarship.  After three years of the

coaching staff promising recruits early playing time, there were now 12 players that had

taken the staff up on a promise that would now be difficult to fulfill.  Coach Blue

described it best when referencing Pete and P.K. who were both upperclassmen that had

been recruited during his first season:

> When we began here, we got guys like Pete and P.K. – guys that we probably
>
> wouldn't even look at now, to be honest.  These guys are in a tough spot because
>
> they're the veterans and yet, we have better players than them that are younger.

This is pretty unique because typically your older guys are logging minutes. If not, then they've already transferred or left the program, or at least they understand their role, but for these guys they played early, like we told them they would, but now…I mean, you know…

It's just been kind of backward because those guys (Pete and P.K.) probably played a lot more minutes than their ability really warranted earlier for us, so now, they think because they've played a lot in the past and put up some points, they should be playing more. Well, we didn't have anyone else that could score points then. We didn't have enough other guys to be competitive enough that they shouldn't have been playing then, but now…uh…they…well, it's just tough for them.

P.K.'s mom called me angry and told me we're using him. I wanted to say, "Lady, your son is getting a $100,000 degree for free and we're using him?" But, in coaching you're always going to have to deal with minutes – there just aren't enough to go around to keep everyone happy.

As a result of the scenario, that Private U was facing, Coach Caff stated the week before the season, "There will be some conversations happening next week because right now, everyone thinks they're going to play twenty minutes and there aren't enough twenty minutes to go around." In other words, a true test of how the coaching staff would manage cohesion would be seen by how they managed not only the high or low

LMX relationships off the court, but on the court as well. To aid this discussion, I will give a very brief background of dialectical theory.

## Dialectical Theory

The study of dialectics was introduced to the field of communication and has most greatly benefited the area of interpersonal communication through the work of Baxter and her colleagues (Baxter, 1988, 1990; Baxter & Simon, 1993; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 1998). However, it has also been examined in the group communication field through a study on a community theater group (Kramer, 2004) and in the organizational field with regard to nursing roles (Apker, Propp, & Zabava Ford, 2005).

The dialectical perspective emerged in the interpersonal field as a form of relational maintenance. Essentially, this perspective examines ideas that are opposing forces or contradictions in relationships (Montgomery, 1993) or ideas are "both interdependent and mutually negating" (Zorn, 1995, p. 130). However, dialectical theory posits that within these relationships the contrasting ideas can co-exist. Rather than an "either/or" scenario, dialectical theory takes a "both/and" perspective. Dialectical theory views relationship maintenance as the normal, ongoing struggle of continually coping with dialectical tensions.

In this study, I observed that relationship maintenance was of utmost importance to the coaching staff at Private U. Barge (1996) examined the dialectics of group leadership, but Kramer (2004) pointed out that he focused on leaders' experiences and failed to examine group members' experiences. As a result, I will describe on-court interactions and how the coaches had to manage cohesion within a vivid dialectic from

the members' perspective. While Baxter (1988) identified three primary dialectics that operate across personal relationships: autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness, I will provide a dialectic that would be an extension from the autonomy-connection: competition-cooperation.

*Competition-cooperation dialectic*

This suggests that both competition and cooperation are at work in the team setting, and that both can be healthy in these team situations if managed properly. They are often posited against one another in research studies in a manner that proposes a group should *either* compete or cooperate and examining which of these approaches concludes better results, but this study posits them as dialectical in this area. While an athletic team has not yet been analyzed in this way, there is precedent for examining an organization that was forced to both compete and cooperate observed in Browning and Shetler's (2000) excellent portrayal of Sematech.

Sematech was a consortium born out of a pressing desire to bring collaboration between the government and the U.S. semiconductor industry in 1987, as Japan was overtaking the market that had once been dominated by U.S. companies. As a result of strategic market gains by the Japanese, who had never even developed an advancing device in this market but had simply perfected the manufacturing based on what U.S. firms created, the consortium became a landmark exercise for collaboration.

What makes Sematech so unique is that it forced the leaders in the market who have traditionally been in great opposition to one another to gather and share their ideas so that there could be a possibility of a bright future for all of the parties involved. These are corporations at the top of the market that engage in competitive prices against one

another on a daily basis that were moved into a cooperative relationship so that it could ultimately lead to an overall group success. This apparent contradictory relationship that encompasses both competition and cooperation is the basis of the dialectical perspective.

The dialectical perspective consists of four main components: contradiction, change, totality, and praxis (Baxter & Montgomery, 1998). Within the competition-cooperation dialectic, I will focus on the areas of contradiction and praxis in this chapter. Baxter and Montgomery (1998) stated that contradiction refers to the "dynamic interplay between unified opposites" (p. 4), and that praxis refers to the strategic choices or decisions that social actors make in the midst of these contradictions.

Chen, Brockner, and Chen (2002) noted "Although people ideally strive to bring their individual goals into alignment with those of their group, individual and group goals conflict with one another under certain conditions" (p. 483). Their work has argued that individuals have either an individual-primacy or collective-primacy within intra-group settings and "refers to the extent to which people emphasize their individual interests (individual-primacy) vs. the interests of their ingroup (collective-primacy)" (p. 482).

