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Game Changing Leadership: Developing a student athlete leadership identity development model

Sally Gates Parish

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GAME CHANGING LEADERSHIP: DEVELOPING A STUDENT ATHLETE LEADERSHIP IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

by

Sally G. Parish

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Higher Education Administration

The University of Memphis
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the student athletes who live, lead, and sacrifice every single day so that fans, families, and communities may rally around them and cheer for something we all believe in.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to my university, my faculty, and my family for believing in me. To any student who I have ever taught in a leadership class, especially those in my Leadership in Sport classes, thank you for the privilege of teaching you and learning from your experiences. To the participants in this study, thank you for opening your lives to me and for sharing your stories. To the athletic department, thank you for your willingness to allow me to learn from your teams during a historic and unprecedented time. To Keith, thank you for always giving me the push to pursue this degree. To Edith, thank you for believing I could do this and for your all-nighters to ensure I did. To Team Tangleberry - thanks for always being there with a happy-hour, a fire-pit, and a smile. To my #ashesandtears family, I love you and am grateful for your forever friendship. To Katie, Bob, Laird, Joe, Dr. Ash, and anyone else who has ever let me pontificate to you about the importance of developing student athlete leadership - thank you for being a part of this journey. To Brent, who is dearly missed, and to Beth for being my cheerleader and my champion, thank you for your friendship. To my dearest Deacon and Nola - thank you for understanding the days I needed to skip out on family fun to tell this story. I love you so much and am so proud of you. And last, to my best friend and partner in all things, thank you Danny. I am grateful for your love, support, encouragement, pancake making, and table of contents formatting skills. You are the real MVP.
Abstract

There are several theoretical models and approaches to define the leadership identity development of college students, however, none of these models adequately frame the specific leadership identity development of collegiate student athletes. The purpose of this grounded theory study is to develop a leadership model to address this gap by explaining the leadership values and behaviors unique to student athletes and to understand if their leadership experiences occur in a staged, scaffolded way. The research questions guiding this study are: What are the staged, scaffolded leadership identity development experiences of collegiate student athletes? What are the common leadership values and behaviors of collegiate student athletes and how are they practiced? These questions were explored using Constructivist Grounded Theory, three contemporary leadership theories, and theories of social and situated learning. Data collection for this study included intensive interviews, photo-elicitation, and practice observations of 12 nominated student athlete leaders across 7 NCAA Division-1 sports at a mid-size, mid-south public university. The findings of this study illuminate that collegiate student athletes do not experience leadership in staged, scaffolded ways. Instead, they experience leadership through a specific set of leadership values and behaviors that are uniquely cultivated in the context of sport. Additionally, this study found that the common leadership values of collegiate athletes are self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment, growth mindset and competitive purpose. These are practiced through the leadership behaviors of student athlete integrity, modeling, influence, communication, trust, unity, sacrifice, resilience, work ethic, and discipline. The findings of this study are presented in a proposed Student Leadership Identity Development Model that provides a resource to practitioners and professionals to better support this population on our college campuses. These findings are significant as they can help to more intentionally reframe and retrain the entire student athlete leadership experience as it relates to team culture,
leadership roles, and formal and informal leadership learning experiences. The model produced through this study not only fills an existing research gap, it can also be applied to curricular, co-curricular, and sport-based programs on college campuses to enhance the leadership experiences of collegiate student athletes during and after college.
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Chapter One: Introduction

We pick our teams. We follow our players. We don our colors and sometimes burn others in effigy. We create our brackets and draft our fantasy teams. We buy our tickets and pick our seats. We spend billions on athletic merchandise. We travel. We stay home. We cheer and we cry. We chicken dance. We curse under our breaths or (in the rare and sometimes not-so-rare occasion) we audibly curse and call names. We predicate our happiness on the athletic abilities of teenagers and 20-somethings. We tell well-trained referees and coaches with years of professional experience that they aren’t doing their jobs right, that we, the untrained and unprofessional, know better. We do the wave. We erect stadiums and monuments. We are willing to ignore the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations if it means we get one more game with them. We cite them as our heroes and role models. We wait for autographs and stand in line for tickets. We camp out overnight. We watch them on TV. We listen to them on the radio. We base our family traditions around their performance. We talk smack. We stretch in the seventh inning. We hang their faces on our walls. We backseat coach. We use the term “we” when talking about “our” wins and losses, even though we may have never played the sport a day in our life.

There is no doubt that collegiate athletics has left a significant impact on the culture of the United States, and more specifically on the culture of higher education. But, I have a wild idea. What if we invested just as much time and energy in the experiences of these student athletes on the court, pitch, pool, field, etc. and not just their athletic performance? We see them as leaders--Michael Jordan, Tamika Catchings, Missy Franklin, Serena Williams, Peyton Manning, and hundreds of others. Truly, in some instances, grown men and women of all ages,
ethnicities, and social classes idolize these 18-22 year olds. But, do we understand them? We backseat coach, but do we know what they need or what they value?

While many consider athletics a significant aspect of the higher education experience, there is not much focus on understanding the leadership experiences of those who play the game beyond keeping up with their athletic stats (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014). Often student athletes are held to higher standards and expectations than the typical college student--with the added pressure to publicly perform added to the standard pressure of academic performance (Provencio, 2016). We bestow the title of “leader” upon them because of their performance on the field or on the court, but we rarely take the time to examine what that title means, or how they got there, or if it is even warranted. Universities do not consistently provide specific leadership training to these students, often due to their already packed schedules, lack of departmental talent or divisional buy-in, or the all-too-often limited resources (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014). In a best-case scenario, an alumni student athlete who was able to advance to the next level of their athletic career will come back and share their lessons learned, but there is no leadership model or theoretical foundation to inform these conversations (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014).

We often confuse points on the board with leadership behaviors, failing to acknowledge the process through which those behaviors and beliefs may be cultivated. While there are a multitude of leadership theories, models, books, programs, and approaches, none are based entirely upon the student athlete leadership experience. None take into account the unique contexts, values, behaviors and environments that student athlete leaders experience and none of the existing models were co-created with the authentic voice of the student athlete at the center. This study aims to address just that, with the goal of developing a leadership model to
specifically inform the ways in which universities can collectively support the leadership identity development journey of the men and women who inspire our athletic enthusiasm and who deserve our understanding and support.

**Background of the Study**

Collegiate athletics has grown from the first competition held in 1852 between Yale and Harvard to the multi-billion dollar industry that we know today (Miller, 2003). The value of collegiate athletics has long been rooted in concepts of character, motivation, loyalty and citizenship (Miller, 2003). National student engagement data has demonstrated that student athletes score high in certain areas of the higher education experience including the ability to learn in diverse groups, high engagement with faculty, and leadership (NCAA, 2020). A 2016 Gallup study also reported that former athletes experienced significantly higher rates of community, purpose, and social and physical well-being as alumni (NCAA, 2000).

According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), there are nearly half-a-million college athletes participating in nearly 20,000 teams across 24 sports in three divisions (NCAA, 2020). The organization has been in existence since 1906. The first line of the organization purpose as cited in the NCAA Constitution (2019) states that it exists to “initiate, stimulate and improve intercollegiate athletics programs for student-athletes and to promote and develop educational leadership, physical fitness, athletics excellence and athletics participation as a recreational pursuit” (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA Constitution], 2019, p. 1). However, this is the only reference of the word “leadership” in the context of student athletes within the 452-page document.

The NCAA website defines its leadership development program as an entity that seeks to “provide education and training for college athletes, coaches and administrators to assist with the
transition to life after college sports, to foster the growth of the next generation of leaders and to encourage athletics administrators to translate lessons learned through competition” (NCAA, 2020, para. 1). Noticeably missing, however, is the word leadership. The leadership development arm of the NCAA also does not provide a definition of leadership, a leadership model or framework, activities, recommended programs, or a roadmap by which those who are not formally trained in leadership can work to advance the leadership identity of the student athletes in their charge. Likely due to the lack of having a consistent or researched framework or model in place, a number of universities around the country have attempted to facilitate their own student athlete leadership development programs. This number is on the rise and has been met with varying degrees of success (Voight & Hickey, 2016). I have personally facilitated such programs at two universities, and speak first-hand to the impact they can have on both individual and group outcomes.

According to Voight & Hickey’s (2016) research, the first student athlete leadership development program was established at the University of North Carolina in 2016. However, I can attest from my own experience with program creation, course development, and facilitation that this is not accurate as a program was launched and implemented at a Southeastern Conference (SEC) institution the year prior. This points to yet another challenge in student athlete leadership identity development work - there is no clearinghouse to host a central leadership model or framework for facilitation of these programs. However, Voight & Hickey’s work does prove valuable as they conducted a content analysis of websites to identify which NCAA Division 1 institutions were providing collegiate student athlete leadership development opportunities, a figure that had not previously been identified. Their research revealed that 62 athletic departments across 19 NCAA Division 1 conferences facilitated an in-house, home-
grown leadership development program for student athletes (Voight & Hickey, 2016). This figure represents 25% of available athletic departments in their sample, which indicates that, at best, at least 75% of student athletes are getting no focused leadership identity development experiences. This figure does not take into account the quality, credibility, or consistency of the engagement they do receive or the number of athletes at participating schools who are able to access these programs. Programs ranged from monthly workshops to guest speakers to programs specific to class rank or position. Others, which they deemed “fully integrated processes” included courses, mentorship, service and citizenship components. While they defined “best practice” programs, they did not define the metrics used to measure these programs, and the study did not reveal any of the leadership frameworks, models, approaches, scaffolded curriculum, or learning styles acknowledged within each program’s development. The program information consolidated by Voight and Hickey (2016) revealed much discrepancy among those offering programs, and their study acknowledged the vast differences in the academic or programmatic expertise of those facilitating these programs.

There is much literature to describe the enhanced or perceived leadership outcomes of student athletes (Astin, 2003; Barnes, 2015; Duguay, 2018; Hall, 2015; Magrum, 2019; McDowell et al., 2018; Simons et al.,1999; Weaver, 2015). Similarly, there is much literature to describe a number of theoretical and practical models of leadership including the three models referenced in this study: Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2006), Social Change Model (Komives & Wagner, 2017), and Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (Allen, Shankman, & Haber, 2016; Salovey et al., 2002), as well as a number of models not extensively explored in this study including Relational Leadership, Strengths Based Leadership, Transformational Leadership, , Authentic Leadership, and Adaptive Leadership (Dugan, 2017).
There are also sport specific and coach inspired anecdotal leadership programs like John Wooden’s Pyramid of Success and Pat Summitt’s Definite Dozen (Carty, 2005; Summitt, 1998); both of which I have taught and neither of which have a theoretical foundation. This study aims to bridge these gaps and provides a greater understanding of the leadership values, behaviors, and identities that this unique sub-population of students experience.

**Statement of the Problem**

As the research indicates (Allen et al., 2016; Dugan, 2017; Komives et al., 2006; Komives & Wagner, 2017; Northouse, 2019; Salovey et al., 2002) and as outlined in Chapter 2, there are a number of theoretical models and approaches to define and shape the leadership identity development of college students, however, none of them adequately frame the specific leadership identity development of collegiate student athletes (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014; Voight, 2016). Further research is needed on the leadership development of this student population, and a qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study would allow such a model to be created in the context of the student athlete experience with an emphasis on how their learning is situated in the environment of collegiate sport. Such a model would allow for collegiate leadership programs to be strategically structured to meet the specific leadership needs of this student population based on their unique student role and experience in sport, allowing for more targeted and direct engagement of student athlete leaders which will better prepare them for leadership both on and off campus, during and after college.

Despite references to the phenomenon of leadership within sport, there is no model that describes the leadership identity development experience of collegiate student athletes and research on the subject is sparse, at best (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014). Student athletes comprise a significant subpopulation of US college students today, and their
college experience is significantly impacted by their involvement in sport (NCAA, 2020). While there is an existing body of research related to student athlete academic success, there is not a consistent model that demonstrates the unique leadership experiences of student athletes (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014). While this type of research exists in a generalized way for all college students, and in fragmented descriptions of leadership in relation to sport, there is not a singular leadership model that defines the leadership experiences for student athletes (Astin, 2003; Barnes, 2015; Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Duguay, 2018; Fransen et al., 2014; Hall, 2015; Magrum, 2019; McDowell et al., 2018; Simons et al., 1999; Weaver, 2015). Because of the lack of knowledge that specifically defines and frames the leadership experiences of collegiate student athletes, there is an existing gap between current leadership models and the lived experiences of this student population as well as a lack consistency in student athlete leadership development content delivery, program implementation, and measurement of impact or effectiveness (Fransen at al., 2014; Voight, 2016). Currently, practitioners attempt to apply existing leadership theories and models to this specific student population in a “one size fits all” approach that vastly underserves and underrepresents the unique experiences of this student population (Hall, 2015). While research indicates that student athlete leadership behavior supports team success (Worley et al., 2020) and athlete leaders impact team cohesion, confidence, and satisfaction (Fransen et al., 2014), there is no research to indicate what those behaviors are, how they are cultivated and scaffolded as an identity, and how they are theoretically framed. As collegiate athletics have the potential to impact a number of facets of the higher education experience including application rates, rankings, funding, institutional affinity, legislative support, and alumni giving, it is important to more critically examine and define the experiences of this population -- not only for the development of the
individual students involved who later go on to become members of the workforce, but also to advance understanding of how to strengthen this very important facet of US higher education (Anderson, 2012; Fleming, 2007; Humphreys, 2006; McEvoy, 2006; Pope & Pope, 2009; Toma & Cross, 1998). In short, similar to other subpopulations on college campuses that researchers have demonstrated to have unique experiences in college, the student athlete population is a subpopulation that is half-a-million students strong any given year, with no existing leadership model to describe their experiences.

Recently, the NCAA (2020) has begun to consider the potential of intercollegiate athletics qualifying as one of George Kuh’s (2008) High Impact Practices in Higher Education (NCAA, 2020). Kuh’s High-Impact Practices suggest a number of activities or experiences believed to support student engagement, success, and retention. In a recent publication, the NCAA (2020) suggested that three of Kuh’s (2008) high impact practice criteria do not easily fit within the student athlete experience at every school but that they could be developed within athletic programs to ensure that student athletes are having equitable access to high impact experiences that ultimately lead to their persistence and success. One of these referenced practices falls under Kuh’s (2008) Service Learning and Community Based Learning which suggests the importance of students “discovering the real-world applications like leadership, work ethic and responsibility that their participation teaches them” (NCAA, 2020, para. 7). This study addresses this criteria and the lack of a working model to better define the leadership identity experience of this student population. The importance of this model is rooted in the need for US colleges and universities to better support the leadership identity development of this student population, and for this student population to have a better self-awareness of their own leadership strengths, behaviors, and values and how they contribute in a team setting.
Komives and colleagues, the researchers and creators of the only existing grounded theory related to leadership identity development, the LID model explored further in chapter 2, specifically suggest that “the possibilities of research on a new theory such as this one are numerous” (Komives et al., 2005, p. 608). They argue that further research is needed for settings which are not leader-centric, on more diverse populations, on more varied group structures, and on groups and individuals who may espouse leadership philosophies outside of relational leadership (Komives et al., 2005). Their study, similar to other studies and other models, is not specific or inclusive of the leadership identity development of student athletes. No studies or models in existence have proven to address this population yet it is widely understood that this population is unique in how they experience leadership and how they navigate their time on our college and university campuses (Astin, 2003; Barnes, 2015; Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Duguay, 2018; Fransen et al., 2014; Hall, 2015; Magrum, 2019; McDowell et al., 2018, Simons et al., 1999; Weaver, 2015).

Leadership is an often misunderstood and under examined phenomenon, particularly as it relates to specific populations like student athletes. While the historical study of leadership is fairly young in comparison to other areas of research within the academy, qualitative studies of leadership are relatively rare, particularly in North America (Klenke, 2015). The study of leadership specific to the student athlete population is even more limited. While volumes have been published on the concept of leadership over the past 60 years and a number of disciplines ranging from sport psychology to sport management have provided research and support related to the lived experiences of student athletes, there is minimal research to connect the two in a meaningful way. Even in examining three of the most commonly used leadership development models in collegiate leadership programming, the Social Change Model, the Leadership Identity
Development Model, and the Emotionally Intelligent Leadership Model, there is a gap in the research related to how these models are experienced among today’s collegiate student athletes. An understanding of how collegiate student athletes experience leadership could provide scholars and practitioners with a leadership model for practice that helps to define the leadership identity development journey for this population of college students. In doing so, institutions, organizations, coaches, faculty, and staff can be more intentional and engaged in a holistic approach to developing the leadership of collegiate student athletes.

**Purpose Statement**

Using Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006), and a theoretical framework inclusive of three contemporary leadership theories paired with the theory of social and situated learning (Allen et al., 2016; Komives et al., 2006; Komives & Wagner, 2017; Lave, & Wenger, 1990, Salovey et al., 2002) the purpose of this study is to develop a leadership model to explain the leadership values and behaviors unique to the student athlete leadership experience and to understand if these experiences occur in a staged, scaffolded way. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that leadership is defined as a collaborative process, not a position, by which an individual positively and ethically influences an individual or group to achieve their personal best. (Komives & Wagner, 2017; Northouse, 2013). The staging and scaffolding (Komives et al., 2006) being explored in this study examines how and when specific leadership values and behaviors are developed and demonstrated by student athlete leaders in the context that other staged and scaffolded leadership models present.

Using a theoretical framework made up of Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2006), Social Change Model (Komives & Wagner, 2017), Emotionally Intelligent Leadership, (Allen et al., 2016; Salovey et al., 2002) and Lave and Wenger’s (1990)
social and situated learning theories, this study aimed to develop a leadership model which explains a) the common leadership values and behaviors of collegiate student athletes and how they are practiced and b) how to engage student athlete leaders in leadership development opportunities that are unique to their experiences. Leadership behaviors are defined as what leaders do and how they act; the actions of leaders in various contexts as demonstrated through task or relationship orientation (Northouse, 2019). Consistent with grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2006), collegiate student athletes ‘espoused leadership values and their practiced leadership behaviors were be identified in data obtained through interviews, photo-elicitations, and observations.

By creating a leadership identity model specific to student athletes, this study adds to an existing body of knowledge related to the theoretical underpinnings of leadership that uniquely connects to the experiences of today’s student athlete leader and examine if existing models of staged and scaffolded leadership identity development apply similarly to this population. Participants in this study include male and female athletes from the following NCAA Division 1 team sports: men’s and women’s track and field, men’s and women’s tennis, men’s and women’s basketball, women’s soccer, softball, and football. Intercollegiate athletics is defined as organized athletic competition and support provided to athletes enrolled in institutions of higher learning across a variety of sports (Cornelius, 1995). My primary interest lies in the leadership development identity of athletes competing in team sports, hence the inclusion of participants from these specific teams. The study was conducted at a mid-south, mid-size, urban public university over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year and corresponding athletic season(s).

**Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:
1. What are the staged, scaffolded leadership identity development experiences of collegiate student athletes?

2. What are the common leadership values and behaviors of collegiate student athletes and how are they practiced?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study generated a leadership model to explicitly describe the student athlete leadership identity development experience, and in doing so promotes intentional opportunities for more specific and direct engagement of student athlete leaders. The model serves to better prepare and inform this population for leadership both on and off campus, during and after college. This study provides valuable and theoretically rooted information for scholars and practitioners to better support the experiences of student athletes and for collegiate leadership programs to be strategically structured to meet the unique leadership needs of this student population. Faculty, staff, coaches, and leadership practitioners within higher education could use this leadership model to scaffold specific programming for student athlete leaders, and could communicate their leadership values and behaviors to potential funders and employers to ensure the sustainability of the leadership support of this population. Academic programs could be built around this model, thereby supporting a number of Kuh’s (2012) high impact practices for student success. Advising programs could be shaped with this theory in mind. And, perhaps most importantly, student athlete leaders could have a model through which to best describe their lived experiences and the value they bring to higher education and the workforce.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guides this research is multifaceted, as is leadership itself, and includes a grounded theory of leadership identity development, Komives et al.’s (2006)
Leadership Identity Development Model; the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Komives & Wagner, 2017); Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (Allen, et al., 2016; Salovey et al., 2002); constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006); and the theories of social and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1990). These are depicted in Table 1.

