

2009

## Engagement in the Workplace: Incorporating Athletic Team Characteristics Into the Business Community in an Effort to Alleviate Male Disengagement

Matthew J. Bries  
*University of Northern Iowa*

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

Copyright ©2009 Matthew J. Bries

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt>

---

### Recommended Citation

Bries, Matthew J., "Engagement in the Workplace: Incorporating Athletic Team Characteristics Into the Business Community in an Effort to Alleviate Male Disengagement" (2009). *Honors Program Theses*. 791. <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt/791>

This Open Access Honors Program Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

**Offensive Materials Statement:** Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

ENGAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE: INCORPORATING ATHLETIC TEAM  
CHARACTERISTICS INTO THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY IN AN EFFORT TO  
ALLEVIATE MALE DISENGAGEMENT

A Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Designation:

University Honors with Distinction

Matthew J. Bries

University of Northern Iowa

May 2009

This Study by: Matthew J. Bries

Entitled: Engagement in the Workplace: Incorporating Athletic Team Characteristics into  
the Business Community in an Effort to Alleviate Male Disengagement

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation

University Honors with Distinction or University Honors (select appropriate designation)

Tony McAdams

5-28-09

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Honors Thesis/Project Advisor

5/28/09

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

## Abstract

This paper will focus on the idea of leveraging athletic team characteristics within the workplace in an attempt to alleviate disengagement amongst males. In order to understand what this disengagement is and how to alleviate it, three central themes, motivation and its relationship with engagement, engagement itself, and the power of identification in organizational engagement, will be discussed. Lastly, recommendations developed from a synthesis of engagement and athletic research will be presented.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
Introduction	1
Theme 1 – Motivation	2
Motivational Importance	2
Motivational Sources	4
Gender Motivation through Academics	8
Theme 2 – Engagement	13
Academic Engagement	13
Workplace Engagement	15
Theme 3 – Identification	20
Organizational Identification Background	20
Athletic Identification	21
Recommendations	22
Transformational Leadership	23
Team Unity & Competition	25
Conclusion	27
References	29

## Introduction

We spend countless hours at work, but for what cause? During an American's life, he or she will work an average of 44 hours per week, 174 hours per month, and 2,088 hours per year based upon a mere five day work week (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). That means one quarter of each American's life is spent at work, but do we care about that work? Are we committed to it? Are we truly engaged in what we do at work? Generally it seems that employees are not engaged in the workforce, and more specifically, it seems as though men are even less engaged than women. What can we do to alleviate this diminished sense of engagement? Many people believe that more hours invested at work directly correlates to a higher sense of organizational engagement. Marylene Gagne, an academic scholar, actually found the opposite; she found no correlation between hours at work and engagement (2003). Therefore, regardless of how much time we spend at work, we need something more substantive to create a truly heightened sense of organizational engagement.

This paper will focus on the idea of leveraging athletic team characteristics within the workplace in an attempt to alleviate disengagement amongst males. In order to understand what this disengagement is and how to alleviate it, three central themes, motivation and its relationship with engagement, engagement itself, and the power of identification in organizational engagement, will be discussed. The first central theme investigates whether or not males are less motivated academically than females. Focus will be placed on developing an understanding of general motivation and then a more specific understanding of academic motivation in an effort to determine whether there are gender differences in motivation. This paper will also present the difference between motivation and engagement. The second theme investigates whether or not males are less engaged both academically and in the workforce than females. Evidence will be

presented regarding general levels of engagement as well as differences in levels of engagement between males and females. The third central theme investigates whether or not males identify with athletics at a generally higher rate than females. Organizational identification will be researched in an effort to find a potential way to engage the male workforce. Recommendations developed from a synthesis of engagement and athletic research will then be presented, followed by concluding statements.

### Theme 1 – Motivation

#### *Motivational Importance*

The definition of motivation utilized throughout this paper has been adopted from Meyer, Becker, and Vandenberghe who claim that motivation is “a set of energetic forces that originates both within as well as beyond an individual’s being, to initiate work-related behavior, and to determine its form, direction, intensity, and duration” (2004, p. 992). This definition is comprised of three main foci: internally determined motivation, externally determined motivation, and the result of the combination of those motivations. The first two foci can be described through the confines of the three primary types of motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation (Pelletier et al., 1995). Intrinsic motivation develops from an inner desire to complete a task voluntarily, without outside intervention or from “innate psychological needs of competence and self-determination” (Pelletier et al., 1995). Intrinsic motivation resides in the individual person: his or her values, needs, personality, and self-efficacy; whereas, extrinsic motivation relies on factors outside of the self.

In general, extrinsic motivation is induced through outside intervention. Three basic ways to develop extrinsic motivation are external regulation, introjection, and identification

(Pelletier et al., 1995). External regulation focuses on the well-known and well-understood concept of motivation based upon external rewards or imposed constraints that are provided through outside intercession (Pelletier et al., 1995). In other words, external regulation is when someone is motivated based upon the desire to acquire a reward, amongst other things, from an external source. Introjection, conversely, is developed when an individual internalizes external pressures over time in such a way that the external forces are eventually no longer necessary to invoke the specified behavior (Pelletier et al., 1995). In other words, external pressures condition a response in an individual with such strength that after time the pressures are no longer needed to elicit the behavior. The third type of extrinsic motivation, identification, is a combination of introjection and intrinsic motivation. Motivation through identification occurs when an individual begins to value a behavior based upon the results it produces, and thus begins to practice that behavior out of a desire for its external reasons (Pelletier et al., 1995). Intrinsically, the individual chooses to behave a certain way, but the motivation for doing so is not intrinsic at all but rather based upon the person's identification with, and resulting desire for, the external results produced by the behavior. Thus, the motivating factors of identification are solely external.

Amotivation, on the other hand, is the basic loss of motivation as a whole; individuals who develop this will no longer be able to identify any reasons to continue the behavior, which results in the ultimate discontinuation of the behavior (Pelletier et al., 1995). They are no longer motivated intrinsically or extrinsically because they feel no connection between their actions and the results that subsequently occur (Pelletier et al., 1995). Amotivation is the general absence of motivation and should be avoided at all costs when attempting to motivate a workforce.

Motivation, thus, has three primary types: internal, external, and the general lack of motivation



through amotivation. The combination of these three types drives individuals' work behavior as well as determines the structure, strength, and duration of these behaviors.