Another way of framing this is through the concept of mixed-motive conflicts. Drolet and Morris (1999) stated "Many interactions in life are mixed-motive conflicts in which the collectively optimal outcome requires mutual cooperation but individual self-interest makes it tempting not to cooperate" (p. 26). More simply put, "Mixed motive conflict refers to situations in which people are faced with a tension between motives to compete and cooperate" (Sanna, Parks, & Chang, 2003, p. 26).

Obviously, every Private U athlete wanted to win, yet there is also an inherent desire for each athlete to want to *contribute* to that win. If the autonomy-connection

dialectic is represented in this case study by individual player-Private U, it is extended by examining how an athlete will perform within this dialectic. Will they choose to compete with their fellow teammates until a starter is named and then choose to cooperate and thereby encourage that teammate as the coaching staff hopes or will they choose for this situation to result in an "either/or" scenario rather than a "both/and?"

Browning and Shetler (2000) stated "The classic conditions for cooperation are said to be facing high stakes and having high interdependence" (p. 12). I have already highlighted the interdependence required in basketball, but there are also high stakes at the collegiate level of competition. Collegiate athletics is a big business with an inordinate amount of money at stake. Consequently, it would appear that teams are ripe for cooperation, but this is not always the case. I have already described that nearly every player desires a future in the sport of basketball, but in order for this to happen they obviously have to play well and catch the attention of a professional scout. This could lead to a tension of whether they place more attention on the pursuit of individual or team goals.

When I asked the players about the tension between individual and team goals they all quickly responded with very politically correct answers such as "the team comes first," and "I don't even need to score as long as we win," and even "It's about the 'W's, not about individual honors." While these statements sound good on paper, as I mentioned earlier, every player on the Private U squad with the exception of Rick wants to continue their basketball career after their eligibility is up at Private U. Thus, I pushed Plant to go on with his response after he began by saying "Hey, it's a team sport." He added:

Okay, you really want the truth, huh?  I mean, it's a team sport with individual

success within it.  You just have to do both.  If you go in and you think about you

as an individual, you won't be able to accomplish your personal goals because

you'll mess with the team chemistry.

This was a frank, honest response so I continued by asking him if he would like to

win the conference championship to which he replied, "Of course."  I continued by

asking him what if it meant that he had to sit on the bench and not play, but that the team

would win the conference championship – would he still want them to win it?  His

answer was again quite candid: "If I have to sit?  Then, no.  I've gotta get to Chicago, you

know?  I gotta get to Chicago…so let's just have me play and have us win, okay?"

Chicago is where a pre-NBA draft camp is held for the top collegiate prospects

who arrive on an invite-only basis.  In order to be invited, the player must have stood out

throughout the course of the season.  Since teams are unable to see every minute of every

game played, the primary way for a player to stand out is obviously through their

statistics.  A player can show intangibles such as leadership and encouragement from the

bench, and these are fine qualities, but Plant repeatedly noted that he needed to average

"10 boards – 10 a game will get me a look from the big boys."  In other words, it does not

matter how many games Plant's team wins in order for him to reach one of his ultimate

goals, which is playing in the NBA.

When examining a team with a finite lifespan such as Private U, time is an

important element and Plant's language shows a level of desperation at what he has to

achieve in order to reach his goals. The collective good is truly at the heart of competitive cooperation because it is almost always necessary to have collective talent, ability, and intelligence not only in order for a team to win, but also to enable individuals to thrive. This places an individual who is pursuing individual goals at the mercy of the collective; therefore, he/she must rely on their collective "self." Though their individual "self" may be focused on statistics, their collective "self" reminds them of the need for one's teammates and consequently of the team's goals and not just the individual's goals. This places these individuals in much the same position as the corporations that arrived to the Sematech consortium.

Browning and Shetler (2000) described "Desperation now made unfamiliar but committed partners out of former adversaries – including industry rivals, government agencies, and equipment and materials suppliers. That their desperation brought competitors together in cooperation is well known" (p. 6). Much the same, individualistic people, whether in the corporate world or in athletics would just as well forge their own path and reap the rewards, but in some cases interdependence is required and without the role of cooperation a team will never achieve success. It is ironic that so many incentives in professional sports are based on individual statistics yet time and time again champions are crowned that have unselfish players taking on roles within the team for the collective good. However, at the collegiate level these players are still striving for their first professional paycheck, and it is natural for the individual "self" to dominate.