The student leadership development theories used in this study included a staged model of leadership identity development based on the research of Susan Komives and her colleagues (Komives, et al., 2006). This model, the Leadership Identity Development Model (LID) presents leadership as a six staged directional development theory through which students progress over time (Wagner, 2009). Additionally, this study incorporated two leadership development models that did not involve a staged or scaffolded approach: the Social Change Model of leadership development (Cilente, 2009) and Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (Shankman, 2008). The Social Change Model (Komives & Wagner, 2017) frames the experiences of collegiate students who wished to use their leadership to collaborate with others to create positive social change over the course of their lifetimes. Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (Allen, et al., 2016; Salovey, et al., 2002;) is a mixed model approach to emotional intelligence and blends the two constructs of emotional intelligence and leadership to form a process-oriented approach to leadership contingent upon three interactive facets and 19 capacities.

By incorporating these three leadership models into my framework, it allows me to examine if student athlete leadership identity development is a collection of values and behaviors as exemplified by emotionally intelligent leadership and leadership for social change, or if it instead follows a staged, scaffolded model as in LID. It also allows me to examine a broad cross-section of leadership capacities to determine the best combination that most accurately depicts the lived experiences of student athlete leaders.
The inclusion of social and situated learning within my theoretical framework supported the assertions of constructivist grounded theory (discussed in detail in chapter 3) which suggest that knowledge and identity are dependent upon context. Social and situated learning are critical to this study as it helps to frame which leadership identity components are learned or developed as a result of a student athlete’s situation within their sport. Lave & Wenger’s (2015) work in this area demonstrates that learning is often informal and dynamic, connecting community, practice, meaning, and identity in a way that produces engagement, alignment, and imagination. This approach allowed my study to consider the contexts that construct and constitute leadership learning among student athletes while considering the interactions between research participants and others, as well as with the environment itself.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory and Scholars</th>
<th>Key Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Identity Development (LID) Model (Komives et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Directional development theory consisting of six stages and five categories; Emphasis on psychosocial and cognitive development; Foundation of relational leadership and self-authored leadership; Sequenced, staged model in which students move from a simple to complex understanding of leadership; Each stage is marked by a transition process and developmental influences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Change Model (Komives &amp; Wagner, 2017)</td>
<td>Model consists of three domains: individual, group and community; Three domains consist of seven values: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change; Leadership is socially responsible; Leadership is collaborative; Leadership is a process, not a position; Leadership is inclusive and values based; Community service is a powerful vehicle for leadership;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (Allen et. al, 2016; Salovey et al., 2002)</td>
<td>Blends emotional intelligence and leadership to form a process-oriented approach to leadership; Model includes three interactive facets: context, self, others which include 19 capacities that can be learned and taught; Leadership is seen as a relationship between the leader, followers, and context; Intentionality and choice are key elements of the model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory and Scholars, cont.</td>
<td>Key Characteristics, cont.</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006)</td>
<td>Emergent qualitative method that is inductive, indeterminate, comparative, interactive, and open ended; Methodology through which a researcher can flexibly and systematically collect and analyze qualitative data; New theories can be constructed that are grounded in the data; Data is constructed through observation, experience, and interactions; Data are coded and compared throughout the study; Iterative process in which data collection and analysis occurs simultaneously throughout the process; Data and theories are not discovered, they are co-created; Researchers are part of the world the study and the data they collect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Situated Learning (Lave &amp; Wenger, 1990)</td>
<td>Learning occurs through participation in practice; Learning occurs in the context of our lived participation in the world; Learning occurs as social participation in which the learner makes meaning; Learning is less formal and more dynamic; Learning is social in nature, occurring via interactions with the learner, others, and the environment; Humans are social beings, by design, and our knowing is a matter of active engagement with the world; Communities of practice provide community for learning within unique cultures, identities, and perspectives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assumptions

It is assumed by the researcher that leadership is inherently good, and that leadership can be cultivated through a series of environmental impacts, experiences, and opportunities of which competitive collegiate team sports is one. It is assumed that all team sports have the capacity to provide opportunities to demonstrate and grow leadership. It is assumed that those who recommended participants for this study did so according to the guidance provided, and that the participants engaged truthfully and honestly in the study. It is assumed that those engaging in recommending participants for this study, the participants themselves, and the researcher may maintain differing leadership values and definitions, but that these values and definitions share some sort of baseline cultural normativity (House et al., 1999).

Limitations

As the sample is constructed from coach nominations, participant representation may not align with overall representation of gender, nationality, or ethnicity of the student athlete population at the university or in general. Without further research, the results of this study cannot be consistently generalized to other college divisions with unique organizational leadership paradigms such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II, NCAA Division III, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), United States Collegiate Athletic Association (USCAA), National Christian College Athletic Association (NCCAA), Association of Christian College Athletics (ACCA), National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), and high school, international, or professional athletes. Lastly, this study was conducted in the year following the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic which had substantial impacts on higher education and intercollegiate athletics. Undoubtedly, this impacted participation, team culture, and resulting data.
Delimitations

This study only describes the leadership experiences of intercollegiate athletes competing in NCAA Division 1 team sports enrolled at a mid-size urban, public institution in the mid-south. This study does not include collegiate participants who are non-athletes who may have more time at their disposal to explore formal or informal campus leadership roles and programs. The study also does not engage student athletes at smaller, public, faith based, or rural institutions. The study also does not engage or represent athletes at the high school or professional level. This study is limited to one institution and participants are all competitors within collegiate team sports instead of more individualized athletic experiences. Additionally, all participants were nominated by a coach or other member of the athletic department staff who believe the nominees demonstrate leadership qualities, behaviors or attributes within the context of their sport. This research is focused specifically on the leadership identity experience of collegiate student athletes participating at an elite level within a team sport.

Definition of Terms

Authenticity- a deep understanding of one's own self aligned with actions that are congruent and consistent with that self-knowledge (Komives & Wagner, 2017).

Collaboration- working together toward common goals through shared responsibility, accountability, and commitment to a common purpose (HERI, 1996)

Competition- mutually exclusive goal attainment that motivates individuals to perform better than others (Komives & Wagner, 2017).

Congruence- the alignment of internal beliefs and values with observable actions and behaviors (Komives & Wagner, 2017).
Development- the result of key biological, psychological, and social interactions resulting in individual growth (Erickson, 1950).

Emotional intelligence- the knowledge, skill and ability to understand and appropriately engage one’s own feelings and emotions and the feelings and emotions of others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Formal role- a positional leadership role established by the organization or team (e.g. team captain) (Carron & Eys, 2012).

Identity- a person’s mental representation of who he or she is (Erickson, 1950).

Informal role- a non-established or appointed role that emerges as a result of influence and interactions with group or team members (Carron & Eys, 2012).

Peers- groups that share current and historical experiences that shape how they interpret events and deem to be important (Komives & Wagner, 2017).

Relationship behaviors- behaviors that help others feel comfortable with themselves, others, and the situations they are in (Northouse, 2019).

Resilience- the ability to cope and navigate through challenging times (Komives & Wagner, 2017).

Student athlete leader- an athlete who holds a formal or informal role within a team who influences team members to achieve a common goal (Loughead, et al., 2006).

Task behaviors- behaviors that facilitate goal accomplishment and help others to achieve objectives (Northouse, 2019).

Team sports- competitive sports with an emphasis on team member collaboration and coordination as a key facet of the sport itself; a sport that requires multiple players engaging
simultaneously (e.g. basketball, football, soccer, softball, volleyball, etc.) compared to more individual sports that can be played alone (golf, rifle, etc.).

**Tenure**- the length of time, or established level of experience of a player on a team

**Values**- the core principles that shape how one makes meaning of the world; key priorities that guide how individuals live their lives, determine what is important, and make decisions (Komives & Wagner, 2017).

**Research Design**

This is a qualitative research study rooted in constructivist grounded theory influenced by the research approach of Kathy Charmaz (2006). Participants were recruited by coach nomination and participated in semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation, and participant observation conducted during team practice. Data was analyzed via initial coding, axial coding and selective coding (Charmaz, 2006), and the results informed the development of a student athlete leadership identity development model. This model can be used to better describe and define the student athlete leadership development experiences of nearly half-a-million collegiate student athletes each year. The implications of these findings and this model, in particular, are vast as they can serve to reframe the collegiate leadership experience both on and off the field for this population of college students. Specifically, the work of Kathy Charmaz (2006) undergirds the theoretical framework of this study through the co-construction of data through observations, experiences, and interactions between participant and researcher that the researcher studies, separates, sorts, and synthesizes while preserving authenticity of participant voice (Charmaz, 2006).
Study Overview

The current chapter provides an introduction and background which frames the research study used to develop a leadership model to define the leadership behaviors and values of Division 1 student athletes competing in team sports. It includes the statement of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, theoretical framework and research design that guide this study. Chapter 1 also includes the assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and definition of terms which help to inform the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive review of relevant literature which features literature related to the student athlete experience, theories of social and situated learning, and leadership theories and approaches including the Leadership Identity Development model, the Social Change Model, and Emotionally Intelligent Leadership.

Chapter 3 describes the qualitative research design including detailed information of the use of grounded theory for data collection and analysis, and information on the participants, participant sampling, research site, and trustworthiness and credibility of the study. Chapter 3 concludes with the researcher’s positionality statement.

Chapter 4 provides detailed descriptions about each of the research participants and presents the findings from the study.

Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive leadership model based on this study’s findings, implications for practice, opportunities for future research, and the conclusion.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Much research exists on contemporary leadership theory (Allen, et al., 2016; Dugan, 2017; Komives et al., 2006; Komives & Wagner, 2017; Northouse, 2013; Salovey 2002) and on the experience of collegiate athletes (Barnes, 2015; Duguay, 2018; Hall, 2015; Magrum, 2019; McDowell et al., 2018; Simons et al., 1999; Weaver, 2015), yet, there is a significant gap in connecting existing leadership research and theory directly to the lived leadership identity development experience of today’s collegiate student athlete. Both anecdotally and through empirical research, the association of athletes with leadership is longstanding (Astin, 2003; Barnes, 2015; Duguay, 2018; Hall, 2015; Magrum, 2019; McDowell et al., 2018; Simons et al., 1999; Weaver, 2015). Similarly, leadership development models have been in existence for centuries and have evolved as has the world around us. From early trait and skill-based theories, to post-industrial process-oriented theories, the field of leadership pedagogy, andragogy, and research has changed immensely (Northouse, 2013). The review of the literature in this chapter focuses on a broad-based summary of existing leadership theories that pertain to collegiate student leadership development and then narrows to focus more specifically on three post-industrial theoretical perspectives that currently influence the collegiate student leadership development experience: the Leadership Identity Development Model (Komives et al., 2006), the Social Change Model (Komives & Wagner, 2017), and the Emotionally Intelligent Leadership Model (Allen, et al., 2016; Salovey 2002). This review examines each of these three models individually and then explores how each relates specifically to the experience of collegiate athletes to determine if there is a best practice approach to engaging collegiate student athletes in leadership identity development at all levels within team sports. Acknowledging that no current leadership model is specific to student athletes, this review aims to understand if there are
minimally aspects of the three existing models referenced above that could potentially apply if combined into an integrated leadership development model that engages situated and social learning theories. For the purposes of this review, the leadership identity development behaviors of coaches, professional athletes, and recreational sports were not be examined in an effort to hone in on the specific leadership experiences and application of models to today’s collegiate student athlete.

Social and situated learning theories were examined as they both emphasize the environment, or situation, which impacts one’s leadership learning through sport. Social learning theory takes social interactions into account to explain how interpersonal relations provide a source of learning, while situated learning theory is rooted in the application of learning through practice in the context of lived experience in the social world. Both debunk some of the existing learning theories and approaches which imply that learning is an individual process, and can be tied to Vygotsky’s notion of learning through social development (Lave, 2009; Wenger, 2015). Both have been researched in pedagogical and andragogic environments alike but have not been fully scaled as many researchers have commented on the apparent “mismatch” between today’s standard educational environment and approach, and “real world” applications that harness social and situated learning, (Anderson et al., 1996). This mismatch is apparent in how leadership learning occurs in communities of practice of student athletes (Christensen et al., 2011; Kirk & Kinchin, 2004; Light, 2011; Wenger, 2009). Reviewing situated and social learning theories demonstrates that these are appropriate models through which to facilitate leadership learning for the specific population of collegiate student athletes in the context of sport.
Leadership Development Models and the Student Athlete Experience

Leadership is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that connects to nearly every aspect of the human experience, yet there is no one central definition, ideology, or approach. Many researchers would say that we still do not understand leadership particularly well (Klenke, 2005). Scholars have called the field “broad and fragmented” (Duen-Lee, 2020, p. 88) with over 65 different classification systems developing over the past 60 years to further define leadership (Northouse, 2018). Some scholars have indicated that there are as many definitions of leadership as there are scholars attempting to define the concept. With early definitions stemming from concepts of power and control, to mid-1930s concepts that incorporated individual traits, leadership definitions then shifted to the group and relational themes that emerged in the 50s. Leadership began to adopt a more behavioral approach in the 60s and 70s before a slew of new approaches and definitions emerged throughout the 80s and 90s. These include more recent concepts of transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, adaptive leadership and the concept of followership. The only constant in the field of leadership is that there is no singular definition of the concept (Northouse, 2018).

Leadership scholar and historian James MacGregor Burns (1978) stated that we know much about leaders as persons but far too little about the actual process in which leadership occurs (Klenke, 2015). Burns (1978) also articulated that “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (p. 2). While the term “leader” was used as early as the 13th century, the concept of “leadership” has only been in existence since the late 1700s. Extensive research did not begin on the concept until the twentieth century (Badshah, 2012). Even today, there are philosophical debates on whether leaders are born or made, and if the latter “what makes them?” (Harrison et al., 2014, p. 39). Today, an internet search of the term
“leadership” yields 4.84 billion results, and practitioners have noted that the list of leadership behaviors “has become too long to be useful” (Vecchiotti, 2018, p. 40). With these challenges in mind, it is impossible to extensively review all existing models and definitions However, this review focused instead on a few of the key and emergent approaches to leadership that may provide useful background knowledge for the purposes of this study.

While there is significant literature available to describe the undergraduate student experience in reference to the models included herein, literature specifically synthesizing, applying and examining the student athlete leadership experience in relation to each model is limited (Fransen et al., 2014; Voight, 2016). As Weaver’s (2015) research has indicated, leadership programming and education has increased across college campuses, yet intercollegiate athletics is still relatively new to implementing a leadership development program or integrating models into daily practice. However, emerging research has begun to examine the experience of student athletes in the context of leadership, loosely linked to the LID and Social Change models as well as the role of positional leadership in sport. What this research does not yield is a comprehensive leadership model that is specific to student athlete leaders; instead, it identifies portions of existing models that are sometimes loosely applied to the lived leadership experiences of student athletes.

While it would not be possible to include an exhaustive list of all relevant leadership models in existence, either in theory or practice, it is worth noting that there are a number of widely followed models that may provide insight or connection points to describing facets of the student athlete leader’s experience. These models are briefly described below in Table 2:
### Table 2

**Leadership Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Theory or Approach</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Scholars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Man Theory</td>
<td>Great leaders are born and will emerge when faced with the appropriate situation.</td>
<td>Thomas Carlyle (1841)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait Leadership</td>
<td>People are born with certain characteristics like intelligence and creativity that lead them to excel in leadership roles.</td>
<td>Gordon Allport (1921)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden’s Pyramid of Success</td>
<td>While not an academic leadership theory or approach, Wooden’s Pyramid of Success is predicated upon a scaffolded approach to success gained through 25 practiced behaviors.</td>
<td>John Wooden (1948)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional Leadership</td>
<td>Systems of punishment and reward define the leadership relationship between the leader and the follower. Leader-Member exchange builds upon this concept by highlighting the leader/follower relationship based upon the transactions made.</td>
<td>George B. Graen (1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant Leadership</td>
<td>A leader is a servant first, and embodies a set of tenets that enrich the lives of individuals, organizations, and the world around them.</td>
<td>Robert Greenleaf (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>Leadership is characterized by trust that results in motivation, inspiration, and charisma in which both leaders and followers have a mutually beneficial experience.</td>
<td>Bernard Bass (1985); Kouzes &amp; Posner (1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Leadership</td>
<td>Leaders determine whether to monitor or take action to support the team, and follow a task, relational, or environmental approach to support team effectiveness.</td>
<td>Susan Kogler Hill (1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Leadership</td>
<td>Authentic leadership is based on passion and purpose that inspire a set of qualities that an authentic leader demonstrates.</td>
<td>Bill George (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Leadership</td>
<td>A framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments.</td>
<td>Ronald Heifetz (2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Without a specific model in mind to define or describe leadership specific to the context of sport, researchers have demonstrated that student athlete leaders tend to be identified as the team’s skilled performers, individuals with critical playing positions, and/or the team’s veteran players (Duguay, 2018). However, all student athletes should have the capacity to lead regardless of their performance or tenure. Additionally, according to Weaver (2015), “widely held research related to leadership in athletics focuses primarily on the development of coaches’ leadership styles versus developing student athlete leadership capacity” (p. 54). Weaver also indicates that the athletic team and departmental structures tend to promote the slow growth of a student athlete, which allows for the emphasized growth of the positional leader. Finally, Weaver also suggests that the role and selection of team captain is an example of hierarchical, positional leadership that one may witness in sport, but that these roles often come with no instruction, development, skill, or competency needed to navigate unfamiliar leadership terrain. Team captains are given additional responsibilities such as role modeling, mentoring, and problem solving and are also given greater access to decision-makers and coaches, often serving as mediators between athletes and coaches (Weaver, 2015). Weaver suggests that these positional leaders should be given adequate leadership training to be successful in these given leadership roles. Weaver also indicates that student athletes are often given positional leadership titles and roles due to their athletic skill set. Top athletic performers are often expected to lead the team through challenges, however, Weaver indicates that being a star athlete and a star leader are not synonymous and suggests that coaches should cultivate opportunities to share leadership responsibilities with student athletes beyond the traditional, positional leadership role of captain (Weaver, 2015). He offers examples of engaging athletes as counselors at sport-specific summer camps and suggests that they should be engaged in leading team meetings, practices, off-season
workouts, community outreach programs, and game-time situations. But consistent with much of the existing research, Weaver does not specify which model should be used to best describe or develop leadership among the student athlete population. This lack of specificity to which model, or which combination of models, continues to present a gap in theory and practice of student athlete leadership identity development. However, the body of research that does exist related to modern student leadership development points to three primary leadership development models which are described in detail and in relation to sport in the sections that follow.

**Leadership Identity Development Model (LID)**

The Leadership Identity Development Model is the application of a grounded theory leadership model created by Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella and Osteen in 2005 to address the research gap on the sequential steps in which students experience leadership development. The Leadership Identity Development model seeks to examine and explain the ways in which collegiate student leaders move through a series of stages in their leadership development, addressing a gap in the research between student development theory and student leadership development. The LID model takes into account the journey college students make in their psychosocial and cognitive development, as well as through their growth as relational and self-authored leaders (Komives et al., 2006).

Because the purpose of their study was to understand how a leadership identity is created, Komives and colleagues opted for a grounded theory methodology which allowed them to generate a theoretical model that is grounded in the experience of the participants. In Komives et al.’s (2006) study, the developmental experiences of college students who had demonstrated strong relational leadership was studied through an in-depth, life story, interview technique. The theory of relational leadership examined in Komives et al.’s study is examined in further detail
later within this chapter. The sample population included 13 students from diverse racial, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and academic backgrounds. The researchers used constant comparative analysis and open, axial, and selective coding to analyze their data (Komives et al., 2006).