### *Motivational Sources*

What precisely causes an individual to be motivated in his or her life? Motivation is a complex entity that entails countless sources and endless results. Focusing on Meyer, Becker, and Vandenberghe's research, one can break motivation into three main arenas in which to intervene: leadership, teamwork, and open communication (2004). Through the combination of these three segments, motivation will either be built or dismantled.

#### Leadership

*General importance.* Gary Latham and Christopher Ernst developed an analytical compilation of research that focused on what will be necessary to motivate future generations. Their research found an undeniable link between motivation and leadership within a company; in their words, "employee motivation is inextricably tied to an organization's leadership" (Latham & Ernst, 2006, p. 191). Leadership to Latham and Ernst, though, did not focus on one individual on the top of an organization but rather on the ways which employees interact. Latham and Ernst noted the importance of individuals who set the direction and lead the company, but they also found a substantive value of leadership within the relationships between employees and their imitation of organizational leadership.

*Leader-employee interaction.* David Stum, president of Aon Consulting's Loyalty Institute, re-built Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs into his own employee commitment pyramid. A vital element of this commitment pyramid was the idea of leadership. He focused on leadership because he believed leaders can build as well as weaken commitment within the

workforce through their day-to-day actions and behaviors (Stum, 2001). He found that the interaction between leaders and employees develops an atmosphere that both motivates and retains employees within the organization (Stum, 2001). While motivation and retention are both vital, Stum focused on the employee-leader relationship. This focus showcased the importance of a working relationship on every level of leadership within an organization from the first-line supervisors to the top executives of the organization. Through those relationships employee motivation and retention is built or diminished.

*Leader improvement.* Leaders inevitably must continue to improve and progress in their relationships with employees. The only way to continually improve is through employee feedback and employee involvement in the decision-making process (Rauch, 2007). Feedback allows the leaders to more fully understand what their actions and behaviors drive, the opinions held by their employees, and whether they are making an impact or not. The inclusion of employees in the decision-making process not only gives the employees a feeling of ownership but also allows them to better see and understand what is happening in the organization.

*Incentives.* When attempting to develop an environment truly conducive to motivation, many times leaders will attempt to utilize rewards. They assume, among other things, that employees desire more money, more vacation days, and higher prestige. Reward style managing may lead to potential disaster as reported by Del Jones, a *USA Today* journalist (2001). She describes rewards as having the potential to be coercive and actually limit motivation due to them being seemingly unfair or unachievable (Jones, 2001). Few Americans like being coerced, and often times that is how rewards are perceived: as a way of pressuring someone to do another's bidding. Additionally, rewards may be seen as uncharacteristically difficult to achieve, which diminishes an individual's desire to strive for them and may ultimately negate the desired

behavior all together. Rewards can present many positive motivators, but they also have the potential to be completely detrimental to an organization and its motivational desires. Joe Magliochetti, CEO of Dana Corporation, an automotive supplier, says, “Conceptually they (motivational rewards) sound great, but downstream the grand scheme doesn’t always work. The fallout is disenchantment” (Jones, 2001, p. 3). Rewards are not inherently bad; they merely need to be utilized with care and commitment. Through care and commitment to avoid disenchantment, rewards can drive a high level of motivation within an organization.

### Teamwork

Leadership is a vital and necessary beginning point for developing motivation within an organization. Motivation must flow from the top of the organization through the masses in an effort to express its importance and necessity, but in order to enhance motivation an organization must build commitment amongst its employees. They will become committed to an organization based upon the amount of trust developed within that organization. Richard Pech, Director of Research at La Trobe University’s Graduate School of Management, and Bret Slade, Director of Staffing and a Senior Lecturer at La Trobe University’s Graduate School of Management, completed a study which focused on determining whether or not there was a problem of employee disengagement in the workforce. Their findings clearly exposed trust as a key indicator in developing a motivated workplace (Pech & Slade, 2006). The trust they found was built through workplace relationships (Pech & Slade, 2006). The study showed that employees will respond to an environment of mutual trust in the workplace. This trust amongst employees is built through teamwork. Pech and Slade noted additional benefits from working within a group, including: satisfying an individual’s holistic need, giving meaning to his or her life, and

potentially helping that person find his or her own identity (2006). Each of these benefits can help to build that trust within an organization. This trust is vital to the development of a committed workforce because of employees' committed response to mutual trust within an organization. This commitment will lead to an enhanced motivation within the workplace.

## Communication

Communication is a well understood necessity of business, one that can create either alliance or turmoil. It has the potential to lead to an increased level of motivation within an individual employee. A key component of communication is that of goals (Meyer, et al., 2004). By understanding the vision of the company, an employee can identify more closely with that organization and create a higher sense of motivation because of it. Additionally, academic scholars, Rod McNutt and Phillip Wright of the University of New Brunswick, express the importance of recognizing specific employee contributions as well reaffirming in each employee how important he or she is to the organization (1995). Employees' benefit from this communication is the development of a personal motivator.

Developing within individuals a sense of trust and motivation is a very difficult task, but keeping them motivated is even harder and potentially more important. Any one person can be motivated to complete a task at a certain time, but the true difficulty resides with the ability to keep that person motivated, either extrinsically or intrinsically. McNutt and Wright compared the current workplace with athletic motivation in an effort to develop a way to "get people excited about coming to work every day" (1995, p. 27). They found that in order to keep someone continually motivated, business leaders need to recognize their contributions and maintain their level of importance within the team, much like coaches do on a daily basis with

their teams (McNutt & Wright, 1995). Keeping employees continually motivated is vital to the success of the organization because it builds trust in the leadership of the company. Recognizing employee contributions is a much more difficult task than it may seem. Managers, supervisors, and team leaders all need to make a concerted effort to instill within employees a sense of confidence and loyalty by recognizing the positive results the specific employees have accomplished for the organization. In addition to recognition, employees must feel that their presence and input is valued to the organization. They must also understand their importance to the organization. Without this feeling of importance they could become disengaged.