Van Oostrum and Rabbie (1995) posited "We expect that striving after one subgroup goal (e.g. by trying to 'beat' the other group or department) will hinder competitive (sub) groups in organizations to focus their attention and efforts to reach the

overall or superordinate organizational goals" (p. 276). Thus, if a player is more caught up with his playing time, his statistics, or his role on the team rather than on the opponent, it can have a detrimental effect on the team as a whole – particularly if all thirteen players are thinking this way. How is this dialectic managed in intra-group situations in athletics when the interests of the individual and collective may be diametrically opposed? As was mentioned earlier, Plant was not prepared to cheer on a teammate who is starting ahead of him because if that player performed well, it would only further enhance the likelihood that Plant would remain on the bench and being on the bench would keep him from "getting to Chicago." Again the notion of time comes up as Coach Ruff said:

> It is easier if the backups are younger players, which was not the case this season. If they're younger, you can sell them on progression and that their day is coming. It was more difficult this season because the guys riding pine were upperclassmen – it was tough to keep them with us. If the guy in front of you is older, you can tell the young guy that he's going to move on, but when the guy in front of him is a freshman…well, this guy isn't going anywhere. That could lead to destructive behaviors within the team. That could result in these older guys just checking out – thinking they're not useful and have no purpose here, like 'there's no way you're gonna get my best effort. I'm here, but I'm just gonna make use of the scholarship and the social atmosphere at Private U.' And that becomes difficult.

It's tough because you like these guys. You recruited them and you have relationships with them so you don't like to see them hurt. But at the same time, our coaching staff has to step back and say, 'We're going to be accountable for how this group does.' So, the group has to be most important. And we need our guys to really believe that the group is most important. Their success, their role, their performance has to be about team and not themselves.

Coach Ruff and the staff realized that in order to have team success, both competition and cooperation were vital. The coaching staff needed the players to compete hard in practice against one another to push each other to be the best just as IBM needed its competitors, but IBM also realized "that the major connecting link between the health of U.S. merchant chip makers and IBM's own survival as a systems maker was a viable American semiconductor equipment and materials supply industry" (p. 16). Similarly, without assistance from their teammates, individuals are unable to thrive in a team-based game.

Initially, competitive cooperation pits individuals against one another in an intra-group setting. This individual competition eventually results in players taking on specific roles which may enable (or disable) the group and its goals as a whole. IBM played the role of the coach at Sematech as they had the foresight to realize that these different parts in the process must begin to work together to have a more effective end-product, and that there could be detrimental outcomes if individual organizations tried to "play" on their own.

In a results-oriented world that is based on wins and losses, it is difficult to step away from the game-to-game grind within a season. Had Coach Blue stepped back and looked at a larger blueprint – one that not only encompassed this season, but the next as well – perhaps Rick and P.K. would not have felt like their skills were being wasted on the bench. Perhaps the staff could have pointed out to Plant examples of NBA players who do one thing really well and to encourage him that by playing that specific role, he could still bring attention to himself while simultaneously serving the greater interest of the Private U team. These are difficult things to point out to anyone, much less 18-22 year olds who have feelings of entitlement after being held up as the "gold-standard" for most of their lives, but this is the life of a collegiate basketball coach.

In this chapter, I have examined three areas of the Private U experience in which the coaching staff must manage cohesion. Their leadership is initially shown in the recruitment process and finding both the right incentives and the right message to draw the desired player to campus. Next, cohesion is further built between the coaching staff and the players through their off-court relationships and interactions. In their attempts to avoid creating "in-groups" and "out-groups," the coaching staff made sure each player was connected to a coach in hopes that the player will share not only their basketball lives, but their entire lives with the staff member.

Finally, cohesion must be managed through on-court relationships and interactions, which can be quite difficult in a high-pressured environment. There is pressure on the coaching staff to win games, and there is pressure on the players to perform at a high level. While the coaches want this performance in order to achieve team goals, the players have an added stake in their performance as the majority of them

want to further their careers in the game of basketball. As a result, there is a challenging competition-cooperation dialectic that must be addressed in order to maintain good cohesion within the team.

Coaches, as leaders, need to be mindful of their role in maintaining cohesion before and during the season. If they neglect any of these three areas, the team will have less success. Neglecting any of these three areas can lead to a breakdown of communication between the staff and the players, and also to a breakdown in the team reaching its prescribed goals.

CHAPTER V

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

*"One of the principal strengths of qualitative research remains its blend of strategy and unexpected discovery."* (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002, p. 210)

The above quotation speaks strongly to me and to this study because though I went into this study with certain areas of focus, other unexpected areas emerged as well. Further, some of the expected areas of focus were revealed at a much deeper level or observed with data that I had not foreseen prior to investigation. I was able to see intricacies that I would not have projected prior to research such as the depth of moral incentives that the coaches utilized in their recruitment of players. While it is obvious that all coaches want players that will stay out of trouble, the coaching staff was extremely overt in their message as one coach explicitly stated what they desire in their players "…character and Christianity – if they have both, bonus..."

In this final chapter, while I will summarize the previous chapters and try to provide some semblance of a "conclusion," I want to accentuate the fact that this is more of a beginning than an ending. My hope is that this study will be a springboard to future studies with data that I have yet to fully analyze as well as opening up additional opportunities for extensions in other areas from this research. In addition to a brief look at future research, I will conclude by highlighting some of the potential limitations to this study. I will look at the concept of positioning in research and how I balanced the perceived blurry line between "fan" and researcher. In particular, I will address what

Goodall (2000) calls "subjective positioning," or how our life history and personal experience shape our views of what is being studied.