**Figure 1**

*LID Model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Exploration and Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Leader Identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Leadership Differentiated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>Generativity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>Integration and Synthesis</td>
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</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing Self</td>
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<td>Group Influences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changing View of Self with Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadening View of Leadership</td>
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The LID model, as shown in Figure 1, is a directional development theory because of the way students move through each stage sequentially and do not reach later stages until preceding stages have been explored. Students develop from a simple to a more complex understanding of leadership. As this understanding evolves, students move away from seeing leadership as a position and move towards seeing leadership as a process. (Wagner, 2009). According to Komives and colleagues (2009), the LID model consists of six stages and five categories that influence the development of one’s leadership identity. The six stages include: awareness, exploration, leadership identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. The five categories of the LID model consist of: broadening view of
leadership, developing self, group influences, developmental influences, and the changing view of self with others. As students move through each stage and category, they are moving from a stage of dependence to interdependence. Each stage is marked by a transition process which is deemed as critical to the student’s leadership development experience.

Awareness, the first stage, includes the initial understanding that leadership exists but only in historical or prominent public or familial figures. Exploration and Engagement, the second stage, includes seeking new experiences in group settings such as clubs, groups, sports, etc. often under the collegiate moniker of “getting involved.” Leader Identified, the third stage, is based upon the concept that leadership is a position. This stage is leader centric, and also asserts that anyone not in the positional leadership role is viewed as a follower. A key crisis appears to occur in Stage Three which disrupts the hierarchical understanding of leadership and transitions an individual to a collaborative approach to leadership characterized by Stage Four of this model (Wagner, 2009).

Leadership Differentiated, the fourth stage, is when the student’s perspective of leadership begins to shift from leadership as a position to leadership as a process. In this process, leadership can be demonstrated by group members without positional titles or expectations to lead within their respective roles. In a sport-based example, leadership does not have to come from a coach, captain or more tenured player as would have been conceptualized in previous stages. Leadership instead, can come from anywhere in the group or team. In Generativity, stage five, students begin to make commitments to things they are passionate about and dedicate their leadership to those causes while also demonstrating a concern for the sustainability of their groups. Affirmation, modeling, and mentorship become aspects of practice in this stage and the transition in this stage is much more reflective than in previous stages. The sixth and final stage,
synthesis, is marked by students acknowledging that leadership can happen from anywhere in the organization, that one does not need a position or a title to lead, and that congruence, credibility, and trustworthiness are critical aspects of leadership. It is in this final stage that leadership learning is viewed and cultivated as a lifelong process (Komives et al., 2006).

The five categories of the LID model consist of: broadening view of leadership, developing self, group influences, developmental influences, and the changing view of self with others. Students’ broadening view of leadership evolves from seeing leadership as something others do, to seeing leadership as a positional role, to seeing leadership as something they can obtain, and finally to seeing leadership as a process. Developing self includes increasing self-awareness, developing self-confidence, developing interpersonal efficacy, integrating new skills, and increasing motivations. Group influences include participating in groups and engaging in group development behavior, both of which would be reflected in team sports. Developmental influences include parental and peer involvement as well as personal reflection (Komives, et al. 2006).

On the whole, research on the LID model asserts that most students enter college with a hierarchical, leader/follower, top-down view of leadership (Komives, et al. 2006). This approach is more consistent with traditional leadership theories, including trait, behavioral, and situational theories that support student athlete behavior that accepts or perceives coaches and captains as the exclusive leaders of a team. As students begin to view themselves from a lens that is independent of others, they transition their leadership perspective to actions or behaviors that can result in a shared group process. This approach is more consistent with postindustrial views of leadership (Komives et al., 2006). In applying the LID model, educators and practitioners must also acknowledge that leadership identity intersects with other dimensions of identity including
race, culture, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and social class. “A challenge in using the LID model is recognizing this intersectionality and how students’ multiple identities shift in relative salience depending on context and relationships” (Owen, 2012, p. 29).

**Relational Leadership in the Context of the LID Model**

As relational leadership is the undergirding model upon which the LID model was predicated, and is the criteria which established the purposeful sampling in the LID grounded theory study, it is important to examine it in the context of LID. The relational leadership model first emerged in 1998 under the direction of Komives, Lucas, and McMahon. The model is conceptual in nature and provides a framework for how leadership may be cultivated through relationships and group processes. This model situates leadership as learnable. Within this model, Komives defines leadership as “a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (Dugan, 2017). The inclusion of “positive change” can make this model difficult to transfer to the concept of sport where the intended outcome may not be as altruistic or community oriented. The relational leadership model maintains a constructivist perspective and includes five core components: purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical, and process oriented (Dugan, 2017).

Each component of the relational leadership model is written from the point of view of a positional leader, and not in the context of leadership as a process. This is concerning as it relates to its role as a foundational element in the LID model to define a leadership process. The purposeful component of the relational leadership model is its epicenter and defines both the context and nature of change efforts toward which leadership is directed. In the purposeful component, leaders commit to goals through collaboration and shared vision. The inclusive component suggests that leaders engage with diverse perspectives, experiences, and identities
with the goal to understand and advance empathy, equity, and connectedness. The ethical component of the relational leadership model emphasizes values that serve as group norms for decision making and modeling specific value-laden behaviors. Lastly, the process orientation aspect of the model suggests that relational synergy creates a process for group creation, cohesion, and collaboration all of which contribute to mission-driven goals and meaning making around leadership experiences (Dugan, 2017).

Komives et al. (1998) asserts that relational leadership is inherently a model comprised of multiple philosophies, but is not in itself a theory. She acknowledges the gap that may exist between the centrality of relationships in this model and the degree to which those relationships are deemed as important in the larger community. This is an interesting perspective as it relates to how LID and its foundation of relational leadership is embodied within certain sports and certain team cultures where there may not be an explicit emphasis on relationships. The authors of the model, consistent with the constructionist approach, do not provide a framework through which to operationalize relational leadership but instead emphasize a commitment to ethical leadership oriented toward group goals (Dugan, 2017). The work later conducted by Komives and her colleagues in creating the LID model, did provide more of a framework for actualization and confirmed the relational leadership model through their theoretical application. However, there has been no dedicated research conducted on relational leadership to date, which does open the model to scrutiny as the primary foundation on which the LID model is predicated and in the participant selection criteria for the initial LID grounded theory study (Dugan, 2017).

Leadership Identity Development (LID) and the Student Athlete

Hall (2015) indicates that professionals working with established groups, such as a varsity team, should expect most students to begin in the third stage of the LID model, Leader
Identified. She asserts that professionals should ensure that specific skill development is being actively incorporated into group development including a focus on delegation, goal development, and effective meeting facilitation. Hall (2015) indicates that while the LID model provides guidance for professionals engaging with college students, there are important challenges to consider including a student’s misconception of the stage they are in and ensuring that the model is not used in a “one size fits all” approach which does not take into consideration the predictors of behavior based on the intersectionality of various student identities and groups (Hall, 2015). Specifically, if a model consisting of six stages only has three stages that apply to the experiences of student athletes, it would suggest that a new theoretical approach is warranted.

Additionally, limited research exists to specifically connect the lived leadership experiences of student athletes to the five categories of the LID model (broadening view of leadership, developing self, group influences, developmental influences, and the changing view of self with others). Specifically, the developmental influences of coaches on the lives of student athletes is often unaddressed in research. While literature related to student athlete experience within these categories may exist, existing literature does not specifically connect these experiences directly to the LID model or stages of student athlete identity development within this model which presents an area for future research.

Social Change Model (SCM) and Socially Responsible Leadership (SRL)

The Social Change Model (SCM) was created in 2006 by a team of leadership educators and researchers who wished to frame the experiences of collegiate students who wished to use their leadership to collaborate with others to create positive social change over the course of their lifetimes. The team of 15 referred to themselves as an “ensemble” funded by the Eisenhower Leadership Development Program within the US Department of Education. The conceptual basis

The SCM is based upon the following assumptions: leadership is socially responsible, leadership is collaborative, leadership is process oriented and not a position, leadership is inclusive and accessible to all, leadership is values based, and community service is a powerful vehicle for leadership (Cilente, 2009).

The model, as illustrated in Figure 2, utilizes three levels of values clustered into individual, group and community domains (Komives & Wagner, 2017). Students may enter the model at any point, and each value interacts with and influences the others. Each value is a distinct component of the model, and the model asserts that positive social change is not possible without all values interacting (Cilente, 2009). The Seven C’s of Change include the individual values of consciousness of self, congruence, commitment; the group values of collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility; and the community value includes citizenship.
Figure 2

Social Change Model


Consciousness of self refers to one’s awareness of their personal beliefs, values, emotions, attitudes, and overall mindfulness. Congruence refers to one’s ability to act in congruence with their personal beliefs, attitudes and emotions, or simply put, their ability to “walk the talk.” Commitment refers to one’s ability follow through and invest in an action aligned with their passions and purpose. Collaboration refers to one’s ability to engage in the collective contributions of others with mutually beneficial goals. Common purpose refers to one’s ability to engage in trust and shared responsibility toward common aims, values, goals or vision. Controversy with civility refers to one’s ability to navigate conflict within a diverse group by promoting open-mindedness and critical and civil discourse. Citizenship refers to one’s ability
to become connected to the community through care, service, and social responsibility. At the core of the model is an eighth “C” which refers to change, defined as one’s ability to create a better world, challenge the status quo, and demonstrate confidence and competence in navigating transition and ambiguity often associated with change. The Seven C’s do not represent a checklist, instead, development in each of the C’s is ongoing. Connecting each value, or C, to a hands-on leadership experience results in deeper meaning and understanding because of the interactive nature of the values within the model itself (Cilente, 2009). Sport can provide an environment for this ongoing development and experiential learning.

Dugan’s (2010) research of the impact of the SCM uses the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale to measure the influences of higher education on eight outcome areas prescribed by the SCM. In a recent study of 14,252 college seniors from 50 United States institutions of higher education, Dugan found that socio-cultural conversations with peers, faculty mentoring and participation in community service were all high-impact practices in the cultivation of the values presented by the SCM as was leadership self-efficacy, or the belief that one has the capacity and potential to lead (Dugan & Komives, 2010). In the context of his study, Dugan (2010) describes socio-cultural conversations as dialogue in which participants are able to suspend their own beliefs to critically reflect on their own role within society, including reflecting on their own identities and experiences within the context of others. Dugan’s (2010) research has also demonstrated varying degrees of competence among subpopulations of students in regard to each of the value dimensions presented in the SCM. For example, African American/Black students reported higher scores than white students on consciousness of self, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change. Asian American students scored significantly lower than their peers from all racial demographics in consciousness of self, and lower than all
peers except for Native Americans in congruence, commitment, controversy with civility, citizenship and change. Women reported higher scores than their male peers on all categories except change, in which the men scored significantly higher (Dugan et al., 2008).

**Social Change Model and the Student Athlete**

Barnes (2015) suggests that educators need to identify opportunities to focus on individual stages of student leadership development within the social change model. Similarly, Hall (2015) asserts that three of the four high-impact practices from Dugan’s (2008) study on the social change model were revealed as predictors for developing leadership capacity along the socially responsible leadership scale and are able to be readily incorporated into collegiate athletics programs. However, high impact practices not referenced in any existing leadership models specific to the leadership development of student athletes are: socio-cultural conversations with peers, community service activities, and mentoring relationships.

That said, the impact of socio-cultural conversations amongst athletes has been widely researched (Comeaux & Fuentes, 2015; Gayles & Baker, 2015). One such study indicated that 60.5% of athletes report that their engagement in sport significantly contributed to their understanding of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The same study revealed that 79% reported their tolerance for different races and backgrounds was positive (Comeaux & Fuentes, 2015). A similar study examining 310 white athlete college graduates from 16 Division 1 Football Bowl Subdivision Conferences suggested that “cross-racial integration during college had continuing benefits on pluralistic orientation and leadership skills for white athletes from racially diverse neighborhoods and long-term effects on leadership skills for white athletes from segregated pre-college neighborhoods” (Comeaux & Fuentes, 2015, p. 180). Pascarella’s research indicates that student-athletes participating in diverse teams report high levels of
openness to diversity in ways that are unmatched by the larger campus community (Gayles & Baker, 2015). In response, Hall (2015) asserts that professionals should identify opportunities to capitalize on this appreciation and incorporate socio-cultural conversations and reflection into varsity athlete training. She also suggests incorporating peer-led trainings and discussions amongst student athlete peers. This points to a need to potentially integrate socio-cultural conversations and interactions into a new leadership model that is specific to the leadership development experiences of student athletes.

The second of Hall’s (2015) identified high impact practices of socially responsible leadership, or leadership for social change, is community service activities. Hall indicates that while these are already often engaged in by student athletes, professionals should ensure that students are working intentionally with members of the community, reflecting meaningfully on their experiences and discussing the leadership implications of their activities. While service is a vital aspect of the social change model (Komives & Wagner, 2017), there is not a specific leadership model for student athletes that integrates service into its framework. With the NCAA’s inception of collegiate Life Skills programs to enhance student athlete academic excellence, athletic excellence, personal and career development and engagement in service, student athletes are becoming increasingly civically engaged, however, student athletes may not always be as engaged in meaningful service as their non-athlete counterparts. While athletes are encouraged to engage in service experiences, financial and staffing shortages and ever-present student athlete time constraints provide barriers to doing so (Fuller et al., 2015).

The third high impact practice of socially responsible leadership, or leadership for social change, is the inclusion of mentoring relationships in the student athlete experience. Hall (2015) indicates that professionals should discuss the importance of mentorships with student athletes,
assist with student athletes’ development of mentorship relationships, and support student athletes’ development of a succession plan for their team which yields further leadership growth. Hall (2015) also points to the impact of engaging experienced students as mentors for new students and recommends the strategy of training mentors to prepare them for this role. Similarly, Navarro indicates that leadership development is at the forefront across NCAA Divisions as a result of the increased commercialization of sport. Her research demonstrates how a mentorship program focused specifically on the development of individual leadership skills can develop student-athletes to be stronger contributors to society through success in academics, higher education and life during and after college (Navarro et al., 2015). However, Navarro’s work does not specify which leadership model or leadership skills would be engaged within this specific approach to leadership development. This again points to a gap between current research and practice related to a specific model that could be used to support the leadership development of student athletes. Instead, what seems to exist is a list of high impact practices, or components of models that could apply, but without a comprehensive approach to how that application should be implemented.

A recent study suggests that there may be a difference in socially responsible leadership development between athletes engaging in team-based sports versus athletes who compete in individual sports (Huntrods et al., 2012). The study indicated team-sport athletes scored lower than non-athletes in facets of socially responsible leadership while individual-sport athletes are statistically no different than non-athletes in their socially responsible leadership development. According to Huntrods (2012), these results indicate that participation as a student athlete does not increase socially responsible leadership and that some forms of athletic participation have actually been shown to slow gains in socially responsible leadership. The same study also
indicated that students engaged in a collision team sport score .22 standard deviations lower than non-athletes on the socially responsible leadership scale, and that findings are significant in spite of controls for pretest variables. This points to a need for additional research to further understand if participation in sport truly does enhance socially responsible leadership, or leadership for social change, in student athlete leaders which is an aspect this study aims to illuminate.

**Emotionally Intelligent Leadership**

There are two primary models used to employ emotional intelligence—ability models and mixed models. While both engage in the awareness of the emotions of self and others, they are fundamentally different in their approach. The ability theory of emotional intelligence was developed in 1990 by Peter Salovey and John Mayer. Their original conceptualization was based on the core components of emotional appraisal and expression, regulation, and utilization (Salovey, et al., 2002). Their theory evolved to include four branches of emotional intelligence: emotional perception and expression, emotionally facilitation of thought, emotional understanding, and emotional management. Within this model, emotional intelligence represents the ability to perceive, appraise, and express emotion accurately and adaptively; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate cognitive activities and adaptive action; and the ability to regulate emotions in oneself and others (Salovey, et al., 2002, p. 159). This four-branch model is further illustrated in Figure 3.
**Figure 3**

*The Four-Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence*

| Emotional Perception and Expression | Ability to identify emotion in one’s physical and psychological states  
|                                      | Ability to identify emotion in other people  
|                                      | Ability to express emotions accurately and to express needs related to them  
|                                      | Ability to discriminate between accurate/honest and inaccurate/dishonest feelings  |
| Emotional Facilitation of Thought (Using Emotional Intelligence) | Ability to reflect and prioritize thinking on the basis of associated feelings  
|                                                                      | Ability to generate emotions to facilitate judgment and memory  
|                                                                      | Ability to capitalize on mood changes to appreciate multiple points of view  
|                                                                      | Ability to use emotional states to facilitate problem solving and creativity  |
| Emotional Understanding | Ability to understand relationships among various emotions  
|                                                                      | Ability to perceive the causes and consequences of emotions  
|                                                                      | Ability to understand complex feelings, emotional blends, and contradictory states  
|                                                                      | Ability to understand transitions among emotions  |
| Emotional Management | Ability to be open to feelings, both pleasant and unpleasant  
|                                                                      | Ability to monitor and reflect on emotions  
|                                                                      | Ability to engage, prolong, or detach from an emotional state  
|                                                                      | Ability to manage emotions in oneself  
|                                                                      | Ability to manage emotions in others  |

The mixed model approach to Emotional Intelligence was first introduced separately by Daniel Goleman and Reuven Baron, both in the mid-1990s. While they used different approaches, their collective approach relates to one’s ability to develop an awareness and regulation of one’s emotions as well as an understanding of the emotions in others (Allen et al., 2016). This model used the scaffolding of personality research and the concept of emotional quotient (EQ) to develop a model that describes one’s ability to engage in emotion related tasks (Magrum et al., 2019). Commonly used in corporate culture, often called a trait model, and now often referred to as emotional-social intelligence, this approach blends emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and leadership (Allen et al., 2016). The latter, Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (EIL), blends the two constructs of emotional intelligence and leadership to form a process-oriented approach to leadership contingent upon three interactive facets that are depicted in Figure 4: context, self, and others.

**Figure 4**

*Emotionally Intelligent Leadership Model*

![Emotionally Intelligent Leadership Model](image-url)

Consciousness of Self includes one’s awareness of their abilities, emotions, and perceptions and the ability to continuously reflect and practice self-awareness. Consciousness of Others is one’s awareness of the abilities, emotions, and perceptions of others. This consciousness involves working intentionally with others to influence positive social change. Consciousness of context is one’s awareness of the environment, setting, or situation in which the process of leadership occurs and how group dynamics impact that process (Allen et al., 2016). Together, these three overarching facets are comprised by 19 capacities depicted in Figure 5 which include: emotional self-perception, emotional self-control, authenticity, healthy self-esteem, flexibility, optimism, initiative, achievement, displaying empathy, inspiring others, coaching others, capitalizing on difference, developing relationships, building teams, demonstrating citizenship, managing conflict, facilitating change, analyzing the group, and assessing the environment (Allen et al., 2012). These capacities can be learned and taught.
The model asserts that EIL is predictive of student leader behaviors which are then predictive of individual, group, and organizational outcomes. Within the EIL model, leadership is seen as a relationship between the leader, the followers, and context; intentionality and choice are key elements of the application of the model (Allen et al., 2012). The model addresses the complexity of leadership and emphasizes emotions and their impact on self, others, and context in a leadership capacity (Allen et al., 2016). While not likely that an expert leader will be fully developed in each capacity throughout their collegiate experiences, Allen asserts that higher education administrators can create conditions conducive to growth in each area by engaging in coordination, collaboration, and deliberate practice. “All educators have a responsibility
regardless of where they are housed in the institutional structure, to be committed to learning goals related to student leadership development” (Allen et al., 2016, p. 89). As it relates to sport, this would imply that all educators within the institution, not just leadership practitioners and not just athletic administrators, have a responsibility to identify and cultivate leadership within this student population, but once again the term ‘leadership development’ emerges without a specific framework or definition to guide its application, especially as it relates to the specific population of student athletes.