### *Gender Motivation through Academics*

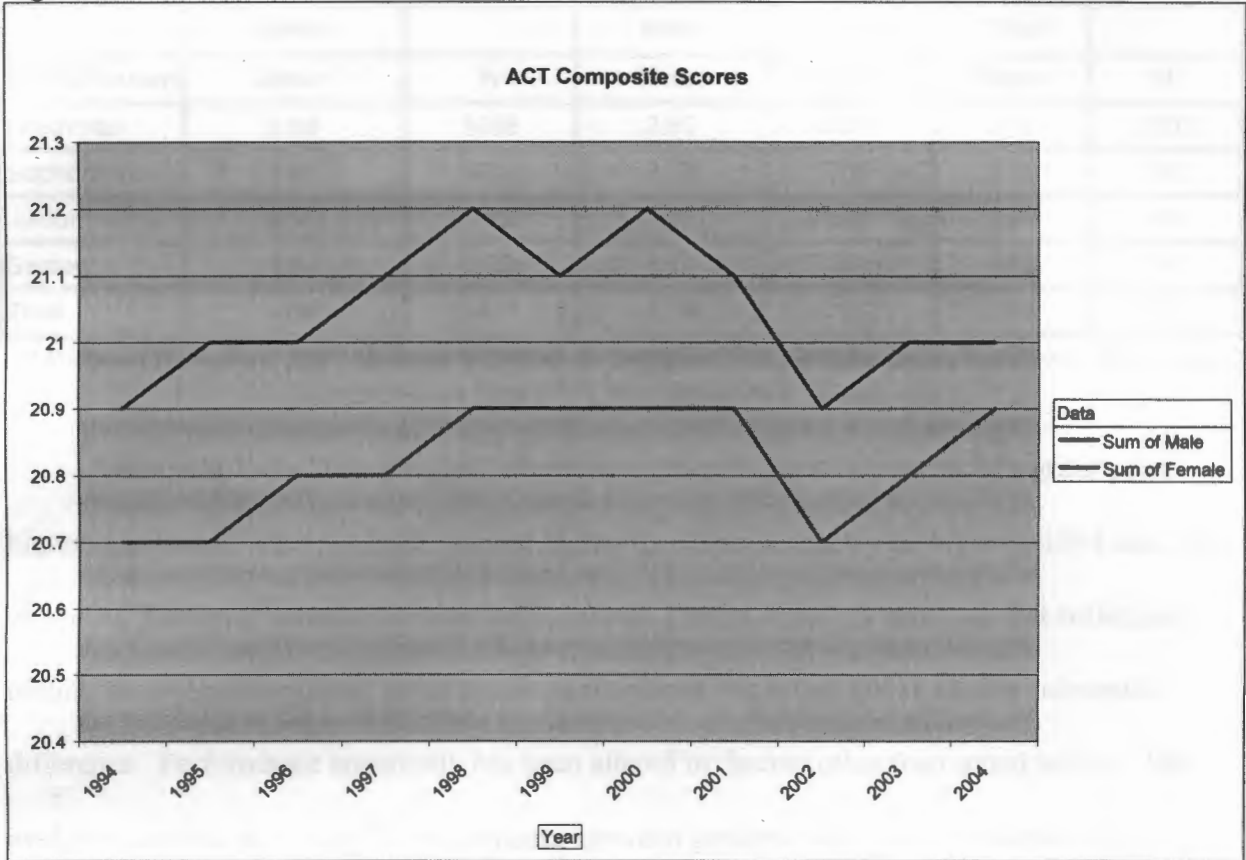
A primary theme investigated by this paper is the proposal that men are less motivated academically than women. Generally, commentators argue that men are not as motivated as women. Evidence suggests that women tend to perform better in school, are more satisfied with their careers, and set higher goals for themselves (Jayson, 2008; Noble & Sawyer, 2002). Sharon Jayson from *USA Today* discussed male motivation in an article she wrote about society's influence on it (2008). She specifically indicated that males are motivated through a "guy culture" that includes things like playing video games, talking sports, and binge drinking, among other things (Jayson, 2008). Jayson provides one opinion on male motivation, but the following paragraphs will search for evidence regarding potential motivational differences in male and female motivation.

From birth, males and females exhibit inherent differences, but as they age many of those differences become measurable through factors such as standardized test scores, grade point average (GPA), and graduation rates. Standardized test scores are believed to be generally

predictive of collegiate performance. Noble and Sawyer researched different potential predictors of collegiate success. Their research, through statistical analysis, found that “ACT composite scores provide greater differentiation across levels of achievement than do high school GPAs in terms of students’ probable success during their first year in college” (Noble & Sawyer, 2002, p. 22). The study found that ACT composite scores are a more accurate indicator of probable success than high school grades. Therefore, standardized test scores will be adopted as a baseline in an attempt to measure the difference between predicted collegiate performance and actual collegiate performance by gender.

ACT obtains historical data over several years based on the average test scores for individuals based upon several criteria, including gender. Upon dissection of the data, it turns out that females, in general, have scored consistently lower than males on the ACT exam between 1994 and 2004 as shown in Figure 1 (National Average ACT, 2004). The difference, though, has not been large. As recently as 2004, the average female score was only one tenth of a point below the average male score, which signifies that collegiate performance should be relatively equal between genders with a potential slight advantage to men.

Figure 1



*Obtained from National Average ACT Composite Score by Gender at <http://www.act.org>*

With the understanding of a roughly equalized baseline of collegiate performance indicators between males and females, the actual performance of each gender must now be considered. In the fall of 2003, the Iowa State Department of Residence Research Office developed a compilation of GPAs for the students living in the residence halls at Iowa State. They separated the data by classification and gender. For each classification of students, freshman through senior, females held substantially higher GPAs than males as shown in Figure 2, regardless of previous ACT scores (Fall 2003 Summary, 2003).

Figure 2

	Female		Male		Total	
Classification	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
Freshman	2.89	1698	2.60	2004	2.74	3702
Sophomore	3.01	488	2.78	705	2.88	1193
Junior	3.12	192	2.91	302	2.99	494
Senior	3.38	109	3.17	181	3.25	290
Total	2.96	2487	2.70	3192	2.81	5679