## Lessons from Private U

The first research question sought to understand the idea of cohesion and how it becomes communicatively manifest on the Private U team. The concept of cohesion is a tricky one as research typically regards it as a positive attribute for team members and something that can enhance overall performance of the team as long as it does not reach a point in which members cease critical thinking as Janis (1972) explained when he noted cohesiveness as an antecedent to groupthink.

However, cohesion becomes even more of a difficult attribute when time is factored into the team due to the fact that a key member that holds a team together (portrayed as someone who is the "glue" of the team) could graduate and the team dynamic can shift dramatically. Further, a team in transition can face this in the midst of a season as a result of a player who previously helped provide cohesion for the team getting injured or simply not playing as well as people had projected him to play. The loss of social and task cohesion was experienced the following season for Private U. Four of the five starting players, as well as four other reserve players, were forced to miss at least one game due to injury, which was a loss that the '05-'06 team was fortunate to avoid.

Transition situations such as these could have a significant impact on the overall cohesiveness of the team. A player's loss due to graduation or injury could affect the social cohesion of the team due to their absence in the locker room and/or other areas on a day-to-day basis. Poor play could transpire into the loss of respect from other team

members and have a loss of task cohesion with regard to other players' confidence in that teammate.

For Private U, social cohesion was experienced in many ways off the court ranging from the time that players spent in the locker room lounging around watching television and playing video games to situations off the court where teammates would get together at the home of a coach to watch a boxing match, eat a meal, or to attend a Bible study. However, two of the most prime examples in which social cohesion was observed were through the lives of two teammates, Gov and Plant.

Gov came to America with literally one duffle bag of clothing and what he had on his back. Watching his growth throughout the year, I observed that he not only became a fan favorite due to his warm demeanor and appreciation of his new life at Private U, but he also became a favorite of his classmates and teammates. He worked hard to adjust to life in a new home. While the "family" metaphor could be interpreted and received in many different ways by each team member, it most appropriately applied to Gov in these new surroundings. Another player who experienced the best of what "family" could offer was Plant who saw his entire immediate family displaced to the Private U area due to Hurricane Katrina. The following days brought clothing, job and schooling opportunities, and most importantly, a home to his family as the result of hard work and care by the community, the team, and Private U. These "off-court" actions weighed heavily in forming players' feelings about one another and helped achieve a positive social cohesion that is typically desired by a coaching staff. Social cohesion was demonstrated through in-vivo coding by the coaching staff using the phrase "Belonging precedes believing" thereby encouraging the process of a player forming bonds with the

players and coaches so that they will buy into and believe in the program and the instruction of the coaching staff.

Some researchers such as Carless and DePaola (2000) have argued that task cohesion is more important than social cohesion. They stated "Improved group performance is more likely to accrue from targeting behaviors that enhance commitment to the group task rather than behavior that increases people's liking for one another" (p. 72). Consequently, I searched for examples of task cohesion during my time with Private U and there were plenty of accounts to observe.

Coach Caff's comment of "Winning makes people happy" may not be the most eloquent statement, but his overriding point is significant because it connotes that the end result is really what determines players' feelings about the team, and possibly even each other. The statement indicates that as long as the team is winning and the players are performing their tasks correctly, everything will be fine from a team standpoint. If true, this may sound like a team with very shallow individuals, but the fact of the matter is that collegiate athletes are typically driven by winning and as long as their teammates are helping them accomplish that, it is not a stretch to say that they will have great rapport off the court as well. Thus, "winning makes people happy" was a clear example of task cohesion for Private U. Since the wins were not coming as frequently as the players or coaches would have liked, there were times of discontent that were expressed both publicly and privately among team members.

Despite the mounting losses that began the season for Private U, frustrations never boiled over as they may have with another team perhaps due to a strategy used by the coaching staff called self-handicapping. In order to deflect some of the blame that

would inevitably come despite the difficult circumstances in which Private U was forced

to operate during the '05-'06 season, Coach Blue continually implemented self-

handicapping statements in his press conferences and interviews. This strategy was

designed to offset some of the criticism of his young team. He did this by mentioning the

team's youth in essentially every interview he gave noting that his "rookies" were

developing and on more than one occasion stating that the best thing about freshmen is

that they become sophomores.

The continual reminder to both media and fans alike of his team's youth was

certainly to preempt some of the blame and critique of the team, but it also served a vital

secondary (and perhaps primary) group which was the team itself. It is unrealistic to

think that 18-22 year olds are not reading the newspaper and/or the message boards on

the Internet about their team and their own play. The players could see their coach not

only come to their defense, but they could also read about his reasoning for why certain

actions transpired. Self-handicapping enabled the players to form a more tightly knit

team and established more trust between the players and the coaching staff.