**Emotionally Intelligent Leadership and the Student Athlete**

There is limited research on the intersection of emotionally intelligent leadership and student athlete development. Meyer and Fletcher (2007) indicate that although we anecdotally know that relationships exist and that emotions play a critical role in the development of both individual athletes and athletic teams, there is a need to further recognize how emotions and related constructs impact both the objective and subjective outcomes in sport. They indicate that there is a need to expand this study and to encourage critical and constructive reflection by student athletes. Meyer and Fletcher posit that several elements of EIL have been linked to maximizing sport performance including managing and perceiving emotions, yet little research has been conducted in this area.

Current research indicates that athletes with a high level of emotional intelligence demonstrate superior self-confidence, mental toughness, goal orientation and goal setting, and motivation for athletic success (Magrum et al., 2019). Athletes with higher levels of self-reported emotional intelligence also identify experiencing lower levels of negative emotion before and during athletic competition. Similarly, athletic teams with high demonstrated emotional intelligence exhibit greater emotional control, improved ability to manage in-game controversy,
and a greater understanding of the impact that negative emotions have on their performance (Magrum et al., 2019). Lastly, findings in Magrum’s (2019) study indicate that NCAA basketball players with high self-reported emotional intelligence on the Emotional Intelligence Scale perform better than peers with lower emotional intelligence ratings.

That said, much of the existing research linking EIL to the student athlete experience is predominantly focused on the coaching experience (Meyer & Fletcher, 2007). Specifically, the following EIL factors were determined to be important competencies that facilitate leadership development of student athletes by coaching behaviors: self-awareness, social skills, empathy, self-motivation and self-regulation (Meyer & Fletcher, 2007). However, limited research exists to explain the overarching EIL capacity of collegiate student athletes and how these factors can be developed outside of coaching intervention which may not be equally accessible across all players and positions. This study aims to bridge this gap and illuminate understanding of how EIL factors into the leadership development experiences of student athletes, and if there is any meaningful intersection of this model with the previously mentioned LID and Social Change Models of Leadership Development.

Additional Relevant Models

While much of the literature reviewed for this study was done prior to the launch of the study itself, an integral part of a Grounded Theory study, as explained in Chapter 3, is the inclusion of reviewed literature upon conclusion of data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). As data is collected and analyzed, I was able to identify themes significant to this study that had not already been extensively explored in this literature review. As such, I have included these themes in this particular section to help better frame the findings, implications, and definitions
shared in subsequent chapters. These themes include servant leadership, growth mindset, and resilience.

Servant Leadership

The concept of servant leadership emerged from the writings of Robert Greenleaf (1970, 1972, 1977) and focused on the relationships of leaders and followers who lead in ways that are for the greater good. Greenleaf (1970) says that leaders “serve first” and have a social responsibility to be concerned with the well-being of others, particularly those with less power and privilege. Spears (1996) adopted Greenleaf’s approach and identified ten characteristics to create the first formal model of Servant Leadership. The ten characteristics of Servant Leadership include: Listening- Servant leaders communicate by listening and acknowledging viewpoints of followers; Empathy- Servant leaders are able to stand in someone else’s shoes and see the world from their perspective; Healing- Servant leaders care about the well-being of their followers; Awareness- Servant leaders are attuned to the complexities of their physical, social, and political environments; Persuasion- Servant leaders are able to use influence to create change; Conceptualization- Servant leaders are big picture visionaries who can respond to complex problems and envision long term goals; Foresight- Servant leaders are able to account for historical context to make predictions about what is to come; Stewardship- Servant Leaders take responsibility for their role, their people, and their organization; Commitment to the Growth of People- Servant leaders commit to helping followers to grow; Building Community- Servant leaders promote a collective, comfortable environment of shared interests and values (Spears, 1996).

Despite its extensive study in the business context, there are not many studies specifically exploring servant leadership through the context of sport (Robinson, Neubert & Miller, 2018).
However, the literature that does exist does indicate that servant leadership provides a unique lens through which to view student athlete leadership (Worley et al, 2020). Specific servant leadership behaviors are often evident in the leadership practices of student athlete leaders and are a good fit when discussing concepts of role modeling and other supportive leadership behaviors in sport. Specifically, a student athlete leader’s willingness to place the team’s needs above their own, and a focus on the development of teammates and group cohesion are aspects of servant leadership that are well aligned with leadership in sport (Worley et al, 2020). However, as Robinson et al. (2018) point out, much of the remaining literature applies specifically to coaches and coaching behaviors. Their research and review of the literature also suggests that servant leadership is associated with increased athletic performance and psychological health of student athlete as well as athlete satisfaction. Robinson et al.’s (2018) research also directly suggests that “although a single best leadership style for a sport organization has yet to be determined, servant leadership is a style that has the potential to yield positive results” (p. 49).

**Growth Mindset**

Individuals who believe their talents can be developed have a growth mindset (Dweck, 2017). This development can occur through their work ethic, strategic and intentional growth measures, and feedback and support from others. Those with a growth mindset are more likely to achieve their goals than those with a fixed mindset, in which they believe talents are innate gifts granted at birth with no potential for growth (Dweck, 2017). Dweck’s research on growth mindset is specific to an educational environment, however, her findings and recommendations have extended into other settings across disciplines. She says that “whether they (students) see their intelligence as something that’s fixed, or something that can grow and change- has
profound effects on their motivation, learning and school achievement” (Dweck, 2006). This can translate to leadership learning in sport and pushes back on a fixed mindset perspective in which some may suggest leaders are born and not made. This is a perspective that is often debated in leadership education, and is one that Vince Lombardi, legendary coach speaks of specific to sport “Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile” (Lombardi, 2009 as cited in Chase, 2010).

Individuals with a growth mindset value effort, see ability as a skill that can be honed, and are able to persevere through challenges (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). This can be applied simultaneously to athletic ability and leadership ability. If an athlete believes they are born with limited potential, as a leader or as an athlete, they have a fixed mindset that prevents their ability to grow across either context (Potgieter, 2011). The ability to lead is a learned ability (Chase, 2010) and Dweck’s (2006) research suggests that the way in which leaders view their abilities has a profound impact on how they live their lives: “Dweck’s mindset conceptualization contends that leader’s views of their abilities to lead (e.g., innate or learned) can greatly influence whether they are effective leaders” (Chase, 2010, p. 302). Specifically, athletes with a growth mindset believe their ability is malleable and can be improved upon with hard work (Chase, 2010).

Growth mindset is an incremental theory of ability in which traits and attributes are thought to develop with effort and the continued quest for improvement (Dweck, 2006). Individuals with a growth mindset embrace challenges, persist through hardship, see effort as integral to mastery, and gain knowledge and inspiration from the success of others. They have higher self-efficacy, persist longer, work harder, perform better in physical activities, and are
stronger decision makers (Chase, 2010). These experiences combined, promotes a student’s free will and a student’s ability to demonstrate resilience and grit, both in the context of leadership and in the context of sport (Atwood, 2010; Hochanadel et al, 2015).

**Resilience**

Connor and Davidson (2003) define resilience as a collection of characteristics that allow an individual to overcome adversity, persevere through challenges, and to successfully manage stress. Another way that resilience is defined in the literature is “an ability to recover from negative affect and experiences and to gain certain adaptability to varying circumstances” (Hu, Zhang, & Wang, 2015 as cited in Leupold, et al., 2020).

High self-reported resilience is typically found in exceptional leaders; however, quality research on the role of resilience in leaders is limited (Leupold et al., 2020). While resilience is shown to have a positive correlation with mental health and is considered as a highly desired skill by employers, its formal relationship with collegiate leadership programming or existing leadership models has not yet been explored (Leupold et al., 2020). The role of resilience in effective leadership, however, has been investigated, and the research findings imply that there is a positive relationship between resilience and leadership (Maulding et al., 2012 as cited in Leupold et al., 2020). This relationship manifests in a leader’s ability to adapt, negotiate difficult situations, and navigate uncertainty. This is particularly beneficial as a leader in sport can cultivate a resilient team culture which can lead to increased adaptability and enhanced well-being, in addition to a decrease in reported burnout (Hatler & Sturgeon, 2013 as cited in Leupold et al., 2020).

The current literature also suggests that resilience is a critical contributor to self-efficacy and leadership efficacy (Leupold et al., 2020). Bandura’s (1997) research points to the
importance of resilient self-efficacy, which empowers individuals to persist through challenging circumstances:

When facing obstacles, leaders tend to exhibit a temporarily lowered leadership self-efficacy; however, with a resilient self-efficacy, individuals are more likely to stay motivated and confident in their abilities to learn and succeed despite having weaker beliefs about their current leadership skills. Furthermore, there is a significantly decreased chance of an exponential downward spiral in leadership self-efficacy when the leader has a strong resilient self-efficacy (Leupold et al., 2020).

Studies have revealed that resilience produces positive emotions and that the short-term cognitive effects of positive emotions can help to cultivate long-term resilience (Cohn, et al., 2009 as cited in Leupold et al., 2020). “Clearly, resilience is a powerful skill for both defending against adversity and increasing well-being,” (Leupold et al., 2020, p. 57).

Related to resilience, Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) “... introduced the construct of grit, “defined as trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals, and showed that grit predicted achievement in challenging domains over and beyond measures of talent” (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 166). In her seminal study on grit, Duckworth (2007) found that cadets at West Point were able to reach their goals based on grit, more than other characteristics. “Grit is not just having resilience in the face of failure, but also having deep commitments that you remain loyal to over many years” (Perkins-Gough, D., 2013). Grit is seen as a higher order construct, comprised of two lower order facets thought to contribute to one’s success: perseverance of effort and consistency of interest (Crede et al., 2017). Research indicates that grit is a predictor of performance, suggesting that individuals with higher levels of grit are thought to better utilize capabilities by being less discouraged by short-term setbacks and
failures that are commonly experienced in a variety of contexts, including sport (Crede et al., 2017). A recent study on grit and positive leadership also revealed that gritty leaders also have a higher capacity for leadership. Specifically, grit was positively correlated with a leader’s capacity to implement positive leadership strategies like positive communication and goal setting (Schimschal & Lomas, 2019). “In environments where change is constant, leaders are often required to adjust goals and priorities to meet the shifting needs…” (Schimschal et al., 2019, p. 1461). In an environment like sport, where coaching and player changes are constant, grit is an important leadership behavior to help student athlete leaders meet shifting needs.

Barnes (2015) suggests that building resilience is a benefit of engagement in sport, and that educators should help to mentor students into translating that resilience to other aspects of their collegiate experience. He indicates that the mental toughness cultivated by participation in sport aids students in resilience building overall and enhances other areas of their lives, even beyond sport. Additionally, Barnes (2015) suggests that resilience in leadership development has been proven to positively contribute to a leader’s ability to manage challenges and stressful situations they may encounter. Resilience could be interpreted as a product of socially responsible leadership, or the facet of commitment in the social change model (Barnes, 2015; Komives & Wagner, 2017) but is not explicitly stated as a component of the model itself. However, resilience is a critical component of the student athlete experience even without formal placement in an existing leadership model (Barnes, 2015).

**Situated Learning and Social Learning Theory**

While learning is often considered a formal activity that happens in a classroom, Lave (2009) suggests that learning is situated, embedded within one’s activity, context and culture. Situated learning attempts to bridge the gap between education and application and asserts that
learning occurs through practice, specifically communities of practice that are often influenced by a social theory of learning (Lave, 2009; Wenger, 2015). When Lave (2009) and Wenger (2015) introduced situated learning, they illuminated the concept of participation in social practice, or in a system of social practices, to situate one’s learning in a particular environment (Cobb & Bowers, 1999). They suggest that learning occurs when instructional tasks are rooted in real world settings and often-times learning occurs in group settings, with particular sociocultural contexts that shape learning through participation in its practices (Light, 2014). Kirk & MacDonald (1998) suggest that situated learning is simply learning that takes place within a certain circumstance, time, or place. This certain circumstance, time, or place is where the context of sport has the ability to influence leadership learning. Instead of focusing on abstract classroom knowledge, in contrast, this approach to knowledge acquisition is ever changing in the “medium of socially, culturally, and historically ongoing systems of activity, involving people who are related in multiple and heterogeneous ways, whose social locations, interests, reasons, and subjective possibilities are different” (p. 207). In this regard, knowledge cultivated or practiced in sport is situated learning, or learning situated in the context, culture, and activity of sport (Lave, 2009). Situated learning theory defines learning as knowledge that occurs in an authentic context and incorporates social engagement and collaboration. Situated learning involves communities of practice, further described later in this review (Lave, 2009). What has not been extensively explored is the connection of situated learning to leadership learning in sport.

According to the research of Richard Light (2011), research in sport and physical education has been informed by a number of prominent social theorists, including Lave’s work on situated learning and practice. According to Light, this development has prompted the
examination of learning within social contexts that exist outside of the school walls and within settings such as physical education and sports. Light asserts that this research has increasingly begun drawing on the social perspective of learning. Light’s work suggests that the complementary relationship between social learning theory and situated learning theory indicates that they should be integrated, and that doing so provides an opportunity to better understand how learning occurs through sport in the context of social constructivism and social theory.

Light (2011) states that “Situated learning is a specific type of social learning theory whose focus on learning through participation in practice makes it appealing to researchers in the physical education and sport coaching fields” (p. 372). This, Light says, provides opportunities to identify the learning in sport that extends beyond learning the skills of the game and engages the comprehensive understanding of the whole person and the world in which they live, learn and play. Light suggests that often previously learned skills unrelated to sport, like decision making and tactical knowledge, can be situated within the context of sport to make greater meaning in that context. Light also suggests, however, that learning can be physically situated in a sport like surfing or swimming where the skill can obviously not be learned or trained outside of the physical context in which it is practiced.

According to Masika and Jones (2015), Wenger’s approach to a social theory of learning views learning as social participation which engages learners in activities with people and practices in social communities where identities are constructed and the learner is making meaning or interpreting what is done. This participation creates an opportunity for the learner to understand what matters to the community, engage productively with others in the community, and use the resources accumulated by the community. Over time, when examined through the lens of social learning theory, learning becomes less formal and more dynamic connecting
community, practice, meaning, and identity in a way that produces engagement, alignment and imagination (Masika & Jones, 2015). This evolution of learning could easily be observed in the community, practice, meaning, and identity development of student athlete leaders, however, there is no existing research that connects those disparate threads.

Kirk & MacDonald (1998) assert that situated learning allows educators to expand their focus on the learner from an isolated individual to the social settings that “construct and constitute the individual as a learner” (p. 380). Their testament to learning as social in nature, refers to the interactions between the learners and others, as well as with the environment itself. They claim that Lave and Wenger’s theory is rooted in the notion of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, which they suggest can refer to any collective group who shares life experiences. These experiences, according to Kirk & MacDonald (1998), relate specifically to affective development and the possibilities of learning, or the barriers that can adversely affect it. Barriers in sport can be lack of access to coaches, finances, facilities or equipment. They suggest that the notion of situated learning related to sport could produce a theory of learning that is both historically and socially situated and can help to position schools and other sport-based communities of practice in relation to one another to better support the communities they purport to serve. Research shows that environmental factors such as those suggested in situated and social theories of learning have an impact on sport practice and play (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998).

According to Jean Cote et al (2007) factors such as relative age, birthplace, city size, and psychosocial and physical costs all contribute to the environmental factors that contribute to one’s success in sport, or even access to it, which ultimately shapes how one’s learning may be situated in that context. Cote’s earlier research also suggests that the social context that
influences participation in sport consists of the child, the coach and the family environment (1999). Cote points back to the earlier research of Ericsson, et al., to suggest that sport performance is tied to motivational, effort, and resource constraints provided by the context in which the athlete is situated, specifically as it relates to access to coaches, training material and facilities (Cote, 1999).

The work of Christensen, et al. (2011) suggests that sport-based skill building is multidimensional and shaped by “the opportunities and limitations of the social and cultural context in which the skill learning takes place” (p. 164). They specifically align the skills of sport to relational skills that they indicate are learned through sociocultural contexts, and that these contexts have implications on the players’ learning and on the way they experience meaning. They posit that sports skill learning is a situated practice that relates not only to the learning of sports-based skills, but also to the identity formation of the players themselves in what they deem a highly specialized community of practice (Christensen et al., 2011).

Communities of Practice

Communities of practice are a core component that differentiates situated learning theory from other learning theories. Communities of practice are everywhere and are formed when individuals share a process of collective learning and in doing so their shared passion or commitment propels them to learn more and do better as a result (Wenger, 2009). According to Wenger “we all belong to communities of practice” (2009, p. 212), as would a group of student athletes learning by doing in their shared experience through sport (Kirk & Kinchin, 2004). Wenger’s work around communities of practice challenges long standing beliefs about learning and suggests that learning is a social process, situated in both cultural and historical context, which is why communities of practice are often referenced in relation to situated learning theory. In this
aspect, learning takes place through social practices, of which sport may be one (Farnsworth, 2016). Wenger suggests that much of learning today is institutionalized and devoid of engagement or activity. Learning is often assessed out of context and without collaboration, and is often perceived by “would be learners as irrelevant…boring, and arduous” (Wenger, 2009, p. 209). Wenger (2009) urges educators and practitioners to identify a different approach and perspective that places learning in the context of our lived participation within the world, and to see learning as a social phenomenon that is inevitable. Wenger’s approach assumes that we are social beings by design, that knowledge is a matter of competence, knowing is a matter of active engagement within the world, and that meaning is what learning aims to produce. Wenger suggests that a social theory of learning can characterize participation as both learning and knowing through meaning, practice, community, and identity.

Kirk & MacDonald (1998) posit that the application of Lave and Wenger’s situated learning theories to school physical education programs would demonstrate that schools regularly fail to provide youth with opportunities to develop communities of practice around the context of sport. They suggest that the reasons for these failures are complex and have caused a physical education crisis in our country because “it is unable in its current forms to reproduce the communities of practice that provide it with meaning and legitimacy among both professional audiences and the lay public” (Kirk & MacDonald, 1998, p. 382). They recommend an approach to sport engagement that situates itself in a way that can help to facilitate students’ personal and social goals. Alexander et al (1996), however, warn against this approach as aspects of contemporary sport-based communities of practice may bring about issues such as cheating, drug abuse, and corruption which then transforms a youth perspective of sport to one in which sport is a commodity, however, no data was provided by this study to support that claim.
Kirk & Kinchin’s (2004) research suggests that communities of practice can provide learners with a framework for making meaning of a certain aspect of their lives, potentially through sport. They suggest that the social and cultural aspects of a community of practice can have a significant influence on what and how learning takes place in a way that “defines possibilities for learning” (Kirk & Kinchin, 2004, p. 223). They say that a key component of this learning is the learner’s identity in relation to others in the community and their associated emotional investment and affinity within the group. Kirk & Kinchen also suggest that communities of practice in relation to sport can allow researchers to explore the relationship between forms of culture and forms of consciousness by exploring the effects of practice specifically as it relates to physical education.

Kirk & Kinchin (2004) specifically identify the community of sport as a community of practice, along with the communities of exercise and leisure, and recreation. Each with unique cultures and forms of practice. Kirk & Kinchin, however, warn of the need to “acknowledge that the community of practice of sport is far from uniform and coherent” (p. 225). Light’s (2011) work suggests that athletes may participate in different communities of practice and may behave differently in each, developing different aspects of their identities and perspectives which may modify their outside experiences. Smith et al. (2019) suggest that communities of practice in the K-12 space can provide on-going knowledge production that is associated directly with their contextual and social engagement within their lived world, specifically in the educational context.