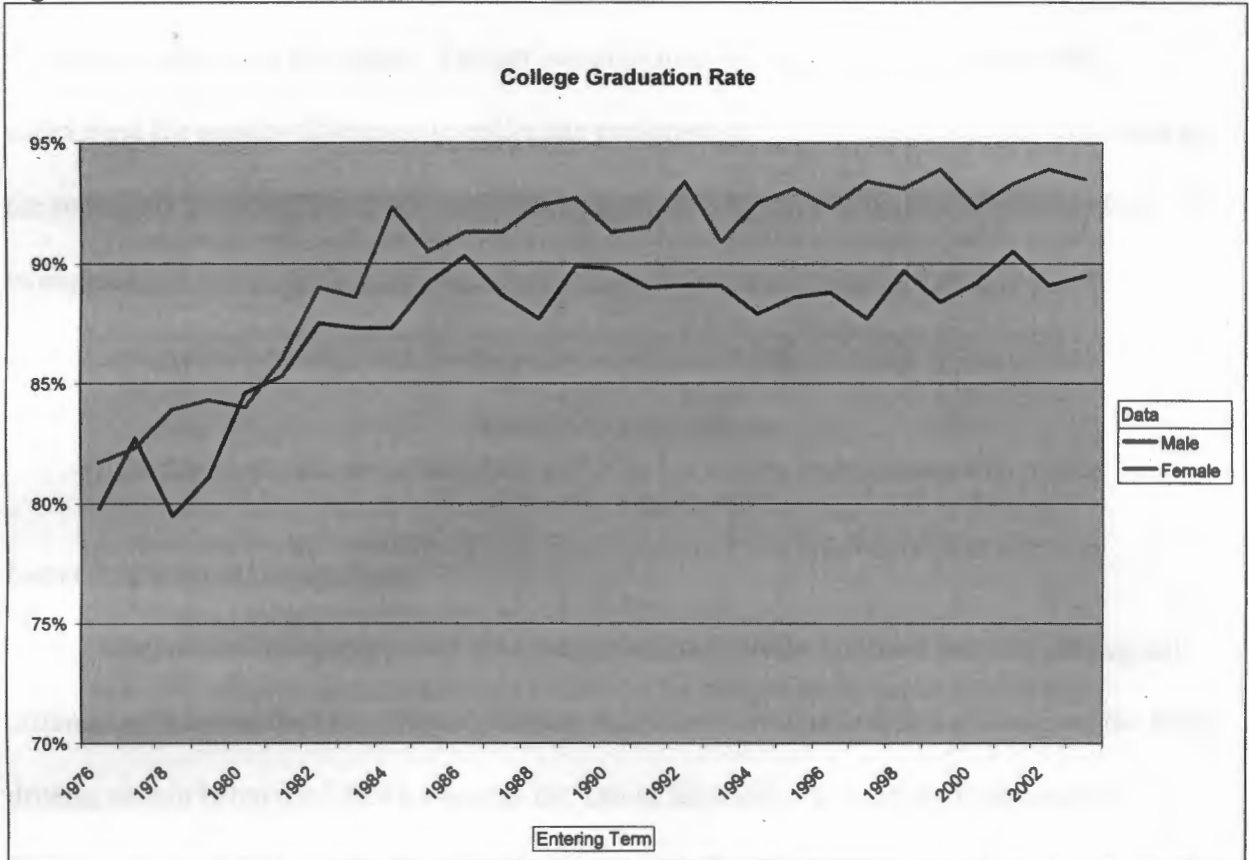
*Obtained from Fall 2003 Summary Grade Report for Undergraduates in Residence Halls and Frederiksen Court (FC) at <http://www.iastate.edu>*

Each year Iowa State females, on average, scored at least two tenths of a grade point higher than males; whereas, males scored higher than females each year between 1994 and 2004 on the ACT exam (National Average ACT, 2004). The ACT scores indicated that collegiate performance should be fairly equal across gender lines, but actual GPAs show a substantial difference. Performance apparently has been altered by factors other than actual ability. This evidence shows a gap in actual performance between genders that was not predicted by standardized test scores.

Beyond the GPA gap, graduation rates indicate that more women graduate from college than men. The University of Virginia's Institutional Assessment and Studies program published their graduation rate within five years of initial enrollment and discovered a discrepancy between the male and female population as shown in Figure 3 (Five Year Graduation Rate, 2009). The data shows that between 1976 and 2004 females have consistently graduated at higher rates than males, and it seems as though that difference is expanding (Five Year Graduation Rate, 2009). Recalling that the ACT scores indicated a fairly equal prediction of collegiate success between males and females, it is of interest that so many fewer males complete their collegiate degrees within five years.



Figure 3



*Obtained from the University of Virginia's Institutional Assessment and Studies disclosure of Five-Year Graduation Rate of First-Time First-Year Students at <http://www.web.virginia.edu>*

Differences in actual collegiate performance, as measured by GPA and graduation rates, when compared to the baseline of standardized test scores indicate a gender specific collegiate performance gap. There is no definitive evidence to prove that the source of this gender difference is motivation, but there is some expert opinion that cites it as a possibility. David Campbell, a clinical psychologist, actually researched the psychological significance of motivational conflicts on college students and found that students with the potential to succeed at the collegiate level can end up performing poorly or even go so far as to flunk out of school based upon their motivational conflicts (2003). According to Campbell motivation seems to play a part of this gender disparity, but there is no definitive evidence to prove that the cause of the gap between male and female collegiate performance is motivation. Due to a lack of substantial

evidence, the proposal that men are less academically motivated than women cannot be proven within the confines of this paper. Further research must be completed in order to fully understand the gender difference in collegiate performance. Therefore, the paper will move to the secondary proposal that males are less engaged than females in both academics and the workplace.

## Theme 2 – Engagement

### *Academic Engagement*

#### General Academic Engagement

Motivation and engagement hold many similar qualities but there are also conceptual differences between the two. Meyer, Becker, and Vandenberghe define motivation as the forces driving certain behavior (2004), whereas Dr. David Shernoff, Ph.D. of the University of Wisconsin defines engagement as actual behavior (2002). Shernoff studied academic engagement amongst 526 tenth and twelfth grade students (2002). He developed a definition of engagement which combined three main foci: concentration, interest, and enjoyment (Shernoff, 2002). He measured this engagement through students' behaviors and their self-reported feelings (Shernoff, 2002). In looking at levels of engagement, the study found that students are generally more bored and less engaged while in a classroom setting when compared with other activities (2002).

Shouping Hu and George Kuh researched academic engagement by focusing on two specific research questions. The first question looked at the characteristics that separate the most engaged and most disengaged students from the average students (Hu & Kuh, 2002). The second research question focused on institutional characteristics that were connected with

different levels of engagement and disengagement (Hu & Kuh, 2002). The study used the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) which combines data from 400 colleges and 300,000 individual student records. Results indicate that more students were disengaged than either engaged or neither (Hu & Kuh, 2002). Additionally, they researched the causes of engagement. Those causes included a combination of background characteristics, parental education level, academic preparation, years in college, major, and personal perception of college environment (Hu & Kuh, 2002).