Throughout the season though, there were many more times of positive team

interaction and Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory was utilized in this study to

examine various incidents in which group consciousness arose and was experienced as

certain fantasy-sharing and fantasy-chaining incidents took place within the team. These

events ranged from road trips for the team to the chapel services that the team took part in

prior to games. On one memorable occasion each person in the room was given a

mustard seed by the team chaplain who proceeded to tell everyone to swallow the

mustard seed. He informed them that they now had faith inside of them and it was their

decision whether to be men of fear or men of faith.  The team members unanimously stated that they wanted to be men of faith and later that night, the team won its first game of the season.

Each of these areas reflected ways in which cohesion was experienced by Private U throughout the season.  The coaching staff desired a team that would gel and would have the right team chemistry, but they also made this attribute a priority by trumpeting a communicative statement that "belonging precedes believing."  Further, they attempted to show that through their actions and not just their words seen most vividly in the team's response to Plant's family following Hurricane Katrina.  However, creating cohesion on the front end would prove to be an easier task than managing it throughout the season.  Inevitably, there would be a disgruntled player or two most likely stemming from a player not getting what he perceived to be a fair shot at contributing to the team.

Thus, the second research question asked how leaders are able to manage cohesion on the team.  Again, this is a difficult task with any team, but particularly when the variable of time enters the picture.  For example, a player who has been patient waiting for his opportunity, only to have it not come to fruition, may create problems or be a "cancer" to the team his senior season, which would not have been the case earlier in his career.  This is understandable given the fact that the senior season, due to eligibility rules, would be the player's last chance to prove himself in order to obtain a chance at continuing his career in basketball.  Leaders must manage the cohesion of a team not only on a season-to-season basis, but within the season as well.

Consequently, the coaching staff places an importance on the type of player whom they recruit because that is the easiest way to avoid many potential problems.  The

second research question was analyzed by looking at the economic, social and moral incentives that are used in the recruitment process and by looking at the message that the coaching staff uses and its "stickiness" with the prospective players.

The Leader-Member Exchange Theory was utilized to analyze certain exchanges that reflected the in-group/out-group status that frequently occurs in team situations. One of the fascinating examples was of Rick's story in which the coaching staff actually co-opted him to be a "spy" for them. While the coaching staff asked Rick to do this because of the trust they had in him, it was perceived quite differently by him as he felt he was being used for information when he would much rather be used on the court.

Finally, the Dialectical Theory was highlighted to examine the issue of competition and cooperation within the team. Whenever this many highly-touted players who have been in the limelight for most of their lives are placed on one team where there are limits to how many people can continue receiving that type of treatment, it is inevitable that there will be some clashes between competition and cooperation. How supportive a "back-up" was of a "starter" on the team was something that was riveting for me to see. While there is not a formula for getting players to put personal goals aside and take on team goals, it is something that the coaching staff tries to preach on a daily basis. This was perhaps best captured by Coach Caff who stated "…we need those guys to believe that the group is most important. Their success, their role, their performance has to be about team and not themselves."

### Personal Reflections

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) mentioned some potential challenges that researchers may run into in qualitative research. When reading about these challenges prior to

entering the field, I had no idea how pertinent some of them would be in my research.  In

retrospect, I realized that I experienced some of these challenges in a vivid way.  One

challenge they mentioned is "the sheer amount of data that must be dealt with…" (p.

209).  I knew that I would build up a lot of data since I would be in the field for roughly

six months, but after mining through page after page of transcribed formal interviews,

transcribed radio interviews, field notes, media guides, newspaper and magazine articles,

and more, I recalled the term "data asphyxiation" and felt that it was quite germane to my

situation.  Having never attempted a study of this magnitude, the data was quite

overwhelming at times and I had to step back from the situation frequently to take a deep

breath and get my bearings.

Another challenge of qualitative research that Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted is

one that is accentuated by the vast amount of data, "…the challenge of acquiring skills in

qualitative analysis" (p. 210).  While it was daunting to look at the mounting piles of

information that I was accruing during research, it was more daunting when I realized

how much of a novice I was at the analysis of such data.  Lindlof and Taylor stated "It is

true that most researchers use data in ways that are suited to their own sense of what

looks and feels right," (p. 210) but they also noted that "Theory and experience come

together in the writing of an interpretive claim" (p. 211).

Since I consider myself a novice researcher, I needed to remember the words of

Charmaz (2006) who stated that a grounded theory approach offers "an interpretive

portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it" (p. 10).  Other researchers may

have been drawn to things that I hardly noticed, but I was confident that because of my

knowledge of the team and of the sport, I would notice pertinent things.  In fact, I believe

I may have had the opposite problem of some that embark on research since I was more confident in my competence and even expertise of the localized scene under study than in my competence as a researcher. I think many understand the tools of research but start from scratch as far as localized expertise in what they are studying. While that is not necessarily a bad thing, I do believe it was advantageous for me to have this prior knowledge and I will address this further at the end of this chapter.