Christensen et al. (2011) make a robust case in their research about how a football team may be considered a community of practice based on its existence as a “bounded system with relatively clear standards for the participants’ identification and membership in the community and with a specific shared repertoire as focal point” (p. 166). First, they point out the mutual engagement of the players as a hallmark of their community in that each participant is responsible
for maintaining practices, skill learning, talent development, and cultivating relationships in their community. Next, they share the ways in which the players cultivate a communally negotiated joint enterprise focused on skill improvement, winning, and training. Lastly, Christensen et al. make the point that the team develops a culture that results in collective stories, skills, expectations, language, symbology, songs, and concepts that define and drive their community through the context of their sport. The authors argue that these dimensions align with Lave and Wenger’s legitimate peripheral participation which move the learner “toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community” (Christensen et al., 2011, p. 166). Their research findings pointed to the potential of two communities of practice—a team-based community of practice, and a smaller position-specific community of practice, both of which may translate across other types of sport-based contexts (Christensen et al., 2011).

While there is extensive research on social learning theory, situated learning theory, and communities of practice, there is no evidence of a body of research on how they each intersect and describe the leadership learning experience within sport for collegiate student athletes (Christensen et al., 2011; Kirk & Kinchin, 2004; Light, 2011; Wenger, 2009). This points to a gap in existing research that is worth further exploration to promote further understanding of the leadership experiences of this unique student population who experience learning in situated and social environments, and within communities of practice.

**Summary**

Much research exists on contemporary leadership theory and on the experience of collegiate athletes, yet, there is a significant gap in connecting existing leadership research and theory directly to the lived leadership identity development experience of today’s collegiate
student athlete (Astin, 2003; Barnes, 2015; Duguay, 2018; Hall, 2015; Magrum, 2019; McDowell et al., 2018; Simons et al., 1999; Weaver, 2015). As Weaver et al. (2015) posit:

Coaches often cite big picture issues, such as the lack of leadership, as one of the key downfalls to an unsuccessful season. Knowing that leadership is one of the most important determinants of a team’s success, college athletic departments should consider leadership development programs for their student-athletes. (p. 53)

Many claim that participation in collegiate athletics cultivates leadership, and a handful of leadership programs exist to serve NCAA athletes at a number of institutions across the country, however, there is no consistent model for practice in place (Astin, 2003; Barnes, 2015; Duguay, 2018; Hall, 2015; Magrum, 2019; McDowell et al., 2018; Simons et al., 1999; Weaver, 2015).

As Pascarella and Terenzini note, “Though the public, in general and collegiate sports backers in particular, may believe that participation in intercollegiate athletics promotes leadership skills, the jury is still out on this claim” (as cited in Huntrods et al., 2009, p.198). As DiPaulo asserts, there are general models available to describe the development of student athletes, but they do not reflect what he identifies as the “cura personalis, or care for the whole person, to which most student life professionals, coaches, parents, teachers, professors, counselors, and others aspire” (DiPaulo, 2017, p. 217). Surprisingly, the review of the literature demonstrates that there is no singular leadership framework or model consistently used to engage what the NCAA cites as over 460,000 student athletes each year in the cultivation of their leadership identity development. However, there are minimally aspects of three existing models reviewed herein that could certainly apply if combined into an integrated co-curricular model and andragogic approach that engages situated learning and communities of practice in delivery. Because college students are complex, dynamic and multifaceted individuals with intersecting
identities and dynamic experiences, it is imperative to not strictly adhere to or over apply any one developmental theory. Instead, leadership educators should seek to integrate multiple theories, models, and tools to inform their approach. (Owen, 2012). With this in mind, one could argue that a new emergent and integrated model and approach to student athlete leadership identity development should be created predicated upon research conducted on the leadership development experiences of this specific student population. Such a model should take into consideration the unique attributes of the student athlete experience and specifically define how a student athlete develops and moves through their leadership development journey, using the post-industrial leadership theories reviewed in this chapter as a foundation, but integrating other elements if and when they emerge as themes through new, emergent research. The experience of leadership learning through sport is still fairly undefined and uninformed, and the field has an opportunity to better serve and support this population of students through a new and innovative approach to their success that a leadership development model specific to student athlete leaders could provide.

Overall, researchers have demonstrated that situated learning and social learning are impactful and provide a powerful vehicle for learning in practice and in community with others. While some scholars have applied situated learning to sport-based contexts, much of the research on situated and social learning centers around mathematics and science teaching and learning (Kirk & Kinchin, 2003). As Christensen et al. (2011) commented, the use of social theory as a theoretical framework for the studies of sport is limited and rare, therefore current robust literature related to social and situated learning in the context of sport is difficult to find.

There appears to be a greater opportunity to explore this phenomenon to ascertain if the aspects of situated and social learning are observed in sport-based contexts, especially those
outside of a traditional K-12 physical education curriculum. Furthermore, a body of knowledge that could quantify or qualify the type of learning that occurs within the context of sport could be groundbreaking in demonstrating the value of sport-based programming and education in the K-12 and collegiate levels, both in course-based and team-based approaches. This could then be further explored in disciplines related to intersectionality, identity, and leadership in a way that further supports the education through sport of all athletes regardless of their socioeconomic status, access, or background.

While limited, the existing body of work would indicate that sport produces an opportunity for learning by doing, and specialized support and development through communities of practice which can foster interaction, break down barriers, and develop social capital generated by trust, shared experiences, norms and reciprocity that can translate to other areas of a learner’s life through situated and social learning in sport.

The research does demonstrate that participation in college sports has the potential to facilitate the development of a multitude of transferrable skills that influence identity, multicultural, moral, and cognitive, and leadership development (Simons et al., 1999). “Learning how to win and lose, for example, requires skill development and character building that is linked to psychosocial developmental areas such as managing emotions like pride and shame, sadness and excitement, and anger and happiness” (Gayles & Baker, 2015, p. 46). This practice of managing emotions is referenced in student development theory and EIL but not connected in a way that specifically frames the leadership development experiences of student athletes. Gayles & Baker (2015) also suggest that the skillset athletes develop and activate to learn plays and techniques for their sport require a similar amount effort and energy a student would expend for studying and mastering class content in preparation for an exam or presentation. However,
existing leadership theories do not take this transferability of skills or psychosocial development into consideration when attempting to frame the student athlete leadership experience. Failure to do so can result in a misapplication of existing theories to this specific population of student leaders. Existing theories also do not specify unique experiences of leaders based on class, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. as many studies point out, which may warrant additional consideration when attempting to apply these approaches to an increasingly diverse population of today’s collegiate student athletes and the various ways in which they experience leadership before, during and after their collegiate experiences.

Additionally, some literature points to a leadership approach that engages students based upon team tenure, but does not consider ways in which to connect more seasoned student leaders to leadership experiences that transfers to their post-collegiate lives (Duguay et al., 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of research which acknowledges the previously acquired skills and experiences student athletes may be bringing with them to the institution which would impact their leadership efficacy, development and experiences (Duguay et al., 2018). Similarly, there seems to be a dearth of research that is informing a scaffolded approach to leadership development within the student athlete community, which could employ different techniques based on the tenure or level of the athlete within the program or the institution to provide greater depth and breadth of leadership learning. Lastly, while a number of leadership scales may be administered to this population, there is not a current scale that specifically measures the leadership identity development of student athlete leadership experiences, particularly through the lenses of social change and emotional intelligence theories.

Additional considerations related to the leadership identity development of collegiate student leaders should include the impact of self-efficacy, defined as a person’s confidence that
he or she can successfully exhibit necessary behaviors needed to produce an outcome. Self-efficacy among student athletes has been found to be consistently and positively correlated with athletic performance and achievements (McDowell et al., 2018) and should conversely impact student athlete leadership experiences. Similarly, additional consideration should also be given to athletes’ demonstrated hope and optimism as key factors that influence their effort and athletic results; both of which have been found to be key traits of high athletic performers and likely influence those performers’ leadership identity in some way (McDowell et al., 2018). Lastly, the influence of additional models such as authentic leadership and adaptive leadership should also be examined in the context of the student leadership experience. While little to no research has been conducted to show their correlation with student athlete identity development, each approach has opportunities to be threaded throughout the student athlete leadership experience. Overall, while the review of the literature reveals a combined 29 potential capacities, values, or stages a leader may demonstrate or experience, there is not one singular theoretical framework to define the leadership behaviors and values of collegiate athletes (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014). This presents a significant opportunity better inform the way this population learns, demonstrates and experiences leadership learning in a social context.

As this review demonstrates, research indicates that while many resources are available related to leadership, social and situated learning, communities of practice, and the student athlete experience, there is still a lack of consistency across the multiple approaches of leadership development, particularly as it relates to this population (Allen et al., 2016). In short, leadership is often connected to the student athlete experience but with no consistent definition, approach or model, the application of leadership for student athletes is inconsistent, unreliable, and open to interpretation. While other fields and academic disciplines may have a clear,
prescribed, singular approach, leadership continues to lack a commonly agreed upon model, approach or scaffold. While learning is often categorized into cognitive, humanistic, and behavioral processes, one could argue that leadership learning in the context of support could span all three (Allen et al., 2016). Specifically, Allen suggests that “the paucity of behavioral learning interventions is the Achilles’ heel of leadership development” however, one could argue that behavioral learning interventions would be the most ripe for cultivating leadership identity behaviors and values among collegiate student athletes (Allen et al., 2016, p. 84). This indicates a need for a consistent, researched leadership model to be developed in the context of sport to best support the leadership identity development of collegiate athletes.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used for this study. Methodology is the framework for conducting research. It helps determine how knowledge is constructed and explains why we use the methods or tools we choose to use in our research. Methodology allows one to answer the question, “How should I study the world?” (Klenke, 2015). Using Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006), the purpose of this study is to develop a leadership model to describe and explain the specific leadership identity development experiences of male and female student athletes competing in NCAA Division 1 team sports. Consistent with grounded theory research (Charmaz, 2006), this study developed a grounded theory leadership development model to explain the leadership values, behaviors and experiences unique to the student athlete leadership experience.

As the research indicates (Allen et al., 2016; Dugan, 2017; Komives et al., 2006; Komives & Wagner, 2017; Northouse, 2019; Salovey, et al., 2002) and as outlined in Chapter 2, there are a number of theoretical models and approaches to define and shape the leadership identity development of college students, however, none of them specifically or adequately frame the specific leadership identity development of collegiate student athletes (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014; Voight, 2016). Further research is needed on the leadership development of this student population, and a qualitative, constructivist grounded theory study allows such a model to be created in the context of the student athlete experience with an emphasis on how their learning is situated in the environment of collegiate sport. The research-based creation of such a model allows for collegiate leadership programs to be strategically structured to meet the specific leadership needs of this student population based on their unique student role and experience in sport, allowing for more targeted and direct engagement of student
athlete leaders which will better prepare them for leadership both on and off campus, during and after college. While there are currently dozens of leadership models, theories and approaches, this grounded theory study intended to identify the most salient aspects of a student athlete leader’s identity and to create a student athlete leadership identity development model that more accurately represents it.

To obtain the data needed to develop a student athlete leadership identity development model, a qualitative methodological approach was used. Specifically, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) served as the guiding methodology. Student athletes from team sports, competing at an NCAA Division 1 level, were nominated to participate in semi-structured intensive interviews, photo elicitation, and non-participant observations of their practice settings. The intent of these three methods of data collection was to develop a leadership model which could more specifically describe the leadership identity experiences, values and behaviors most salient and consistent across this population. This study explored the following research questions through a constructivist grounded theory approach:

1. What are the staged, scaffolded leadership identity development experiences of collegiate student athletes?
2. What are the common leadership values and behaviors of collegiate student athletes and how are they practiced?

The study was conducted at a mid-south, mid-size, public university over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year and corresponding athletic seasons. Participants were nominated from team sports by coaches who identified them as team leaders. This chapter further expands upon my methodological approach, data collection methods, trustworthiness, subjectivity, site selection, timetable, analysis, and representation of this study.
Methodology and Research Approach

The research design for this study utilized a qualitative grounded theory approach which provided data that was both deep and rich and contextualized in the lived experiences of collegiate student athletes. Any attempt to identify a singular definition of qualitative research risks oversimplifying its dynamic and varied approach, but it can be described in part as “a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting or context” (Klenke et al., 2015, p.6). Qualitative research can also be described more simplistically as “understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). A qualitative approach was selected specifically because it allowed a greater depth of understanding of the meaning that student athletes have constructed related to their leadership identity within the context of sport.

The selection of a qualitative research approach for this study is rooted in its emphasis on process, its depth and detail, its thick description of people, interactions, contexts, and observed behaviors, and the ability to capture individuals’ experiences within their own terms (Klenke, 2015). Qualitative research allows for the focus on the lived experience and authentic voice of each student athlete participant, preserving their agency, voice, and experience. According to Klenke (2015), “at the heart of qualitative research, the authentic voice of the informant must be represented” (p. 10). This study represents the authentic voice of student athletes and the leadership experiences they do, and do not, have.

Leadership research has historically been grounded in objectivist, positivist and quantitative paradigms since its inception as a field of inquiry; however, a more recent and growing interest in qualitative research of leadership is emerging and is rooted in a general
dissatisfaction with the information provided by quantitative leadership scholars (Klenke et al., 2015, p. 2015). This study provides a different and unique approach to leadership understanding as a qualitative, grounded theory study. Klenke (2015) argues that while quantitative methods are ideal for hypothesis testing, they are not adequately suited to help us make meaning of the deeper structures and phenomena that qualitative leadership researchers often seek. He instead suggests that the study of leadership is well suited for qualitative analysis due to the field’s multidisciplinary nature. The qualitative study of leadership has several advantages over a quantitative approach including the opportunity to explore leadership phenomena in depth, longitudinally, and in context (Klenke, 2015). According to Klenke (2015), “Unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, predication, and generalization of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding, and meaning making” (p. 8) through the non-numerical organization of data which allows for the discovery of patterns, qualities, themes, and categories of data. For these reasons, a qualitative approach is ideal for this study.

**Grounded Theory**

This study is rooted in constructivist grounded theory, specifically the work of grounded theorist Kathy Charmaz. While Charmaz is not the founding methodologist of grounded theory, she studied under two of the most respected grounded theorists in the field -- Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. The former served as her faculty member and the latter served as her dissertation chair (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory methods emerged from Glaser and Strauss (2017) based on their studies of death and dying. Glaser and Strauss (2017) produced theoretical analyses of dying that demonstrated a new approach to research that advocated for developing theories from data over deducing hypotheses based on existing theories. Their approach was
unique in that it suggested that systemic qualitative analysis could generate theory through simultaneous data collection and analysis. Their approach introduced the construction of analytic codes and categories from data and used constant comparison during each analytical stage. Glaser and Strauss (2017) in introducing grounded theory methodology, introduced a model in which data collection and analysis continuously and simultaneously occurs and researchers engage in memo-writing to further develop categories and identify gaps along the way. In their approach to grounded theory research, sampling focuses on theoretical construction versus population representation. Lastly and uniquely, Glaser and Strauss (2017) suggest conducting a literature review after the development of an independent analysis. According to Glaser and Strauss, a completed grounded theory maintains a close fit with the data, demonstrates usefulness, conceptual density, durability, modifiability, and explanatory power (2017). Their work ultimately challenged the existing assumptions that qualitative research could not generate theory.

Strauss specifically brought a pragmatist philosophical perspective to grounded theory. He viewed humans as active agents in their worlds and argued that process was fundamental to human existence (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). This is a critical component of why I chose a grounded theory approach to my study -- as I wanted to ensure that student athletes are engaged as active agents in the worlds of sport and higher education, and that leadership is defined as a process and not as a position. Glaser brought a positivist approach to grounded theory with an emphasis on rigorous codified methods and emergent discoveries (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

Charmaz built upon the grounded theory assertions and approaches of the 1960s and 1970s, developed by her formative scholars and mentors, to view grounded theory methods as “a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 9). Charmaz
suggests that grounded theory provides a framework through which a researcher can systemically and flexibly collect and analyze qualitative data to construct new theories that are grounded in the data. This data forms the foundation of a theory, and data is constructed through observations, experiences, and interactions that the researcher studies, separates, sorts, and synthesizes (Charmaz, 2006). Data are coded and compared constantly throughout the study, and then interpreted and analyzed. Categories and relationships are developed and refined and the culmination, after a robust amount of data and analysis, is a grounded theory or “an abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). In this study, the resulting grounded theory culminated in a proposed Student Athlete Leadership Identify Development Model which provides a theoretical understanding of the leadership identity development experiences of collegiate student athletes. This proposed model is shared in detail in Chapter 5.

Charmaz specifically asserts that “grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them” (2006, p. 10). Charmaz’s (2006) approach is unique in comparison to the classic grounded theory approach of Glaser and Strauss (2017) as she posits that neither data nor theories are discovered. Instead, Charmaz (2006) claims that, as researchers, we are part of the world we study and therefore part of the data we collect. As researchers, we actively construct meaning from our data, and our consequent theories, through our own lived experiences, perspectives, practices, and human interactions. This approach assumes that a theoretical rendering provides an interpretation of the studied world, not a precise picture of the world (Charmaz, 2006).

Specifically, Charmaz (2008) indicates that grounded theory methodology includes the following tenets:
1. Minimizing preconceived ideas about the research problem and data
2. Using simultaneous data collection and analysis
3. Remaining open to varied understandings of the data
4. Focusing data analysis to construct middle-range theories.

Grounded theory is an emergent method, which is characterized as being inductive, indeterminate, comparative, interactive, and open-ended (Charmaz, 2008). Charmaz suggests this is a helpful method for social scientists who seek to study research problems to build an inductive understanding as knowledge develops and events unfold. This allows for new properties of the phenomenon to emerge in ways that shape new conditions to be studied. In this study, this approach allowed for new properties of leadership identity to emerge in the context of sport and allowed for a new model to be created that would specifically represent that experience. Grounded theory is predicated upon this emergent logic and begins with a systemic and inductive approach to data collection and analysis, examining emergent categories, and engaging in systematic analysis that is both explicit and flexible (Charmaz, 2008). A hallmark to grounded theory research is the series of checks and refinements it incorporates through an iterative process in which data collection and analysis occurs simultaneously throughout the process--each informing the other. This approach was particularly helpful in my grounded theory study as it allowed for a simultaneous data collection and analysis process to occur in which data was collected through interviews, observations, and photo-elicitations with student athlete participants and analyzed in an iterative process.

**Grounded Theory Implications from the LID Model**

I also specifically chose a grounded theory approach for this study because it mirrors the approach used by the research team who created the Leadership Identity Development (LID)
Model (Komives et al., 2005). According to the researchers, they used a grounded theory methodology to better understand how a leadership identity develops (Komives et al., 2005). They shared that the intent of a grounded theory is “to generate or discover a theory or abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation grounded in the experience and perceptions of the participants” (Komives et al., 2005, pp. 592-593). The grounded theory approach in their study was intended to describe the developmental experience of college students who had demonstrated relational leadership (Komives et al., 2005). Komives et al., (2005) used in-depth interviews for data collection and constant comparative analysis which allowed for the modification of their protocol to explore emergent issues through the data collection process. They used open, axial, and selective coding for data analysis and identified over 5,922 items that were distilled into 245 abstract concepts (Komives, 2005). They used constant comparison to compare and connect each participant’s response as categories continued to emerge. According to the researchers, “The theory emerged as the relationships between the concepts combined into an integrated framework that explained the phenomenon of leadership identity” (Komives et al., 2005, p. 596). Throughout this process they were able to create a theoretical framework that provides a staged model to leadership identity development, which is similar to what I set out to achieve through this study; however, their approach was predicated upon one major leadership theoretical approach-- relational leadership. My study used a similar grounded theory approach, but instead took into consideration other leadership values, behaviors, and experiences that extend beyond relational leadership and that focused specifically on student athletes as participants. I also sought to examine if collegiate student athlete leaders experienced leadership in the same staged and scaffolded way that the LID model depicts or if their
leadership experiences, occurring in a different context, also occur in a less linear or college-specific approach.

**Epistemology**

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that focuses on what one knows to be true, or the relationship between the “knower and the known” (Klenke, 2015, p. 15). It examines the origin, nature, and limits of human knowledge and posits that conceptions of knowledge are rooted in each researcher’s individual epistemological assumptions and these assumptions influence how we both understand and interpret our data through the methods we choose, and even unintentionally through our own theoretical beliefs, values, and assumptions (Klenke, 2015). This study employed a constructivist epistemological approach which allowed for knowledge to be co-constructed between the researcher and the participants and allowed me as the researcher to be part of the research rather than an objective observer (Mills et al., 2006).