#### Academic Engagement by Gender

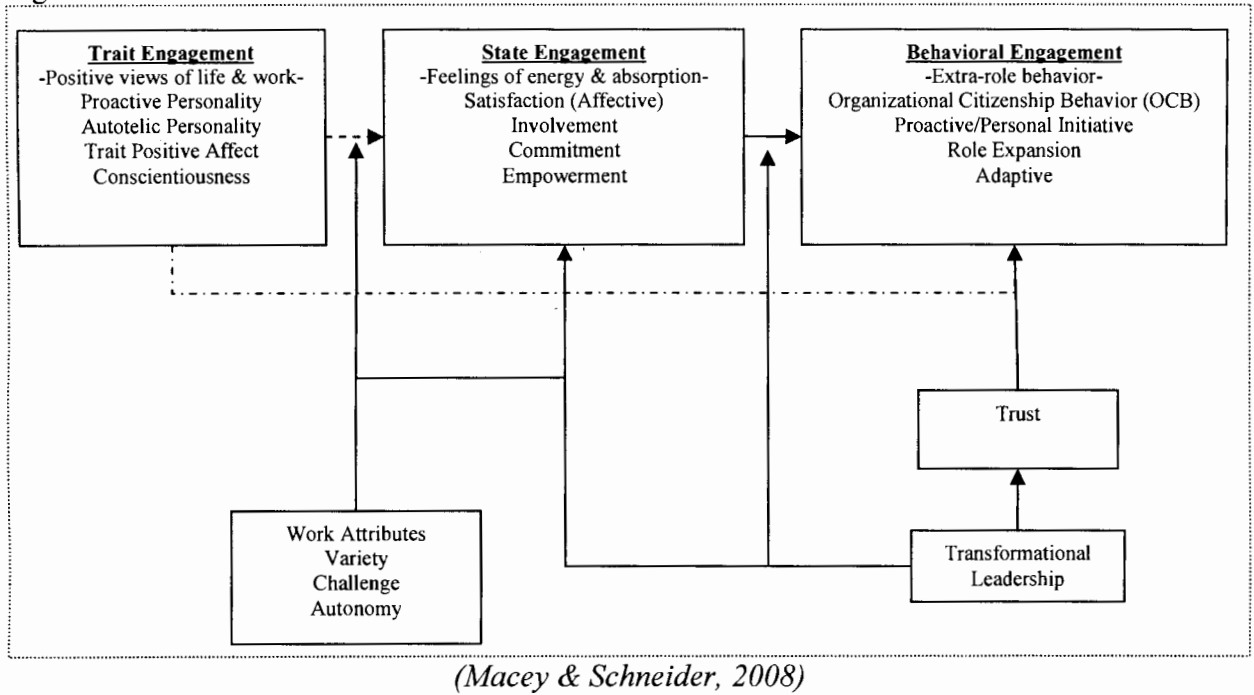
Hu and Kuh's research discovered that general student disengagement also included a difference in gender (2002). With each of their variables (the prior mentioned causes) remaining equal, Hu and Kuh found that males are disengaged at higher rates than females (2002). They concluded that gender is an immutable characteristic that contributes to an individual's level of engagement (Hu & Kuh, 2002). Additional studies in the area of academic engagement and gender found that there were substantial differences between genders (Chee, Pino, & Smith, 2005). This research reinforced the understanding of diminished academic engagement in male students when compared with female students (Chee, et al., 2005). New UCLA research indicates that women have a substantial academic advantage in college (2008). A vital cause of that advantage is females' natural academic engagement that remains consistent throughout college (UCLA, 2008). Through the research indicated above, there is considerable evidence indicating that males are disengaged at a higher rate than females in an academic setting.

*Workplace Engagement*

## General Workplace Engagement

There are several definitions of engagement utilized by practitioners and academic scholars, but this paper will focus on a meta-analysis of these definitions compiled by businessman, William Macey of Valtera Corporation, and academic scholar, Benjamin Schneider of the University of Maryland. Macey and Schneider's definition generalizes engagement as the passion and commitment of employees to their organization (2008). They specifically focused their research on three unique segments of engagement: trait engagement, state engagement, and behavioral engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Through their research, they discovered the importance and relevance of each specific type of engagement, the relationships that are held between the types, and the factors that impact levels of engagement within each type (Figure 4). Macey and Schneider noted that there is a definite similarity between engagement and motivation and that difference is due, in large part, to the ambiguity that surrounds the hypothetical construct of motivation (2008). Their research focused on clarifying the definition and importance of engagement while disregarding any further attention to motivation.

Figure 4



Macey and Schneider's first type of engagement, trait engagement, focuses on employees' personalities and their inner values (2008). An understanding of this type of engagement is vital when attempting to fully understand engagement, but it cannot be easily influenced (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Due to the inability to influence employees' inherent traits, this paper will not focus on trait engagement. Trait engagement, though, should not be disregarded as unimportant, but rather simply not pertinent to the specific action of engaging a workforce.

Macey and Schneider base their second type of engagement, state engagement, on the feelings of energy, dedication, and investment (2008). State engagement encompasses several psychological state variables, such as satisfaction, organizational commitment, job involvement, empowerment, positive affectivity, and personal investment. Macey and Schneider narrow the definition of satisfaction to include feelings of energy and enthusiasm as opposed to mere satiation. They view organizational commitment as "positive attachment to the larger

organization” and measure it with the willingness to exert energy, feel pride, and personally identify with the organization (p. 9). Their definition of job involvement includes task engagement and job commitment while utilizing the traditional view the three. Empowerment is defined by the “inclination to action” through work and to feel that one’s actions have a lasting impact and are of importance (p. 10). Positive affectivity (PA) includes feelings of persistence, vigor, energy, dedication, absorption, enthusiasm, alertness, and pride in the organization. Their final facet of state engagement is personal investment, which they define as employees supplying time and energy to their work while valuing both the outcomes of that work and their organizational membership (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Behavior engagement focuses on employee conduct through “organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), role expansion, proactive behavior, and the demonstration of personal initiative” (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 6). Each facet of behavior engagement reflects specific actions by employees of initiative, proactive conduct, and adaptive actions that are aligned with the organizational purpose and objectives (Macey & Schneider, 2008). These are the behaviors that must be tended to when attempting to enhance workplace engagement. By developing this type of conduct with employees, they will develop a sense of engagement within the organization.