The best way to acquire the necessary skills in qualitative research was to dive in and to begin the study, as well to lean on the research community who Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stated are "always a silent partner at the table where interpretive work is done" (p. 210). In order to account more accurately for the research community, I should add that it was not just past research serving as a "silent partner," that assisted this study. I also had academic committee members and mentors who served as vocal partners in my research lending their insight, experience and guidance.

## Theoretical and Practical Reflections

*Superfan engaging research*

Appropriately, I was questioned by my committee members if I would be able to objectively assess the scene in which I was about to enter into as a researcher. This was due to the fact that I had a friendship with Coach Blue that existed prior to the study, as well as the fact that I had attended Private U as a student and I am now employed by the university. However, rather than viewing those things as constraints, I believe that this positioning soundly improved my ability as a researcher. Not only was I actively interested in the localized culture, which enhanced my desire to research, but I also brought to the study a level of knowledge about the scene and the history of the

organization. I had indirectly experienced some of the team's history stemming from being a fan of the Private U team and a member of the larger Private U family.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) said "The touchstone of your own experience may be more valuable an indicator for you of a potentially successful research endeavor" (p. 36). Maxwell (2005) added "Personal goals and experiences play an important role in many research studies" (p. 16). Having an in-depth understanding of Private U's recent situation that entailed tragedy, scandal, and transition culminating with massive coaching staff and player turnover, my experience and knowledge of Private U's history laid the groundwork for a successful study. Further, my friendship with the coach enabled the initial access to the scene in the first place in what were still quite precarious times in the midst of NCAA continuing investigations and sanctions.

Van Maanen (1995) stated that ethnographers are all partisan, and in turn, what they see as truth is only what they have chosen to reveal based on their partisan thoughts, or on what they choose to shine the light upon. Goodall (2000) noted that ethnographers must be willing to position themselves in the research and in so doing, realize that they have different positions which could slant the research. One of these positions is called subjective positioning.

I discussed the study with the coaching staff at length prior to its inception, and they understood that the goal of my study is that my observations/writings will end up in press at some point in the future. Further, they also understood that despite my subjective positioning favoring the staff and the Private U team, it should not be construed as a guarantee for "positive press." In fact, they realized that neither their names, nor the

name of the university will even be given.  By having these conversations at an early stage in the study's development, it eased the fear of the issue of subjective positioning.

Strauss (1987) wrote about a researcher's technical knowledge, research background, and personal experiences, which he called "experiential data":

> These experiential data should not be ignored because of the usual canons governing research (which regard personal experience and data as likely to bias the research), for these canons lead to the squashing of valuable experiential data. We say, rather, 'mine your experience, there is potential gold there!' (p. 11)

As a result of my knowledge of the Private U team, I could redirect valuable time and energy on the project to observe other things since I already knew much of the background of the initial environmental jolt that caused much of the ongoing transition. Further, my knowledge of not only the sport of basketball, but also specifically of the Private U men's basketball team made my research more efficient as well.  I also had unparalleled access to the head coach, coaching staff and players throughout this study. This combination of knowledge and access was a perfect mix.  If I had similar access to another sport but it was a sport that I did not understand or follow, it would not have been as good of a research site.  I would have had to spend a lot of time developing an understanding of the sport in order to experience the flow of the game while observing practices and games in the same way as I did with the basketball team.  Due to my past experience of having played and having followed the sport of basketball closely as a fan, these efforts were not necessary in this study.  Further, as a result of my past knowledge

of both the team and the game, I did not have to spend time analyzing what certain drills were intending to achieve and I was able to watch individual interactions between players and/or between players and coaches during times that I would have been scribbling notes. An example of such an interaction was when I observed an assistant coach and two of the Private U players "juggling" the basketball and joking around with one another during a break in practice. Maxwell (2005) stated:

> Traditionally, what you bring to the research from your own background and identity has been treated as "bias," something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component of it. This has been true to some extent even in qualitative research, despite the fact that qualitative researchers have long recognized that in this field, the researcher is the instrument of the research. (pp. 37-38)

Again, the idea that I should not take advantage of my prior knowledge of the research scene would be foolish; to pass it off as "bias" simply because I am also a fan of the team would have meant missing a great opportunity for research and one that in fact continues to this day. I believe Reason (1988) provided an excellent balance with his term "critical subjectivity" when he stated that it is:

> …a quality of awareness in which we do not suppress our primary experience; nor do we allow ourselves to be swept away and overwhelmed by it; rather we raise it to consciousness and use it as part of the inquiry process. (p. 12)

Atkinson and Hammersley (1995) wrote that a researcher is part of the social world he/she studies and one's ongoing contact with participants continually restructures relationships – an aspect called "reflexivity." While I strongly believe that my following of the team and my friendship with some of the participants enhanced my study, it was also vital to be aware of this reflexivity throughout the study in order to question how my positionality could be affecting my study.