**Constructivism**

Constructivism is a form of interpretative research, one of the most common types of qualitative research, which posits that there is no single reality but that reality is instead socially constructed, much like leadership (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constructivist researchers believe that there are multiple interpretations of a single event or experience and that researchers do not find knowledge, instead they construct or co-construct it. Constructivism, often interchangeably used with the term interpretivism, attempts to define this experience of construction through the interaction with others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constructivism is particularly important in this study as it provided a foundation for the co-creation of theoretical knowledge related to the leadership identity development of student athletes. The implications of this study propose a
Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development model that was co-created by the researcher and the contributions of the 12 study participants as a result of this study.

Constructivism is relativistic, self-reflective, pluralistic, and idealist and predicated on the belief that the social world must be described within the context of language, symbols, and meaning used to construct social practice (Klenke, 2015). Constructivist researchers see the world as complex and interconnected. The primary assumptions of constructivism assert that truth is a matter of consensus; facts have no meaning except within a value framework; cause and effect only exist within imputation; and phenomena can only be understood in the context in which it is studied (Klenke, 2015). Specific to the latter, constructivists study how and why participants construct meanings and actions in a certain context (Charmaz, 2006). For this study, the context was sport, specifically collegiate athletics. The meanings and actions constructed within the context of sport were the specific leadership values (meanings) and leadership actions (behaviors) that participants shared or were observed enacting, and this is what became the foundation of the grounded theory model that emerged through this study.

Charmaz suggests that constructivism allows researchers to construct categories of data that interprets participants’ views and voices (Charmaz, 2008). Her constructivist approach assumes that:

1. Reality is multiple and constructed under particular conditions.
2. The research process emerges from participant and researcher interaction.
3. The researcher’s positionality and the research participants’ positionality is taken into account.
4. Data is co-constructed by the researcher and the researched; data, therefore, are a product of the research process not the observed objects of the research project. (Charmaz, 2008)
Charmaz (2006) states that constructivists learn “how, when, and to what extent the studied experience is embedded in larger and, often, hidden positions, networks, situations, and relationships” (p. 130). She also suggests that a constructivist approach requires the researcher being alert to conditions under which differences and distinctions between people arise including hierarchies of power, opportunities, and communication strategies that maintain and perpetuate these distinctions (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivists also assume a reflexive stance toward their research and believe that both data and its subsequent or concurrent analysis are social constructions contextually situated in time, place, culture, and situation (Charmaz, 2006). A constructivist approach was important in my research as it not only allowed me to co-construct meaning along with my participants, it also allowed me to take participant context, experiences, identities, and relationships into consideration. In doing so, I was able to utilize a reflexive approach to data collection and analysis.

Guiding Empirical Interests

Charmaz suggests that grounded theorists begin their studies with guiding empirical interests they wish to study and identify general concepts to frame those interests (Charmaz, 2006). I began my study with an interest in student athletes and how they experienced leadership within the context of their sport. This guiding interest led to including the following concepts into my study and within my theoretical framework: leadership identity development, emotional intelligence, grit and resilience, coach and captain influence, and the correlation of athletic performance and athlete tenure with leadership behaviors and perceptions. Charmaz (2006) suggests that researchers use these concepts as “points of departure to form interview questions, to look at data, to listen to interviewees, and to think analytically about the data” (p. 17). I used
these concepts to frame my interview and observation protocols which provided me with an opportunity more critically examine and understand each concept in the context of sport.

**Data Collection Methods**

A defining characteristic of a grounded theory study is to collect as much rich data as possible. As Charmaz (2006) indicates, “rich data are detailed, focused, and full. They reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives” (p. 14). In this study I used three sources for data collection: semi-structured interviews including a photo-elicitation component, and non-participant observation to provide rich, focused, and full data for the purposes of this study. Additionally, Charmaz indicates that a grounded theory method should integrate and streamline data collection by “constructing systematic comparisons throughout inquiry of data with data, data with code, code with code, code with category, and category with category” (Charmaz, 2008, p.162).

Data collection consisted of a one-on-one interview with 12 different student athletes as well as non-participant observations conducted at seven team practices for each of the teams the participants represented. Interviews were semi structured and ranged from 90 minutes to two hours and each included a photo-elicitation segment. These are detailed below and collectively provided rich, detailed data to produce well-developed and comprehensive findings.

**Intensive Interviewing**

I conducted one interview per participant and all interviews took place virtually via zoom using the appended protocol as a guiding document (Appendix A). Each interview was scheduled for 90 minutes and was structured as an intensive interview. Intensive interviewing is a form of interpretive inquiry that can be described as a directed conversation between a researcher and a participant which allows for the in-depth exploration of a particular topic (Charmaz, 2006).
Charmaz suggests the creation of a few semi-structured open-ended questions for intensive interviews which then prompt participants to reflect on their experiences in meaningful ways that provide for in-depth story telling. This approach allowed me as the interviewer to dig beneath the surface of the participants’ described experiences, pause to more intently explore a shared statement, request more information or explanation on a specific point, dig deeper into the participant’s thoughts and feelings, and shift pace and topic as needed (Charmaz, 2006). Furthermore, this approach allowed me as the researcher to validate the participant’s perspective and to use social interaction to further the discussion (Charmaz, 2006). While the virtual interview format made this a bit challenging at times, I tried to monitor participant facial reactions, tempo, and tone as a way to provide an open and inviting environment for sharing their unique experiences.

This approach honored the authentic experience of the participants while allowing them to be the expert in their own narratives, and to share significant experiences, thoughts, or feelings in an affirming and safe space allowing them to create avenues for greater reflection and meaning in their own leadership journeys. Charmaz (2006) suggests that intensive interviewing aligns especially well with grounded theory methodology as both are “open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted” (p. 28). Charmaz (2006) claims that intensive interviewing complements the use of observation methodology in grounded theory research as well, which I also engaged in as described in the section that follows. Charmaz (2006) also suggests to attend to respondents’ language. This proved particularly important in this study and in the data analysis process as it allowed me as the researcher to bridge their individual experiences, values, and behaviors with my research questions in a way that interpreted their intended meaning in an authentic way without making assumptions about that meaning. This
provided more rich, textured data about how their experiences and leadership are related in the context of their sport.

As the researcher, I first contacted coaches via email to recruit participants and then contacted each participant via email. In the email, I invited the students to participate in the study, provided them with the photo elicitation prompt, and engaged them in a virtual informed consent process. I also contacted them via text message the day before each interview to remind them of the interview date and time. I opened each interview (see Appendix A for interview guide) with an overview of my study, my background, an explanation of the interview process, and a review of the consent process which all participants had already completed prior to the interview. As an added measure I also asked them verbally if they consented to participation in the study.

All interviews were recorded via a voice recording software and the built-in recording feature of the virtual platform I used for interviews. I typed notes during the interviews and then compared those notes to the recordings, and ultimately to the interview transcriptions to ensure accuracy. I utilized a transcription service for initial transcriptions. Participants all chose their own pseudonyms, which are also reflected in the transcriptions. The consent form and participant-chosen pseudonym were both measures used to protect participant confidentiality.

The interview protocol began with participant description of their background and demographics. Participants were then asked to reflect upon their experiences as a student athlete and upon their first encounters of leadership in sport. Questions guided the participants through conversations specific to their personal leadership experiences in sport, starting first with their earliest experiences and ending with reflections on their current day leadership practice. Participants were asked to consider connections between coaches and individual leadership,
athletic skill and student athlete leadership, class standing and perceived leadership ability, and the leadership cultures on their teams.

The interview questions shifted to the specific leadership experiences, behaviors and values that inform student athlete leadership. Participants were asked to consider the leadership values and behaviors most important to them and to their team and were asked to reflect upon specific leadership experiences in which those were either demonstrated by them, or by a teammate. I also provided each participant with a combined list of leadership values and behaviors, cutting across four existing leadership models, and asked them to tell me how important each value and behavior was specific to leadership in sport. I also read each LID stage to each participant, with an abbreviated description of each, and asked them to reflect on if and when they experienced each stage. I ended each interview with an opportunity for the participant to include any additional information we may not have covered, or to ask any questions. At the conclusion of each interview, I journaled about the experience which allowed me to identify any gaps in the data and common themes or categories emerging from the data. This also gave me a space to wrestle with any of my own reactions or preconceived notions about leadership in response to the participants’ shared experience. This protocol provided rich data on the lived experiences, values, and beliefs of student athlete leaders and provided an opportunity to compare and contrast their experiences with one another, and their experiences with existing leadership development models. This approach also allowed me to compare data with data, and provided new, rich, descriptive data to further define a new leadership model to frame the specific leadership identity development experiences of student athletes.
Photo-Elicitation

Each intensive interview also included a photo-elicited interview component conducted at the same time and in the same format of the intensive interview. The technique of photo elicitation in qualitative research involves the researcher showing participants various photos related to the subject matter to help stimulate discussion around the interview topic (Merriam, 2016). Photos may be brought by the participants themselves or provided by the researcher. They serve as prompts for the collection of verbal data by providing a visual starting point and a complex sensory experience through the use of memory response, processing of recalled matter, and the composure of a specific account (Tinkler, 2013). In photo elicitation, the researcher contextualizes, listens, juxtaposes, and observes the participants’ physical engagements and physical reactions (Tinkler, 2013). Most importantly, the researcher traces the narrative threads provided by the participants throughout the elicitation (Tinkler, 2013).

Each participant in this study was asked to engage in a photo-elicited interview in which they were invited to bring a picture with them that demonstrates their leadership journey. The only parameters placed on the picture they were asked to bring is that it could not be a photograph of them, or of any present or former teammates. For the most part, these parameters were followed. The instances where they were not are addressed in further detail in Chapter 4. Due to COVID-19 protocols during this particular study, the photo-elicitation portion of the interview was conducted online. Participants were asked to either text or email me a copy of their photo, before or during, their interview and I then operationalized the photo elicited interview protocol via the virtual platform (see Appendix A for interview guide) which started with a participant description of their selected photo and the relevance it has to their individual leadership journey. I then asked each participant to unpack the individual steps or hallmarks of
their unique leadership identity development journey as indicated by their photograph, as well as any salient environmental influences, hallmarks, turning points, or relevant moments that stood out to them. The semi-structured nature of the protocol allowed me to be able to ask specific follow up questions based upon the responses the participants provided. Of the 12 participants in this study, 11 chose to participate in the photo-elicited portion of the interview. One participant declined. These photographs and the data they provided are all included in Chapter 4. While this was challenging to execute in a virtual setting, the photo elicitation component allowed me to experience a first-hand account of leadership through the participants own words and experiences which helped to provide more authentic and triangulated data for this study.

**Non-Participant Observation**

Observation is a frequently used research tool in qualitative study which can address a specific research question through the first-person observation of the phenomenon in its naturally occurring setting (Merriam, 2006). Observation allowed me to witness experiences that may be routine or commonplace to the participants, but helped to contextualize their experiences for the purposes of this study. This approach allowed me as the researcher to record behavior in real-time while collecting data that I could compare with the existing interview data I had already collected. Merriam (2006) suggests this approach is particularly helpful for understanding ill-defined phenomena heavily dependent on context, like leadership. Merriam (2006) also suggests the use of a code-sheet to record specific behaviors or persons in the field. I followed this advice by recording my observations in a notebook with built in lined sections for notes, and an open column of the left that serves as a code-sheet which allowed me to record specific leadership values, behaviors and other coded data in the field, a hallmark of grounded theory research (see Figure 6 for an example).
The focus of the observations in this study was specifically on the participants, their activities, conversations, and interactions as well as on subtleties like symbolic meanings of words, and non-verbal communication among participants (Merriam, 2006). Observation data was collected at a team practice for each of the participants in this study using the attached observation protocol as a guide (see Appendix B), with the consent of the study participants and the head coach. I coordinated practice observation attendance under strict COVID-19 protocols with each participant and their corresponding team coach. Each practice minimally lasted one hour, sometimes extending three hours, depending on the team. I was given full access to all
aspects of the practice and was able to move freely along the court or field as needed to fully observe and document participant interactions.

This allowed me to observe student athlete leadership behaviors in action and the environmental influences that impacted their leadership values and behaviors, as well as the specific contexts in which they emerged. Observations in their practice settings provided for a more informal and interactive environment in which to witness leadership in action, in lieu of a game environment in which participants may have been less interactive and more guarded. Practice settings provided a more authentic and vulnerable space for observing true leadership values and behaviors where there are more organic player and coach interactions without the added pressure of media and fanbases to impact performance. Practice observations allowed me more un-fettered access directly to participants and coaches and provided a greater length of time in which to conduct my research. Researching practices also allowed me to research all participants closely together, rather than when their seasons are “in” which varies widely across the calendar year, dependent upon sport. Additionally, conducting observations in game settings alone would have required all participants in this study to be active in each game, thereby assuming that the teams’ leaders are also the teams’ key players, which is not necessarily the case.

While many practices were cancelled or rescheduled due to COVID-19 protocols, I was able to attend one practice session for all of the following teams within this study, within a three week period: softball, women’s soccer, football, track and field, men’s and women’s basketball, and tennis. I journaled before and after each observation. Throughout each observation I collected notes which I then expanded electronically upon leaving the field. As part of the notetaking process, I notated emerging leadership values and behaviors or the absence of such. I
noted participant behaviors, reactions, conversations, engagements with players and coaches, and coded behaviors while in the field. Those codes were later transitioned out of my hard-copy observation notebook and into an excel document so that I could transfer them into an electronic file for representation via a word cloud image using an online word cloud generation tool at wordclouds.com. Each word cloud is included in Chapter Four for review. I also condensed all of the practice codes into one comprehensive word cloud included in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Practice Observation Word cloud

Generated at wordclouds.com.
Trustworthiness and Credibility

The trustworthiness of any qualitative research is tied directly to the ethics of the investigator in addition to rigorous methods of the study itself (Merriam, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1986) define trustworthiness as a critical rational perspective that reflects a study’s credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These factors, combined with intellectual training and rigor of the researcher then determines the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 2016.). Credibility can be defined as the notion that the results of the study are convincing, represent the participant’s reality, and are therefore to be believed (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This requires rigorous thinking, integrity, competence, and ethics on the researcher’s behalf. In doing so, the researcher is able to reduce concerns or likelihood of confounding, atypicality, instability of data, and bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

This study preserved a relational ethic by protecting subjects from harm and preserving their right to privacy; educating participants on informed consent and ensuring that consent was received and maintained throughout the study; and, an by maintaining an awareness of my role as a researcher within this study and on the impact my role has on the participants in the study (Merriam, 2006). Specifically, subjects were protected from harm and their rights to privacy by conducting all interviews in a private, secure location and storing all interview and participant data in encrypted, password protected files. All participants used a pseudonym and all files related to the study used the pseudonym as well with the exception of one master file which was password protected. I also ensured privacy by obscuring any individual or team specific imagery in their photo elicited documentation, and by ensuring that all findings reported did not include any details that could be used to identify the participating individual. At team practices, I did not speak to the participants or identify them in any way. Specific to informed consent, each
participant received an informed consent document via email before their interview, the consent form was signed and returned electronically before the study began, and the consent process was reviewed again with each participant at the beginning of the interview. I also made sure to get their verbal consent again before arriving at a team practice. Specific to my role in the research process, in qualitative research, the researcher becomes an instrument, if not the primary instrument in data collection (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). A constructivist orientation epistemologically emphasizes this subjective relationship between participant and research in their co-construction of meaning (Mills, 2006). “Researchers, in their ‘humanness,’ are part of the research endeavor rather than objective observers, and their values must be acknowledged by themselves and by their readers as an inevitable part of the outcome” (Mills, 2006, p 26). I made sure to recognize and point out my role to each participant and to ensure they were comfortable with the researcher role within the study.

Several methods were used in this study to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of my methodology, analysis, and findings including Lincoln and Guba’s (1986) recommended techniques: triangulation of data; the use of thick, descriptive data; the use of an audit trail; peer debriefing; and, member checking. To address the triangulation of data, it was important to demonstrate that no single method could universally or adequately solve the occurrence of rival explanations. By using interview, observation, and photo elicitation methods this study was able to reveal different aspects of empirical reality. Some would say in doing so, that this provided “more grist for the research mill” or more rich findings through which to create a grounded theory (Patton, 1999, p. 1192).

I also kept a research journal throughout the study to ensure that I was reflecting on what was being shared by the participants in interview and photo-elicitation settings, as well as what I
observed and experienced in observation settings. This gave me a space to process through the data while ensuring I was not unfairly imposing my own views, opinions, or values on the experiences of my participants. I continued to journal until I moved into the data analysis phase, at which point I transitioned to procedural and memo writing. Memo writing provided a space for me to wrestle with the data and document the process by which codes and categories emerged, as well as to clarify and connect concepts and relationships that arose through the analytic process (Charmaz, 2006). This allowed me as the researcher to identify patterns which moved the content from individual to generalizable cases and also provided space for constant comparison. As it relates to trustworthiness and credibility, memo-writing also helped me to avoid hastily forcing data into concepts or theories (Charmaz, 2006). My preferred method of memo-writing included a combination of clustering and free writing, sometimes on flipchart paper and other times on a password protected voice recording application on my phone. Both allowed for the creation of thick, descriptive data and an audit trail.

Thick description goes beyond surface content; it provides detailed, contextualized data that evokes emotion, voices, and actions in a way that not only promotes credibility of the study, but also makes the study compelling (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I used thick description in my notes, journals, memos and in my Chapter 4 findings to ensure the data I am engaging is descriptive and contextualized. Credibility was also maintained through the process of member checking in which participants were given the opportunity to review interview and observation data via email and make changes or contribute additional context or information to the study. I engaged in member checking by emailing participants a copy of their final interview transcriptions to ask if they felt the transcription accurately depicted the information they shared in the interview, while also giving them a space to choose to change any responses or answers.
before their data was further analyzed. I also shared the word cloud from each team observation setting to ensure they felt it was representative, and to ask if they agreed or disagreed with its representation. Lastly, I shared a copy of the Student Leadership Identity Development Model I have proposed as a result of this study, later shared in Chapter 5, and asked them if they felt it accurately depicted their leadership experiences in sport. This aligned with an approach of member checking and refinement that Charmaz (2006) references in her work which involves the researcher explaining major emergent categories to certain participants and then inquiring whether or not those categories fit the specific participants’ experience (Charmaz, 2006).

This process created more credible research as it gave participants a voice in the findings and the opportunity to address any potential researcher misinterpretations (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). It also addressed my specific desire to ensure that the findings of this study accurately and authentically represented the lived experiences of the participating athletes and the athletes to which the resulting model may ultimately be applied. Lastly, I also incorporated the use of peer reviewers to examine my analysis and findings to ensure my subjectivity as a researcher did not impact my findings. For this purpose, I shared my analysis and findings with my dissertation committee chair and with select members of my committee at various stages in the data collection and analysis process. I also maintained robust data, notes, findings, process notes, journals and memos to provide an audit trail to allow for the retracing or replication of this study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

**Subjectivity**

As this study was qualitative in nature, it was important to acknowledge subjectivity and researcher positionality. Qualitative research acknowledges that the world itself is subjective, as is our way of viewing and valuing it. These views and values are evident in the ways researchers
construct their methodology and interpret their data (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Subjectivity recognizes that the researcher is an instrument in the research, and is part of the findings in a grounded theory study. In a grounded theory study, the resulting findings or model produced from the study ultimately reflects the researcher’s vantage points and valued experiences, often in the most subtle of ways, whether or not she is aware of it (Charmaz, 2006). Researcher subjectivity provides a way of viewing, allowing the researcher to move their main categories to concepts because of their theoretical reach, power, and incisiveness (Charmaz, 2006).