Issues of engagement do not subside easily through life, so they must not disappear once individuals complete their academic years and gain employment. Del Jones, a *USA Today* journalist, cites the results of a Gallup poll which generally indicate that, “55 percent of employees have no enthusiasm for their work” (2001, p. 2). That is, over half of the United States’ working force has zero enthusiasm for their daily work. To be clear, enthusiasm is not a substitute for engagement but rather a result of engagement, as shown through Macey and

Schneider's state engagement (2008). Along with diminished workplace enthusiasm, workplace engagement has also suffered, shifting to an environment of disengagement. Disengagement is defined through the lack of behaviors, traits, and a psychological state that contributes positively to the organization (Pech & Slade, 2006). In short, disengagement is when employees "mentally quit, but stay with their current job" (Pech & Slade, 2006, p. 2). As stated by McNutt and Wright, "[employees] do not treat each day as another game or even a period in a game but as just another ordinary day" (1995, p. 27).

This problem of a diminished sense of workplace engagement permeates throughout the world. Richard Pech and Bret Slade researched this issue of employee disengagement. Their research in the United Kingdom found that only 17 percent of employees were actively engaged while at work, meaning that they "harness" themselves to their work roles and identify with their job and their employer (Pech & Slade, 2006, p. 2). Additionally, they found that 63 percent are not engaged; meaning that the employees neither identify with their job/employer nor mentally quit from their job while staying employed. The final 20 percent of employees are actually actively disengaged, meaning they have mentally quit but stay with their current job. They note that the disengaged employees are at work but actively "minimizing their work contribution" (Pech & Slade, 2006, p. 6).

Seemingly, companies will want to help their disengaged employees toward a path of engagement. That support not only assists employees personally but also develops them into a stronger performing workforce. As long as organizations have corrections available to successfully assist employees when issues of engagement arise, they will be able to survive and, in fact, will aid the development of their employees. With the vast majority of employees, over 80 percent according to Pech and Slade, being either unengaged or completely disengaged,

substantial difficulties obviously ensue within the workplace, but over half of employers, as it turns out, do not have strategies to deal with these disengaged workers (Pech & Slade, 2006).

### Workplace Engagement by Gender

Much of the structure and foundation necessary for success in the business community is developed through academics, and, as indicated previously, there seems to be a gap between men and women. Men are graduating at lower rates than females, have lower GPAs, and are generally more disengaged in an academic setting than females. These issues of engagement do not subside once men are employed. Steve Israel, a journalist, wrote about how men are “falling far behind girls in elementary school, in college, in life” (Israel, 2006, p. 1). He indicated that men are “three times as likely to be unemployed and more likely to be homeless” (Israel, 2006, p. 5). Male unemployment and homelessness are just two examples of the level of male disengagement in our society. This issue of disengagement is spread not only amongst non-working men but also with working men.

Constraints felt by anyone in the workplace can often “deaden the spirit” and make employees feel “less human,” both of which contribute to engagement issues, but men are affected by these problems much more harshly than women (Arrighi & Maume, 2000, p. 471). Men value autonomous working conditions more highly than women (Arrighi & Maume, 2000). When males are subjected to a controlling or constraining work environment, either by the inherent nature of the work or by their manager’s personality, men feel a much greater challenge to their manhood than those working under more freedom (Arrighi & Maume, 2000). When a man’s independence is challenged, his psychological state is put in jeopardy and his productivity diminishes until interventions are put in place to restore the lost sense of engagement (Pech &



Slade, 2006). There is an apparent issue with disengagement amongst males as shown by Israel, Arrighi, and Maume, and interventions must be put in place to deal with these issues. First, though, we must understand the reasons why they have become a problem.

### Theme 3 – Identification

#### *Organizational Identification Background*

There are several potential reasons why males are less engaged than women in both academics and in the workplace, including: academic/organizational identification, meaningfulness, critical feelings toward pay and performance equity, and greater demands for cognitive input, just to name a few (Pech & Slade, 2006). One of the primary causes of disengagement is a lack of organizational identification. Johnson, Johnson, and Heimberg cite the definition of organizational identification as “a process of internal and external persuasion by which the interests of an individual merge with the interests of an organization, resulting in the creation of identifications based on those interests” (1999, p. 160). Their definition of organizational identification focuses on the process of alignment between employees and organizational interests. Basically, identification with an organization ensues when an employee’s interests match those of the organization.

James Shah and Wendi Gardner discuss the issue of role identification and congruity in *Handbook of Motivation Science*. They argue that individuals who strive for goals that they can identify with achieve an enhanced sense of well-being (Shah & Gardner, 2008). Shah and Gardner go on to discuss the importance of gender norms and the positive affect they have on an individual. The research claims that individuals’ goals should align with generally accepted gender norms in an effort to obtain the greatest self-esteem and well-being (Shah & Gardner,

2008). When employees' goals match the organization's interests a foundation for organizational identification has been built. Organizational identification has been described as a vital component of employee engagement by Pech and Slade (2006) and Macey and Schneider (2008). In order to understand what employees identify with, we will develop an understanding of employees' interests.

### *Athletic Identification*

Evidence has shown that there is a problem of male disengagement in the workforce and has established that a lack of organizational identification is one specific cause of that disengagement (Arrighi & Maume, 2000; Pech & Slade, 2006; Macey & Schneider, 2008). An understanding of what males identify with may uncover a potential solution for the problem of male disengagement. Seemingly, males attribute much of their masculine identity to athletics. Scholars Andrew Sparkes and Brett Smith of the University of Exeter studied masculinity and its connection with identity (2002). They show that through athletics, males develop their own manhood; in other words, sports help boys develop masculinity (Sparkes & Smith, 2002). Their research indicates that athletics are vital for boys to reach manhood due to males' generally inherent identification with sports (Sparkes & Smith, 2002).

John Lubker and Edward Etzel, both professors, developed a study looking at college adjustment for first year students. They studied academically disengaged athletes, non-athletes, and current varsity athletes (2007). They found that freshmen males have a more difficult time than females moving past their athletic identity in search of their academic identity (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). In addition, they found that not being able to move past one's own athletic identity will lead to a more difficult adjustment to college (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). This finding may

explain, in part, why males seemingly have a less successful collegiate experience when compared with females. Additionally, it shows that males are more attached with athletics than females and that they attest a larger part of their identity towards sports. A 2002 study examined the degree an individual identifies with athletics. Results from the study showed a stronger connection to sports from males than females (James & Ridinger, 2002). James and Ridinger stated that males develop an “important social identity” from athletics (2002, p. 273).