For example, I mentioned that I had formerly played the sport of basketball competitively and now play recreationally, as well as the fact that I closely follow the sport at the collegiate and professional level. As a result, I believe this helped me seamlessly slip into conversations with some of the players and/or coaches who were discussing things that researchers who do not understand or follow the game would have been on the outside looking in regarding these conversations. Consequently, my athletic background played a role in my research. More traditional aspects of positionality include things like gender and race, which Goodall (2000) calls fixed positioning. While I addressed the practicality of studying the men's team rather than the women's team due to my gender in the second chapter, I would like to briefly discuss the topic of race within my research.

The issue of race is hard to ignore in the sport of basketball and specifically on Private U's team (which is not unlike many other collegiate programs) in that roughly 70 percent of their team was African-American. In fact, there was only one American-born Caucasian on the roster. While this ethnic make-up is not atypical for many collegiate basketball teams, it is very different than the demographics of Private U. For example,

only 7.3 percent of Private U's students are African-American. Further, out of more than

800 faculty members, only 1.7 percent is African-American (91.7 percent of the total

faculty are white) and more than 65 percent of the faculty members are male. Thus,

despite the fact that I am relatively athletic looking and was typically casually dressed in

shorts and a t-shirt, it would have been natural for the players to view me as another

random, white guy who was just watching practice. They may have even assumed that I

was a professor since a white male appears to be the norm at Private U.

Consequently, having Coach Blue introduce me the first day, having prior

relationships with a couple of the older players, and including myself in conversation

topics around basketball in a knowledgeable way all eased my entry into the scene and

helped overcome the issue of race. More than anything with these young players, they

love the game of basketball. If you can play it or discuss it at a knowledgeable level, then

I found that to be the ultimate trump card regardless of what color you are or where you

were born. Despite my lengthy time with Private U, I will never be a "native" to the

team. Nonetheless, I can still easily go into that culture and feel a part of the group,

which leads to my final reflection concerning cohesion.

I realized after leaving the field that I had been focusing on the cohesion that

occurred within the team between coaches, players, and even recruits and their parents.

However, one area that I had not considered was the cohesion that the team and the

coaching staff had developed with me and vice-versa. Having left the field following the

'05-'06 season to begin writing, I was absent from the arena for quite awhile. However,

when I showed up one day during the '06-'07 season, I basically halted practice as

players ran up and slapped me five and hugged me. Coach Caff yelled out, "Hey, buddy

– where you been?  Good to see you!" before whistling at his guys to advance to the next station so we could catch up for a minute.

Without question, I had formed a cohesive bond with both the players and the staff.  I watched another practice which occurred during the off-season when the coaches were not allowed to observe.  Rick had been making nearly every shot he took, and following practice I complimented him by telling him he had been "on-fire."  Rick thanked me and said "Make sure you tell Coach that!"  While I laughed at his comment at the time, upon later reflection, I realized that there were times like these when I had served as an intermediary between both the players and the coaching staff due to the cohesion that I had achieved within the team.  Another example occurred when visiting with Coach Blue following practice.  He would always like to hear who I thought looked good and who had played well.  I am not so vain as to think that I can contribute significant insights that he would not already be aware of, but the fact that he asked my opinion revealed the level of cohesion that had been developed throughout this study.

Perhaps the most intriguing reflection from this study is that the cohesion experience that Private U went through is not dramatically different than what one would expect from another team or organization.  Considering some of the events that transpired that caused abrupt transitions for many of the team members in the not so distant past, this fact is quite fascinating.  However, it makes more sense when you consider the continual transition that is experienced by collegiate athletic teams.  Though the '05-'06 team experienced the sanctions from the NCAA that were a result of the environmental jolt, only one of the current players knew the deceased player or had any direct connection to the tragedy.  In the immediate season that followed, team members may

have rallied around one another in a unique way, but two years later, there were hardly

any actual memories of the incident, only fresh memories from the fallout of the tragedy.

Thus, the importance of redeveloping cohesion and sustaining group consciousness is

magnified each season by the fact that team members are in constant change. A team

may only lose one player but that player may be the one who is the "glue" of the team

and the one who played a central role in maintaining a strong group dynamic.

*Future research*

The goal in qualitative research is not to present findings that are generalizable to

every scenario that is similar to that which is under study. An effort is made to have

findings emerge that are transferable into similar situations and scenes. Thus, the

obvious question having just presented a season's worth of data is "Where do you go

from here?" I believe that with further examination of the data, this work will be the

impetus of multiple future studies. For example, I believe a postmodern article on the

deconstruction of the role that "space" played in the construction of meaning and

cohesion for the Private U team is quite intriguing. There were many areas of space that

were integral during this study that ranged from the team's locker room to spaces such as

a coach's home or even on the bus as the team traveled to an opposing arena.

An additional area of future research is to extend the study of the formation of

cohesion and the ongoing managing of said cohesion by leaders to other organizations.

For example, though the Private U team provided an excellent context for this study,

there are many organizations that must continually address this topic. Organizations that

have finite life-spans, such as those dealing with a transient population like college

students, are prime examples. In other words, this study is not only for those in collegiate

athletics, but it is also for any organization that utilizes college students. Similarly, as I mentioned in an earlier chapter, many companies are dealing with a workforce that is in constant flux as new employees come and go. Thus, it would be very interesting to examine these concepts in another context.