The use of a positionality statement in qualitative research provides an opportunity for the researcher to disclose their role in the interpretive process as a way to address bias in the qualitative process (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Positionality recognizes research findings are always located in social, cultural, historical, racial, and sexual identity contexts and can therefore only represent partial and incomplete truths (Lincoln, 1995). Similarly, researchers themselves are also located in these contexts and the use of a positionality statement to acknowledge and identify that location can be helpful in communicating the ways in which the research was conducted honestly and authentically (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

**Positionality Statement**

I am a white, formally educated woman from a working-class single-parent background currently functioning as a member of the upper middle class; all these factors impact the way in which I interpret the world around me, but also the way in which I engage in research and create space for others to participate in critical dialogue. I am a feminist, a mother, and have very liberal viewpoints related to education and social issues which may influence my personal views related to the leadership identity development of student athletes. I have been engaged in sports my entire life -- either in playing them, or cheering on those who do, but do not have a lived
experience as a student athlete. This certainly impacts the lens through which I view the student athlete experience and the ways in which I am perceived by the participants in this study. I strongly value honesty, integrity, and authenticity and believe that every person has the potential to lead from wherever they are, but acknowledge that not all have the privilege of doing so. Last, in the often contested argument of whether leaders are born or made, I feel strongly in favor of the latter. This influences the way in which I teach and learn leadership, and is an important belief to reflect upon in my journaling so as to not let that belief impact the data I collect and how I respond to participant interviews related to the topic.

As a seasoned leadership educator with over 15 years of experience in the field, I have been intrigued by the phenomenon of student athlete leadership identity development for nearly ten of those years. It began during my time at a large land grant institution when I created a leadership in sport course for student athletes. In doing so, I discovered that there were no existing models, frameworks, or texts to use as a foundation for my course. I found that oftentimes, guest speakers were the preferred method of leadership content delivery and that this content was by no means theoretical, reflective, or rigorous in nature. In contrast, it often involved inspirational stories of struggle and triumph -- career ending injuries, or a stint in the “pros.” Rarely, if ever, was leadership ever discussed as a practice. So, over time, I began accumulating what I thought to be ideal content for student athlete leaders competing within some of the best teams and best resourced programs in the Southeastern Conference (SEC). This course evolved over time to a year-long leadership development academy for student athletes and is still successfully implemented, despite my departure from the institution over three years ago. Much of the content I piloted is still in the curriculum, now being replicated at other institutions. Some of that content has been phased out, by myself in practice or by those that
followed. I have implemented a similar curriculum at other institutions, but have always realized that the lack of a true leadership model to frame that work lends it to scrutiny and is a disservice to student athlete leaders who could thrive under a more well-articulated and crafted curriculum and theoretical foundation.

Through my personal and professional experiences, I came to believe that leadership is a socially constructed process and not a formal position. I study and teach leadership as a collaborative process and not merely as the positional role of an individual leader. As a leadership educator and a leadership researcher, this core belief around the construct of leadership influences the way I research leadership as a field of study. My research lens is that of a social constructionist, and focuses on shared knowledge co-created through interaction. I believe that one’s environment and experiences influence how they engage in or perceive leadership, and my own experiences have impacted the way in which I approach this topic as a researcher.

My formal role within a university setting as a leadership trainer, as an adjunct professor who teaches leadership courses, and as an Associate Vice President influences my understanding, practice, and beliefs related to student leadership. This is important to keep in mind in data collection, analysis, and journaling. This role also influences my access to the context of this study and the access I was able to gain to my research participants, practices, and coaches.

**Research Site Selection**

The research site was a mid-size, urban, public institution in the mid-south. Participants were currently enrolled student athletes competing in an NCAA Division 1 team sport. The University athletics program serves over 400 student athletes through 19 different NCAA sports.
Sports include baseball, basketball (men’s and women’s), cross country (men’s and women’s), football, golf (men’s and women’s), rifle (men’s and women’s), soccer (men’s and women’s), softball, tennis (men’s and women’s), track and field indoor and outdoor (men’s and women’s), and volleyball. Specifically, participants were recruited from all of the teams housed within the university’s athletic program, using the prompt and parameters provided below.

This site was selected specifically for its similarity to a large number of NCAA Division I athletic programs, its diversity of student enrollment and sports offered, and its proximity to the researcher’s location so that in-person observations could be easily facilitated. Access to the site was given through athletic department approval offered by both the Athletic Director and individual team coaches. Institutional Review Board approval was also obtained prior to the launch of the study.

**Research Participants**

The total number of participants in this study was 12. Similar to the previously mentioned grounded theory study conducted by Komives et al., (2005), resulting in the LID Model, my study employed purposeful sampling in which interview participants were nominated by coaches, trainers, and athletic department staff. Coaches, trainers, and athletic department staff were contacted with an email invitation to support the study with nominations. The criteria for nomination was simple and allowed for the initial purposeful sampling of student athletes who demonstrate leadership: nominees must be student-athletes competing in team sports who demonstrate outstanding individual or team leadership within their sport. For the purposes of this study, leadership is defined as: the process of positively and ethically influencing an individual or group to achieve their personal best. I allowed team coaches to determine whether their
specific sport was experienced as a “team sport” so that my subjectivity as a researcher did not inadvertently exclude participants based on my own interpretations and assumptions.

Participant recruitment was conducted one month prior to the launch of the study. Once nominations were submitted, participants were selected to ensure diversity of participation taking participant sport, gender, race, and class standing into consideration. The initial nominations did reflect the diversity the study sought and participants were contacted via email and asked to participate- noting their nomination. I received 14 nominations from eight teams. Of the 14 nominees, one was disqualified because she was out of the country for the semester and could not engage in the observation portion of the study. One other nominee declined to participate. Of the 12 who confirmed their intent to participate, each participant provided written informed consent for all interviews, observations, and photo-elicitations and were notified that consent may be withdrawn at any time within the study. The participants in this study are included in Table 3 below, organized by sport. There were seven women and five men engaged in this study. In relation to the student athlete population at this university, women were over-represented in this study; 39% of the athletes at the university identify as women, compared to 58% of the study participants. Average participant age was 20 which closely aligns with the overall student athlete population. Five of the 12 participants identified as International Students. In relation to the student athlete population at this university, International Students were over-represented in this study; 17.5% of the athletes at this university identify as International Students. Eight of the participants identified as White, and four of the participants identified as Black. These demographics compare to the overall student athlete population at this university which is 39% White and 33% Black.
Table 3

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sport</th>
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<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
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<td>Eleanor</td>
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<td>Softball</td>
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<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xander</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>Football</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 years of age. They ranged from sophomores in college to students in their first year of graduate school and represented a variety of academic majors. Seven of the participants identified as women; five identified as men, and five students identified as International Students.

This consent form and all interview protocols used for this study were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the researcher’s university and are included in the Appendix. Data collection concluded within this study according to the timetable below, which aligned with the saturation and theoretical sufficiency of the categories (Charmaz, 2006).

Timetable

This study progressed according to the timeline outlined in Table 4 below:
Table 4

Research Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Element of Study Conducted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 2020</td>
<td>Interview Protocol Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2020</td>
<td>Institutional Review Board Approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2020</td>
<td>Participant Recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September-November 2020</td>
<td>Participant Interviews; Photo-Elicitation; Observation; Member-Checking; Initial Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2020- December 2020</td>
<td>Axial Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2021-February 2021</td>
<td>Selective Coding; Reporting Findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

A hallmark of grounded theory data collection and analysis is the intentional blurring of the two research phases as the researcher is engaged in data analysis throughout the data collection phase (Charmaz, 2006). Data was analyzed in this grounded theory research via coding, the process of defining and naming segments of the data with a label that categorizes, and summarizes each piece of data to move the research beyond concrete statements to analytic interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). Coding in this grounded theory research was conducted across three phases: initial coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Coding in grounded theory research is interactive and comparative and can be conducted alongside data collection (Charmaz, 2008). Throughout the data analysis process, there was constant comparison -- data was compared with data and with codes to determine which theoretical codes each statement
supports or indicates (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) suggests that “grounded theory coding generates the bones of your analysis. Theoretical integration assembles those bones into a working skeleton” (p. 45). Through the coding process, I was able to define what was occurring within the data and was able to consider what it means as the codes began to come together in the form of a nascent theory. This nascent theory explains these data and informs future data collection. Throughout the data analysis process, I wove together generalizable theoretical statements and contextual analyses of actions and events (Charmaz, 2006). Data analysis for this particular study began with initial coding of interview and observation data, then axial coding to compare categories to subcategories, and finally selective coding to weave the data back together again. Memo writing was used as a technique throughout to sort through the data and make meanings of its analytical impact. New ideas and insights were able to arise through this process, and emergent codes and categories were able to be identified in the data (Charmaz, 2006).

**Initial Coding**

Grounded theory coding began with the initial coding phase when fragments of data in the form of lines and words were closely studied for analytic import. In this phase, it was important that I remained open to all possible theoretical directions in which the data may lead. Initial coding addressed what the study is of, what the study suggests and from whose point of view, as well as what theoretical category the data indicates (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding should stick closely to the data and initial coding words should invoke action. These codes are “provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48).

This study employed the use of line-by-line coding as an initial coding technique for participant interviews and photo-elicitation and incident to incident coding of observation data. These helped to determine fit and relevance of the data. Line-by-line coding required the
researcher to code each line of written data (Charmaz, 2006). This is a useful approach when working with detailed interview data by prompting the researcher to see the nuances in data that may have otherwise escaped one’s attention (Charmaz, 2006). This approach helped to uncover “implicit concerns as well as explicit statements” that then provided opportunities for the foundation of emergent categories (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50). Glaser (2017) recommended the use of gerunds in initial coding because of the action and sequence they represent (Charmaz, 2006). I initially attempted to pursue this recommendation but found the use of gerunds to often detract from the more obvious and aligned language related to this study. To accomplish the line by line coding, I created a coding column to the left of the transcribed content and added codes there. An example is included below in Figure 8.
Incident to incident coding proved helpful for coding observational data as it allowed the researcher to code first-hand the incidents, anecdotes, conversations, and observations from field notes. This coding technique provided analytic insight to routine or ordinary actions that later defined patterns and processes (Charmaz, 2006). This is depicted in a previous section in Figure 6.

In Vivo coding was also used to preserve participant meaning of specific words or phrases (Charmaz, 2006). This was particularly helpful in referencing short-hand or anecdotal

---

**Figure 8**  
**Line by Line Coding Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident Type</th>
<th>Example Coding</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Starting low        | **Blake:**     | 103
| Doubting            | Okay. Probably could start with my lows. Probably I dealt with the phase of not really... How can I put this? The phase of doubting myself and I just... You come into college and everybody's a *top tier athlete*. You get a... *We got a top tier program, everyone around you is a top tier athlete*, so you have to find ways to separate yourself. And my first... Actually, my first two years, I kind of fell through the cracks, and I stopped kind of believing in myself. I feel like I lost my touch and skill for the game of football. I feel like I just kind of lost the love for football, which I really didn't, but at times, I thought I did. And it took one of my older teammates at the time, he was a senior and this was in 2017, he kind of pulled me to the side and was like, "Whenever you want to talk, just come and talk to me." |
| Distinction         | **Blake:**     | 106
| Falling through cracks | At the time, I was looking at everybody as the enemy. Everybody on the team was against me, the coaches, you know how that goes. And that was the one teammate who pulled me to the side and was like, "All right, you ready to talk, let me know." And after that day was over with, I went and talked to him in his car and we had a full out conversation. And he told me there was no reason why I shouldn't be playing because I have the athletic ability to be out there. I just have to trust myself. And he told me, at some point, I was going to be the one who won us a game. And then like a week or two weeks later, we were playing against UCLA, and I won the game. This was in 2017. |
| Self doubt          | **Blake:**     | 107
| Mentorship          | So that ran into my low and high point. So from that point on, I got a... understood who I was, a player and who I wanted to be and each year, it kind of progressed. And just my mental, I kind of gained my mental strength. My mental health became a lot more serious. You kind of hear about it, you think, "Oh, I'm fine, I'm strong. I'm doing all I can do. I'll be fine. I'm not going to fall into depression" or if there's any downfalls, you kind of feel like you're superman all the time. And like I said, I kind of fell into that wave of uncertainty about myself. |
| Reaching out        | **Blake:**     | 108
| Talking             | **Blake:**     | 109
| Adversarial         | And like I said, each year, my mental health and just my mental health has grown. My confidence, on and off the field, and the way I associate myself to people and |
| Being against       |                | 110
| Reaching out        |                | 111
| Mentorship          |                | 112
| Ability             |                | 113
| Trust               |                | 114
| Winning             |                | 115
| Turning point       |                | 116
| Transitioning       |                | 117
| Knowing self        |                | 118
| Growing             |                | 119
| Mental strength     |                | 120
| Being strong        |                | 121
| Uncertainty         |                | 122
| Mental health       |                | 123
| Confidence          |                | 124
| Handling challenges |                | 125

---
terms in sports, for example, “take the charge” as an act of leadership in basketball and the frequently used term “lead by example.” This can be seen alongside the line by line coding in Figure 6, as the highlighted yellow lines of transcribed interview text. Over 3,600 non-unique initial codes were identified in the interview data, and 814 non-unique initial codes were identified in the observation data. These codes were then further analyzed in the axial coding process.

**Axial Coding**

The initial coding phase was followed by axial coding. I determined this data analysis approach would allow me to compare data to data through the categorization and subcategorization process and further distill abstract concepts into meaningful categories.

Charmaz (2006) indicates that “axial coding relates categories to subcategories, specifies the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembles the data you have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis” (p. 60). Through axial coding I was able to sort, synthesize and organize the large amounts of data generated from my initial coding phase and reassemble them. I did this by handwriting all of the initial codes onto individual post-it notes. I then sorted them into initial relational categories, which Charmaz (2006) says occurs on a conceptual level, or by converting text into concepts that can build the dimensions of a larger category. In doing so, I hand sorted thousands of post-it notes into content-related piles that were the foundation of 76 initial categories (Table 5).
### Table 5

**Initial Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>affirmation</th>
<th>energy</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>alert</td>
<td>engagement</td>
<td>practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authenticity</td>
<td>enthusiasm</td>
<td>presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awareness</td>
<td>environment</td>
<td>purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brotherhood and sisterhood</td>
<td>example</td>
<td>relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change</td>
<td>feedback</td>
<td>resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>charisma</td>
<td>flexibility</td>
<td>respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coaching</td>
<td>focus</td>
<td>responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>followership</td>
<td>sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitment</td>
<td>grit</td>
<td>self control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>growth</td>
<td>self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competition</td>
<td>hope</td>
<td>selfless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confidence</td>
<td>hustle</td>
<td>servant leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>congruence</td>
<td>improvement</td>
<td>skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consciousness of self</td>
<td>influence</td>
<td>strategic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consistency</td>
<td>initiative</td>
<td>strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID</td>
<td>inspiration</td>
<td>support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culture</td>
<td>integrity</td>
<td>team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dedication</td>
<td>joy</td>
<td>tempo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discipline</td>
<td>listening</td>
<td>toughness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diversity</td>
<td>motivation</td>
<td>trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effort</td>
<td>negative leadership</td>
<td>unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotions</td>
<td>passion</td>
<td>urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empathy</td>
<td>persistence</td>
<td>vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>encouragement</td>
<td>playing time</td>
<td>winning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>work ethic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After I had identified the initial categories above, I placed all of the handwritten post-its representing the initial codes into one of the emerging categories (Figure 9).
I compared all of the initial data to the categories that emerged, and I then began to compare the categorized data to identify overarching categories and associated sub-categories (Figure 10).

Figure 10

Data Analysis Example 2
In doing so, I was able to develop 11 overarching categories with corresponding subcategories that I then sorted all of the data into. This process is depicted in Figure 11. The categories and subcategories are depicted in Table 6.

**Figure 11**

*Data analysis: Refinement of Categories*
### Table 6

**Categories and Subcategories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Competition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classification/Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Playing Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strategic Tempo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Winning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Alert</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Growth Mindset</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Meaningful Relationships</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Brotherhood/Sisterhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Commitment</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dedication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Communication</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encouragement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selflessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Selfless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sacrifice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Servant leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work Ethic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hustle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Toughness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self Esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consciousness of Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Authenticity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Congruence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Modelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Charisma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inspiration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Leadership Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Selfishness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selective Coding

Once the initial 11 categories were constructed, I used diagramming to further clarify and extend the analytic power of my emerging ideas (Charmaz, 2006). I continued to compare categories to categories, and subcategories to the categories they were aligned with and employed the use of memo writing throughout to further expand upon my reasoning. I compared observation coding to the categories and sub-categories to make sure I had not left any data out, and I compared in vivo codes to categories to make sure participant voice was still represented. I examined my categories in relation to one another to determine where there may be duplication or overlap and wrote memos to guide my analytical thought process. In doing so, I was able to further condense my categories into one culminating category of student athlete leadership identity development, the central thesis of my research, from which five core themes (Table 7) and ten subthemes (Table 8) emerged. I removed two categories that were important but did not have enough robust data to require inclusion in the model, but do reference these in my Additional Findings section of Chapter 4. These categories were negative leadership and COVID-19.

Table 7

Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

107
This was a time consuming and sometimes tedious process, however, I finished my selective coding phase once I felt that I had fully deconstructed and reconstructed the data into something meaningful and compared it enough that I felt the data was fully saturated. Charmaz (2006) states that the “strength of grounded theory coding derives from this concentrated active involvement in the process” (p. 59). Researchers act upon data rather than passively reviewing what the data says; through this process, new analytical threads emerge and events and perspectives become apparent where previously unrealized (Charmaz, 2006). This is a process I fully engaged in and is one that Charmaz (2006) indicates checks researcher preconceived notions. As data analysis in grounded theory is an emergent method, this method of coding allowed for new ideas to continuously emerge through the constant comparison of data to data, in which each finding was able to be cross-compared with other findings from this study. This allowed for the development of a more refined and focused code (Charmaz, 2006).

**Representation**

At the conclusion of data analysis, data was sorted, diagramed and integrated in a comprehensive model with supporting narratives that Charmaz (2006) says is in service to the development of a grounded theory. Memos were used to initiate the first drafts of findings. Sorting of the data within the memos provided a theoretical integration of categories which developed a resulting model (Charmaz, 2006). Each memo was written on a specific category,
then sorted, compared and integrated to form relationships, connections, and comparisons (Charmaz, 2006). Sorting was be done by hand and once sorted, a diagram was crafted to provide concrete images of the ideas that emerged (Charmaz, 2006). This allowed for me to make visible previously unseen relationships and processes that may have been hidden from view and sharpened the relationships between categories (Charmaz, 2006). This also allowed for the emergence of categories that could better define the student athlete leadership identity experience that had previously gone unnamed, and unexplored in research, but according to the participants in this study, had certainly been practiced. The resulting data is presented in a traditional narrative report in Chapters 4 and 5 with supplemental diagrams in the form of a Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model in Chapter 5. Major themes that emerged from the data analysis are explored throughout a detailed participant section in Chapter 4. These themes are also used as headings of sections throughout Chapters 4 and 5 to ground readers in the research findings and guide them through my analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Participant quotes are used throughout these sections to also ground readers in the lived, authentic experiences of this student population as leaders within the context of sport.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provides an in-depth account of the qualitative nature of this study, and the merits and challenges associated with this methodological approach. This study engaged a constructivist grounded theory approach in order to be able to translate findings into an emergent leadership model which can serve as a foundation for describing the student athlete leadership identity development values, behaviors and experiences within Division 1 team sports. Participants were identified through purposeful sampling and were engaged at multiple points throughout the study. Interview and observation data was analyzed using line by line, in
vivo, axial, and selective coding which resulted in the creation of a grounded theory and a proposed student leadership identity development model. This study demonstrated its trustworthiness and credibility through the use of rich, descriptive data, member checking, peer review, and triangulation of data gathered from intensive interviews, participant observations, and photo elicitation. Researcher subjectivity and positionality were addressed through the inclusion of a researcher authored positionality statement. In the chapters that follow, rich, detailed background information on each of the research participants is shared, in addition to the findings from the data analysis that help to frame a proposed leadership model to further describe the specific leadership identity development experiences of student athletes. The research concludes with final thoughts and recommendations for further research and practice and a proposed Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model presented in Chapter 5.
Chapter 4: Analysis of the Findings

In this chapter I discuss the findings regarding the staged, scaffolded leadership identity development experiences of collegiate student athletes and the common leadership values and behaviors of collegiate student athletes. I provide much of the analysis in the authentic words and experiences of the participants including findings from participant interviews, photo elicitations, and practice observations. Where possible, I provide visual elements and participant quotes to enhance the representation of these findings. This chapter begins with a detailed overview of the participants including their leadership journeys as well as their leadership values, behaviors and experiences, findings related specifically to the staged, scaffolded leadership identity development experiences of student athletes, a detailed overview of the central themes of this study – presented as leadership values and behaviors, and additional findings for consideration.