Males seem to be identifying with athletics at a much higher rate than women in multiple stages of their life. This identification opens a gateway into potential corrective action for male engagement issues. As stated earlier, males are disengaged in the workforce, and they, in general, identify with athletics at a much higher rate than females. Because of all this, athletics may be able to alleviate workplace disengagement.

### Recommendations

Macey and Schneider’s research indicated two specific ways that the process of engagement is affected: transformational leadership and work attributes (2008). These two variables represent areas a manager can influence to enhance employee engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Thus, transformational leadership and work attributes are the foundation on which management can build an enhanced sense of engagement in the workplace. Engagement can be developed through organizational identification, and males, specifically, identify with athletics at a greater rate than females (Sparkes & Smith, 2002; Lubker & Etzel, 2007; James & Ridinger, 2002). Therefore, in order to alleviate male disengagement, intervention should be based on recreating athletic team characteristics that are focused on transforming current leadership and work attributes.

Clearly, not all employees will be affected by management focused on transformational leadership and the development of work attributes. Potentially not even all men will be affected, but men driven by athletic performance, seemingly, should develop a more motivated, productive means of working. The following recommendations compile research in an effort to alleviate male disengagement through the recreation of athletic team characteristics. Those characteristics are focused on two topics that are necessary to both organizations and athletics: transformational leadership and competition. These areas are often utilized quite differently in sports and business. This plan will focus on the uniquely athletic segments of each topic and apply those segments to the business community. The first and most important of those segments is leadership.

### *Transformational Leadership*

Leadership is a term that is extremely difficult to define. This paper will not attempt to redefine leadership, but rather will focus on the basic concepts underlying leadership: influencing, empowering, and directing individuals. Transformational leadership, more specifically, is the ability to develop a vision, set goals, and engage followers to achieve those goals (Charbonneau, Barling, & Kelloway, 2001). Charbonneau, Barling, and Kelloway researched the connection between transformational leadership and sports performance through the mediation of intrinsic motivation (2001). They found that transformational leadership can increase performance in numerous settings beyond athletics, such as the Navy, banks, the Air Force, and maintenance workers (Charbonneau, Barling, & Kelloway, 2001). Charbonneau et al. make it quite apparent that transformational leadership is necessary for fully functional athletic teams (2001).

The leader of any group or team is constantly being looked upon for guidance and leadership, whether that is pep talks in the locker room or career guidance in the boardroom. Specifically in athletics, players want to play for a coach who utilizes a democratic coaching style which includes the players in decision making (Turman, 2003). Much like a business setting, the players desire to have some control in the decisions that will ultimately affect them. With a democratic style of coaching comes a relationship of mutual respect and trust between the players and coach, and that relationship leads to positive learning and performance in athletes (Turman, 2003). This respect and trust is what engages individuals to achieve their goals, and it is through that engagement that true transformational leadership is found. The relationship between the coach and players is critical because of the vast impact a coach can have on an athlete's life, "An athletic coach can be one of the most influential figures in a person's life" (Turman, 2003, p.74).

This influential leadership not only affects athletes' lives but also affects their performance (Charbonneau, Barling, & Kelloway, 2001). Charbonneau et al.'s study showed that through intrinsic motivation, transformational leadership truly affects sports performance (2001). Therefore, in order to improve performance in athletics, the player must have an inner desire to succeed and the leader must have the ability to develop a vision, set goals, and engage the player to achieve those goals. Charbonneau et al. noted the importance of both intrinsic motivation and transformational leadership, but they explicitly emphasized the necessity for the latter (2001). Although there is a need for intrinsic motivation on the part of the player, transformational leadership is of utmost importance in athletics as well as in the business community (Charbonneau, Barling, & Kelloway, 2001).

In order to develop and enhance an individual's behavioral engagement in the workforce, transformational leadership is necessary (Macey & Schneider, 2008). This leadership will not only impact the engagement of individual employees but also may develop a relationship of trust and respect between the manager and employee, much like the relationship between a coach and player. Leadership can be very difficult to alter, but while difficult, the development of transformational leadership throughout a company is possible. Management must loyally back the changes and epitomize them throughout their work. Managerial hiring must be adjusted in order to accept only candidates who embody the characteristics necessary for transformational leadership within that specific organization. The culture of the organization must begin its slow transition to that of true transformational leadership. Without eliciting the whole organization to ascribe to this change, transformational leadership can be implemented on a group by group basis within the organization. The manager must take it upon him or herself to develop relationships of respect and trust with his or her employees through democratic leadership.

### *Team Unity & Competition*

Once respect and trust is developed between the leader and followers, that same respect and trust needs to be developed amongst the followers. John Tauer and Judith Harackiewicz, academic scholars, studied the effects of cooperation and competition on intrinsic motivation and performance in athletes (2004). They found that it is necessary to develop a true sense of unity amongst the team in hopes of promoting enjoyment (state engagement) and heightened performance (behavioral engagement) by the individual (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004). In short, they found that through the combination of cooperation and competition athletes can develop

both state engagement and behavioral engagement. They defined this combination of cooperation and competition as “intergroup competition” (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004, p. 850).

This study shows that when a group of individuals are working together towards a goal they must avoid pure competition as well as pure cooperation. With pure competition there are no alliances which make the results less than desirable. With pure cooperation there is alliance but very little to drive heightened performance; the participants were not pushed to perform at their highest levels (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004). Intergroup competition emerges out of the combination of competition and cooperation. Tauer and Harackiewicz (2004) along with others, including Bornstein, Gneezy, and Nagel (2002), found that intergroup competition leads to both behavior engagement and state engagement.

Both competition and cooperation, understandably, lead to challenges. There is a challenge to succeed in both, but that challenge is substantially different in each. Competition breeds a challenge to outperform the opponent; whereas, cooperation creates a challenge to enhance relationships within the team. When these combine, performance is enhanced because of the challenges endured by employees. This challenge is what develops “feelings of energy and absorption” with state engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008, p.6). In addition, the combination of cooperation and competition drives role expansion, initiative, and extra-role behavior with behavior engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Intergroup competition drives the development of behavioral engagement and state engagement within employees just as it does within athletes (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004; Bornstein, Gneezy, & Nagel, 2002). Instituting cultural changes such as cooperation and competition within an organization can be difficult, but based upon the research it should lead to an increase in engagement amongst individuals driven by athletic performance, specifically males.