Finally, I believe that there is ample room for future research involving leadership in the midst of transition. I think that there is the potential for casting dialectical theory as a basis for a critique of LMX. I highlighted the competition-cooperation dialectic that was described in this case study, which was quite evident in both observation and through the words of the players during interviews. Perhaps the dialectic stems from not only the players' competitiveness, but also from the desire to be in the perceived in-group of players with regard to the coaching staff rather than the out-group. With the relatively underdeveloped areas that still remain concerning cohesion within teams in transition, there are numerous areas in which future research can still occur.

Though it was an environmental jolt and excellent access to the scene that initially drove me to examine the Private U men's basketball team, I believe that there are important findings in this study that are applicable to many organizations. The importance of social and task cohesion and of leaders sustaining that cohesion by finding the right messages and incentives for their members are vital for any team – particularly one in transition. My hope is that this study will be one small addition to a greater collective body of knowledge to these topics and will enable further research to take place in order to add depth to this area of study.

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APPENDIX A


INTERVIEW GUIDE


**Group Development and Transition to Private U**
I am interested in how you arrived at Private U and how that journey has transpired, as well as what the transition process looked like upon arriving at Private U with both the coaching staff and the players. In order to find out how some of this background, let's start by having you tell me the story of how you came upon the decision to selecting Private U and how that transition process looked and developed over time up to your present position. Please start from where you feel you should. If at any time (throughout the interview), you need some time to reflect, want me to turn off the tape recorder, or need a break, let me know.

- Who did you initially connect with relationally and how did that occur? (players)
- What are some things you do as a staff to help facilitate a smooth transition for incoming players? (coaches)
- Had anything prepared you for this initial transition experience to Private U? (players)
    - How did the coaches or other players help you in this transition process?

**Cohesion, Leadership, and Transition at Private U**
Now I would like to discuss how the idea of cohesiveness is achieved within the team. Frequently, the importance of team chemistry is touted, but there are still individuals that must make plays to win games. In order to find out how much of an emphasis the idea of cohesiveness is on Private U's team, I have a few questions about this topic.
- How important is it for a team to be cohesive and to have team chemistry?
    - Is there any connection to cohesiveness off the court and on the court?
- Who takes the lead on the team in building team cohesiveness?
    - What intentional actions does the coaching staff take to build cohesion on and off the court?
    - Are there any specific examples you can recall of players intentionally striving to help build team cohesion?
    - What improvements, if any, would you suggest for the coaching staff to better facilitate the development of cohesion as new players arrive on campus?
- Tell me about an interaction with a player or coach regarding the development of cohesion on or off the court.
    - How did you feel during this interaction?
    - Who initiated this interaction?

- Are these types of interactions common?
- Can you tell me any other stories?

**Cohesion, Roles, and Competition at Private U**

One of the intriguing things about an athletic team is that each player is talented and competitive but there are only a certain number of players that will be able to play. I have a few questions for you about the role(s) you fulfill on Private U as well as questions that will address how you cope with being asked to cooperate with a teammate who may also be someone with whom you are competing for playing time.

- What are some of the roles that you play or serve on the team?
  - Have you been assigned to specific roles or have they emerged over time?
  - Have there been changes in these roles as new players have arrived and/or other players have departed?
  - How do you see your role changing in the future, if at all?
- Have you ever felt your personal goals were in conflict with the team goals at Private U?
  - Have you experienced or seen examples of tension between personal and team goals? Please expand.
  - Has this issue been addressed by the coaching staff or the players?

**Conclusions**

- Is there anything else you think I should know about you, the team, or the role of cohesion or leadership in the transition process at Private U as I move forward with this study?
- Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX B


PARTICIPANT GUIDE


Pseudonyms were assigned to each of the following individuals who participated in at least one formal interview with the researcher. In addition, many of these participants also took part in multiple informal interviews throughout the season. Seven other individuals who will remain unlisted without pseudonyms were interviewed and recorded on audio tape, but did not have segments from their interview or notes from my observations used within the study.


Coach Blue – Head Coach
Coach Caff – Assistant Coach
Coach Armstrong – Assistant Coach
Coach Ruff – Director of Basketball Operations/Business Coordinator
Coach Riv – Coordinator of Basketball Operations/Video Coordinator
Ace – Starting player
Tony Mack – Starting player
Gov – Starting player
Plant – Starting player
J.C. – Starting player
P.K. – Former starter, current back-up player
Pete – Former starter, current back-up player
Rick – Current back-up player

VITA

Blair Wilson Browning received his Bachelor of Arts degree in business from Baylor University in December 1995 and his Master of Arts in communication from the Baylor University in August 1999.  His research interests span the areas of communication and sport, conflict management, and organizational communication. Of specific interest to him is the relationship between cohesion and transient organizations and issues concerning the leadership and management of team members.

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