## Conclusion

There seems to be a problem in today's world with a diminished sense of loyalty and dedication, which is driving poor performance (Pech & Slade, 2006) and it seems as though men are affected at a much higher rate than women (Arrighi & Maume, 2000). This paper hypothesized that there was a gender difference in either motivation, engagement, or both. When looking at gender differences, there is not enough evidence to prove a substantial difference in gender motivation. Seemingly there is a performance gap between genders, but what has caused the gap cannot be determined. The evidence, however, does show that employee disengagement is prevalent and that males are affected at higher rates than females. This disengagement leads to poor performance and a lowered self-image in the workplace. Employees' diminished sense of engagement is due, in part, to a lack of organizational identification. Because diminished organizational identification is a cause of disengagement, identification, therefore, is one of the ways by which to reengage the workforce. The employees affected most by diminished engagement are male, and males generally identify at a higher rate than females with athletics. Thus, reengagement of males may be achieved through athletic means.

As discussed by Macey and Schneider, the enhancement of employee engagement relies on two main criteria: transformational leadership and the characteristics of the work, including challenge, autonomy, and variety (2008). Leadership, challenge, autonomy, and variety are common between organizations and athletics, but what currently separates them is the style of leadership and the relationship among teammates. Through transformational leadership employees develop trust with their manager and therefore enhance their behavioral engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Through intergroup competition, employees develop relationships



with their colleagues by challenges, autonomy, and the variety of team based tasks; thus enhancing both state engagement and behavioral engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

When implementing these strategies, it is necessary to adopt what is uniquely athletic and apply it to the workplace. By organizations adopting these specific aspects of athletic teams, they may develop a heightened sense of engagement (both trait and behavioral) in their employees.

Through this engagement employees can become more productive, efficient, and have a heightened self-perception.

## References

- Arrighi, B., & Maume, D. (2000). Workplace subordination and men's avoidance of housework. *Journal of Family Issues, 21*, 464-487.
- Bornstein, G., Gneezy, U., Nagel, R. (2002). The effect of intergroup competition on group coordination: an experimental study. *Games and Economic Behavior, 41*, 1-25.
- Campbell, D. (2003). An intersubjective approach to reducing motivational conflict in a college freshman: a case study. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 17*(4), 55-70.
- Charbonneau, D., Barling, J., & Kelloway, E. (2001). Transformational leadership and sports performance: the mediating role of intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 31*(7), 1521-1534.
- Chee, K., Pino, N., Smith, W. (2005, September). Gender differences in the academic ethic and academic achievement. *College Student Journal*.
- Fall 2003 Summary Grade Report for Undergraduates in Residence Halls and Frederiksen Court (FC)*. (2003). Retrieved March 31, 2009, from <http://www.iastate.edu>
- Five-Year Graduation Rate of First-Time First-Year Students*. (2009). Retrieved April 11, 2009, from <http://www.web.virginia.edu>
- Gagne, M. (2003, September). The role of autonomy support and autonomy orientation in prosocial behavior engagement. *Motivation and Emotion, 27*(3).
- Hu, S., Kuh, G. (2002, October). Being (dis)engaged in educationally purposefully activities: the influences of student and institutional characteristics. *Research in Higher Education, 43*(5).
- Israel, S. (2006, January 15). Boys flunk life 101. *Times Herald-Record*.

- James, J., Ridinger, L. (2002). Female and male sport fans: a comparison of sport consumption motives. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 25(3), 260-278.
- Jayson, S. (2008, August 25). Young guys try to read society's road map for behavior. *USA Today*. Retrieved April 11, 2009, from <http://www.usatoday.com>
- Johnson, W., Johnson, A., Helmberg, F. (1999). A primary- and second-order component analysis of the organizational identification questionnaire. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 59(159).
- Jones, D. (2001, May 10). Firms spend billions to fire up workers. *USA Today*. Retrieved October 22, 2008, from <http://www.usatoday.com>
- Latham, G., & Ernst, C. (2006). Keys to motivating tomorrow's workforce. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16, 181-198.
- Lubker, F., Etzel, E. (2007). College adjustment experiences of first-year students: disengaged athletes, nonathletes, and current varsity athletes. *NASPA Journal*, 44(3), 457-480.
- Macey, W., Schneider, B. (2008). The meaning of employee engagement. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 1, 3-30.
- McNutt, R., & Wright, P. (1995). Coaching your employees: applying sports analogies to business. *Executive Development*, 8(1), 27-32.
- Meyer, J., Becker, T., & Vandenberghe, C. (2004). Employee commitment and motivation: a conceptual analysis and integrative model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(6), 991-1007.
- National Average ACT Composite Score by Gender. (2004). Retrieved April 8, 2009, from <http://www.act.org>

- Noble, J., & Sawyer, R. (2002). Predicting different levels of academic success in college using high school GPA and ACT composite score. *ACT Research Report Series*.
- Pech, R., & Slade, B. (2006). Employee disengagement: is there evidence of a growing problem? *Handbook of Business Strategy*, 7(1), 21-25.
- Pelletier, L., Fortier, M., Vallerand, R., Tuson, K., Briere, N., & Blais, M. (1995). Toward a new measure of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation in sports: the sport motivation scale. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 17, 35-53.
- Rauch, M. (2007, March). A will to win. *Sales & Marketing Management*, 19-23.
- Shah, J., Gardner W. (2008). *Handbook of Motivation Science*.
- Sherhoff, D. (2002, February 27). Flow states and student engagement in the classroom. *American Sports Institute*.
- Sparkes, A., Smith, B. (2002). Sport, spinal cord injury, embodied masculinities, and the dilemmas of narrative identity. *Men and Masculinities*, 4(258).
- Stum, D. (2001, July/August). Maslow revisited: building the employee commitment pyramid. *Strategy & Leadership*, 29(4), 4-9.
- Tauer, J., & Harackiewicz, J. (2004). The effects of cooperation and competition on intrinsic motivation and performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86(6), 849-861.
- Turman, P. (2003, April). Athletic coaching from an instructional communication perspective: the influence of coach experience on high school wrestlers' preferences and perceptions of coaching behaviors across a season. *Communication Education*, 52(2), 73-86.
- UCLA. (2008, September 18). Women have the numbers but find college is still a struggle. Retrieved April 27, 2009, from [www.physorg.com/news140970457.html](http://www.physorg.com/news140970457.html)

*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.* (2008, November 13). Retrieved April 5, 2009, from

<http://www.data.bls.gov>