Specifically, this chapter highlights findings that indicate that collegiate student athletes do not experience leadership in staged, scaffolded ways. Instead, they experience leadership through a specific set of leadership values and behaviors that are uniquely and collectively cultivated in the context of sport. Specifically, these leadership values of collegiate athletes are self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment, growth mindset and competitive purpose. These are practiced through the leadership behaviors of student athlete integrity, modeling, influence, communication, trust, unity, sacrifice, resilience, work ethic, and discipline.

Participant Leadership Values, Behaviors and Experiences

There were 12 participants engaged in this study. Each student athlete participated in an interview including a photo elicitation component, and each participant was observed in a team practice setting. This section provides a brief description of each participant identified by their self-selected pseudonym (Table 9), their leadership definition, the leadership values and
behaviors they find to be most important among student athlete leaders (combined in Table 10), and the stages of leadership identity development they experienced, and when (collected in Table 11).

Table 9

Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Age when starting sport</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Track and Field</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Track and Field</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Black*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddy</td>
<td>Softball</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xander</td>
<td>Tennis</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes student identifies as an International Student

Beatrice: The Sacrificer

Beatrice grew up in Edmonton, Alberta Canada where she began playing soccer at the age of three. She moved away from her family at the age of 16 to play soccer for the Canadian national team and fluently speaks three languages. As a child, she was also a successful competitive diver and reflects on much of her childhood revolving around sport, replacing full days of school with half-days bookended by two to three practices a day, unlike her school-aged peers: “I just lived such a different life” (Beatrice).

Beatrice is now a 20-year-old junior studying International Business and is in her second year serving as team captain on the women’s soccer team at her university. She plays soccer alongside Eleanor, another participant in this study. When asked about her captain position,
Beatrice quickly asked, “Position meaning on the field, or my role?” and was able to seamlessly transition between reflections on both. As she discussed the role of a captain, Beatrice offered that being captain did not necessarily mean she was the best player, acknowledging that leadership and skill are not always synonymous:

*I did, growing up, think that for sure that the best player on the team is going to be the captain. They're playing the most. They're on the field. They know what to do because they're the best player. It's a stereotype that the best player should be the captain and I don't think that's how it should be.* (Beatrice)

Beatrice shares that growing up as an athlete competing in two sports, competitive diving and soccer, had its challenges but she never complained. For her, sport has always been an escape and something fun that she feels fortunate to participate in. Sport has made her a more hard working and adaptable person. It has taught her the value of trust, and has pushed her to reach her full potential, never holding back:

*I was a good player and I think that's how I earned my respect from my teammates. It was just on the field. I was good so they trusted me with the ball--they trusted me with what I would say. That's why I think it's so different from then until now, when there's so many other aspects like communication, trust, respect, literally putting playing aside.*

(Beatrice)

Beatrice defines leadership as “*somebody that puts people ahead of themselves and wants the best for those around them*” (Beatrice). The leadership values and behaviors she viewed as most important include: communication, resilience, role modeling, encouraging and inspiring others, and managing conflict.
Beatrice shared a picture of her hometown of Edmonton for the photo elicited portion of the interview (Figure 12).

**Figure 12**

*Photo Elicitation: Beatrice*


The picture includes a skyline of downtown Edmonton draped with the Canadian flag. She chose this image to represent her resilience and grit. “*I just didn’t give up. Even though my chances were pretty slim from where I lived, I just kept persevering through all the challenges. I didn’t get anything handed to me*” (Beatrice). This image also demonstrates Beatrice’s selflessness: “*When they say ‘Beatrice’ from Edmonton, Alberta it just hits differently. It’s more important to hear my city’s name than my own name*” (Beatrice). For Beatrice, leadership in sport is about bringing out the best in your teammates: “*How do you get everyone around you to be their best? Because if they are not at their best then the team is not going to perform*” (Beatrice).

Beatrice’s selflessness and resilience were both evident in the practice I observed. As Beatrice shared: “*you could be the sweetest girl, the most polite girl, but once you step on the field it doesn’t matter. It’s a complete different personality because you have a job to do and you*
have to get it done” (Beatrice). Prior to the practice, Beatrice suggested I would observe the team demonstrating positivity, encouragement, and hard work. She also indicated “you’ll see grit from me... and that’s what makes my teammates want to be on my team” (Beatrice). Her prediction was completely accurate. It was the earliest practice I attended but easily the most physical. Most of the practice was dedicated to three-on-three scrimmages where Beatrice often flung herself to the cold ground diving for a ball, or could be heard coaching players from the sideline and helping to throw balls into play. She was calm, focused and tough. A ball would smack her cold thigh and she would not so much as flinch. Anytime Beatrice was in play, the field was calmer and everyone played harder.

*I've never seen athletes work so hard. The girls dove for balls face-first into the grass... the grit, the determination, the resilience the hustle. No one ever seemed fazed when they got kicked hard, slammed to the ground, or came up with a mouthful of grass.* (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

The most frequent observation codes from Beatrice’s practice were: grit, energy, toughness, encouragement, communication, and servant leadership. These and others are depicted in Figure 13 with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.
Blake: The Influencer

Blake is a fifth-year senior from Atlanta, Georgia. He plays defensive back for the football team and studies sports law with the hopes of getting a law degree once his collegiate football career comes to a close. He also identifies as a son and as a brother. Blake started playing football between the ages of four and five, and he is 22 now.

Blake defines leadership as “A person who's ready to take himself or put himself in situations for the betterment of others. ... just to be there when others are in need” (Blake). This comes, in part, from a challenging first few years in his collegiate sport. Blake reflected upon his experience coming into college and realizing that while you are a top-tier athlete, so is everyone else. “I kind of fell through the cracks and I stopped kind of believing in myself,” said Blake who credits a senior who reached out to him and offered his encouragement, two weeks later Blake won a historic game for his team with an end-of-game pivotal play. Blake recalls that moment
being pivotal in developing his mental toughness and his confidence as a leader: “I feel like I’ve
grown more as a person, as a man, because of all that had happened to me” (Blake).

Blake now takes pride in his commitment to uplifting the younger players on the team:

I’m that older player who was there for me at that time. So I’m that older player for a lot
of the young guys now… so my position on the team now is just, as I say, it’s to lead.

(Blake)

He also emphasizes the importance of accountability and trust in leadership. Blake obviously
loves his sport, but often refers to it as a job: “I just lead. I walk in there every day. I clock in…
It’s time to go to work on the field or whatever we’re doing, a meeting, a workout. I’m always
trying to push the next person” (Blake). Blake also said “When it’s time to go to work, I’m going
to work” (Blake). He also refers to “handling business” within his position group. Blake
acknowledges and is aware that other players look to him as a role model and an influencer on
the team, and beyond just their sport: “Leadership comes in so many ways, besides just football”
(Blake).

Blake also acknowledges that relationships are important for leaders in sport, but that
relationships are often transient due to the nature of collegiate athletics. “It’s a business and
everything” he says. “You build those relationships for a time period but you have to understand
that eventually they have to move on, you have to move on” (Blake). What Blake shares is that
each year a new recruiting class comes in and a graduating class moves out, and coaching shifts
are not uncommon. Blake has had two head coaches, three defensive coordinators, and three
position coaches. Blake sees collegiate sport as a business with shifting personnel, and these
transitions have helped Blake to become more flexible and open to change and a better listener:
Each time I’ve gotten a new coach, I just listen. I became more of a listener more than a talker, and that had helped a lot. And I’m not always going to have the answers like I thought I was at the young age when I got here. I’m not always going to be right. They’re not always going to be right. (Blake)

Similar to Beatrice’s account, Blake acknowledges that an athlete does not need to be the best athletically to be a leader. Instead, he suggests it’s more about wanting to lead and having the mentality to do it. He defines that mentality as hard working, confident, and trustworthy. For Blake, trust is imperative in his sport, as it ensures the safety of his teammates: “If you know one of your teammates, his weaknesses, you can be there for him. If I know he’s not good going left, I want to protect his left the majority of the time” (Blake).

Blake shared a picture depicting a quote for the photo-elicited portion of his interview (Figure 14).

**Figure 14**

*Photo Elicitation: Blake*

[Image: https://pin.it/6LJ26FG]
The picture has a black background and white lettering that reads “Trust the Process. Your Life Won’t Change in a Day, Week or Month. Be Patient, It Takes Time.” In describing why he chose this image to depict his leadership journey, Blake acknowledged that he hit his “athletic downfall” when he came to college. He felt as though he was putting in the work but not getting noticed. He reflected on sacrifices he had to make and challenges he had to endure to motivate him to be who he is now. As with many of this study’s participants, Blake referenced the impact of COVID-19 on his experiences but chose to see it as an opportunity to pause and self-reflect: “I found something new about myself. I found myself and where I needed to be for myself, for my future, and for my teammates” (Blake). Blake sees this image as a representation of how he leads the younger players--as a way to reassure them that they do not have to have it all figured out, and he uses his own experience to encourage them to trust the process.

Bro, look at me. I had to go through it every year. I have witnesses. I have teammates who’ve seen me literally really go from being the top guy at the end of the season to having to start over the next season. And everybody's like, ‘why do I have to go through so much hardship while I am here?’ And I felt like, at the time I was saying, of course, why do I always have to be the one who has to prove myself? But everybody has their own story. And I feel like doing all that... it made me who I am. And I’m actually proud of it. I'm glad of it. I'm glad that all that happened. (Blake)

Blake imparts to younger players that they should focus on the elements they can control, and try not to be overwhelmed with the external pressures:

Control what you can control. We can't control what's going on in the world right now.

We can't control the media. We can only control our attitude and everything else towards
what we're dealing with that day. We can control how we go about handling our business each day. (Blake)

Blake’s top leadership values and behaviors are: attitude, loyalty, strategic, accountable, confidence. He does not believe that class-standing impacts leadership. In fact, he acknowledges that a hard-working freshman can motivate upper-classmen to work harder for their spot: “I feel like no matter what your age is, or the class you are in... leadership is leadership at the end of the day” (Blake).

When I asked Blake what I could expect to see at a team practice, he referenced accountability, building players up, hard work, brotherhood, having fun, and competing to be the best: “All of us, we have a competitive spirit, even coaches. That's why we're in the sport that we play, because we like to compete” (Blake).

Blake was hard to keep up with during his practice because he was constantly maneuvering from on-field plays to off-field coaching. He was visibly engaged throughout the entire practice--talking to coaches, talking to players, and giving and receiving feedback. It was obvious he was enjoying his sport, and it was also obvious the players were all watching him. He worked hard but would dance on the sidelines between plays. Oftentimes he would be on the field but outside of the play, all the while he would be watching his teammates and then coaching them after the play. He would tap players on their helmets, and jump around in the center of a huddle or a team circle to bring the energy up:

After every play he would go up to his coach and ask for feedback. He would talk to the coaches consistently. He would talk to the other players. He would engage one on one. Even when he wasn't in the play, he was on the field. He was focused. He was observant. He was connecting with players. It was obvious that he had a lot of influence on the field-
whatever he was doing, people were watching him. People were modeling what he was doing. I was intrigued by the level of grit and toughness balanced with the amount of joy that I saw on the field. (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

He could never be heard commanding the group or the field in a vocal way, but Blake’s influence was still significant. Blake was focused and connected. He was tough and he played hard. He excels in one-on-one connections, which I expected from our earlier conversation, but he also had a large group impact with the energy and enthusiasm he brought to the field. He may talk about football like it is a job, but it is obvious that Blake is truly passionate about his sport and experiences true joy in getting to play it.

The most frequent observation codes from Blake’s practice were: influence, coaching, encouragement, focus, joy, unity, and growth mindset. These and others are depicted in Figure 15 with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.

Figure 15

Football Observation Codes
Carter: The Girl with Grit

Carter, 22, has played softball competitively since she was seven or eight years old. She grew up in a small town about an hour away from the university where she now plays third base for the university’s softball team, alongside Maddy who also serves as a participant in this study. Carter grew up around the university her entire life with multiple family members having attended the institution. She refers to the university as her “dream school” (Carter).

Carter graduated in May of 2020 with her bachelors of exercise science, and is now in a masters program for exercise science while still serving as an active member of the softball team. She has participated in an academic fellowship and undergraduate research alongside her sport. She, like many athletes in this study, coins this year her “COVID year” where she was deemed eligible for another season of play by the NCAA due to COVID related season cancellations during her senior year.

Relationships are paramount for Carter, who refers to her teammates as sisters: “You become a lot like sisters. Even when you fight and argue and are tired of each other, you’re still with them and you still know that you love each other and they got your back” (Carter). Carter also acknowledges the resilience needed for sport, calling it a “grind” but saying it’s all worth it in the end. Resilience has been a major aspect of Carter’s leadership experience in her sport, as she has battled two season ending injuries: “I feel that might be what started my leadership role because it was all talk. I couldn’t perform in any way” (Carter). When she returned to play following her second injury and ensuing surgery, she did so with a desire to “step up and build something” but the season ended abruptly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trust and communication are also important to Carter:
One of the people who plays second, for example, in practice the other day, she always talks to me. If I’m gonna throw to second from third, I don’t have to look at her. I just know her voice and I know that she’s going to be there because she tells me… I’m not even that close to her off the field, but we’ve built that relationships on the field so like, I can trust her and know that she’s going to be there. (Carter)

For Carter, communication is also related directly to accountability and ensuring that her teammates know and rise to team expectations:

I try to communicate about what's going on and I try to set standards or expectations that we can be held accountable to. I don't like to leave anything to chance or leave it like people don't know what's expected of them. Because that's when things can go awry.

(Carter)

Carter shared a picture of a hand moving wooden blocks for the photo elicited portion of the interview.

Figure 16

Photo-elicitation: Carter

The picture includes approximately 20 small, cube shaped, wooden blocks and a blurred hand in the background seemingly picking one up. She chose this image to represent her leadership journey as one who leads by example but who is striving to build a stronger leadership style by being a more outspoken leader for her team. According to Carter, “I need to build those other blocks up for myself,” represented by the hand moving the blocks in the image, “and it’s not always a perfect system, so it’s give and take” (Carter). She also references the stacked position of the blocks as representative of the team’s foundation, but that her job as a leader on her team is to build upon that foundation: “to make our team better and leave something that will outlast me” (Carter).

Carter defines leadership from a positional stance as “the go-to and somebody who acts as a good example” (Carter). She sees her role on the team as helping others to grow and improve. Her top leadership values and behaviors are communication, self-awareness, building relationships, resilience, and integrity.

Carter shared that team practices are often very conversational with members of the team seeking opportunities to connect or motivate her teammates. She described this conversation as being very intentional, which she explained as making sure you are focused and attentive. I was able to witness that combination of focus and attentiveness firsthand when I attended Carter’s practice. I noted that practice was a balance of skill/technique and collaboration/communication:

The girls are not afraid to get a little dirty or take a dive for a ball, but they also take care of their bodies and are very self-aware of their performance. It is not uncommon to hear a number of ‘my bad’s’ or ‘that’s on me’ when a catch is missed or a play is botched. Similarly, you hear teammates cheering each other on all practice long. My participants have laser focus- almost a palpable nervous energy that keeps them moving.
Everyone is always moving. There is such a sense of urgency. (Parish, Research Practice Journals, 2020)

Players encourage each other and seek feedback throughout the entire practice. There seems to be a very healthy team culture and high levels of coach and player engagement. The most common codes emerging from the softball practice are: communication, encouragement, positivity, enthusiasm, feedback, hustle, discipline and focus. These and others are depicted in Figure 17 with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.

**Figure 17**

*Softball practice codes*

Eleanor: The Firecracker

Eleanor, 20, is a junior marketing management major from Minnesota. She plays for the women’s soccer team at her university, alongside Beatrice. Eleanor has been playing soccer
since she was four or five years old and has dreamed of playing collegiate soccer since she was a young girl. Eleanor did not play much her first year and suffered an injury, but claims that she took that as an opportunity to lead the team off the field while supporting the players who were on the field at that time. According to Eleanor: “That’s just as important as playing 90 minutes and that’s kind of where I’m at now” (Eleanor). Not playing has actually been a very impactful experience for Eleanor:

Not playing has taught me what role to play and how to be a leader regardless of that... I think it is just showing up every day and playing my role the best I could regardless.

Knowing that I probably wasn’t going to get on the field, but making sure the team would get to where we needed to be to win a championship, regardless if it was me scoring the goal, or if I was on the side. (Eleanor)

Eleanor describes herself as being a high-energy player, on the field and off. She sees this as a way to help connect the group of players on the field to the players on the sidelines. As an athlete she values feedback and acknowledgement and seeks opportunities to provide both.

While she acknowledges that coaches have a significant influence on team leadership, she believes it’s up to the team to enact that culture: “Everybody’s kind of got to be in the same boat to move forward. There can’t be a missing puzzle piece to keep moving” (Eleanor).

Eleanor shared an image (Figure 18) of moving boxes for the photo-elicited portion of the interview.
Figure 18

Photo-Elicitation: Eleanor

The image shows nine cardboard boxes of various sizes stacked in sets of two or three, packed with objects seemingly for a move. In the background there are French doors with light streaming through onto the boxes, a few plants, a few prints, and a hardwood floor. Eleanor chose this image not only to represent that she has moved multiple times in her life, but to also highlight the impact moving has had on her life and consequently on her leadership style as a student athlete. Specifically, Eleanor feels this image represents her adaptability and ability to move forward while leading others in addition to her ability to navigate challenging situations out of her control. It also represents: “having the grit to put our heads down and put the work in, regardless of what happened at home... with your roommates, with the coach’s relationship, what’s happening with school... letting that all go and head down, lets work (Eleanor).”

Eleanor defines leadership as:

*bringing people in and setting goals or setting a mindset that we should all have. I think*
sometimes leadership can also be at the front of the line and everyone's behind you and you're kind of leading the way, but I also think that leadership is you behind everyone else, kind of gearing them all together. (Eleanor)

She believes there are different leadership styles needed to lead a team and sees it is a leader’s responsibility to:

- **pick up the pieces and fill in the spots that can't be met for that day...** Some people are the ones who bring the energy, who are loud, who are always talking.... There are the leaders that don't say much, but they put in the work. And it's very visible that they do that. So I think there's different types of leadership on the team, but I think it shouldn't just be the team captain, everybody should take some sort of initiative. (Eleanor)

She emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and humility: “I think you got to kind of know who you are, and know what you are capable of” (Eleanor). Eleanor’s top leadership values and behaviors are: commitment, common purpose, authenticity, ability to assess the environment, and positivity.

When asked what I could expect to see at a team practice, Eleanor quickly replied “I think you’ll definitely hear me” (Eleanor). She also referenced that I would see effort, encouragement, and players leading by example. She was correct. Throughout the entire practice you could hear Eleanor above all other voices. Even in the most mundane of drills when the team was silent and likely still waking up for the 7:00am practice time, Eleanor could be heard bringing her energy to the practice. Her coach pulled me aside at practice and said that they won a championship last year because of Eleanor--not because of her performance on the field, but because of her encouragement and conviction from the sidelines. Eleanor would yell for her
teammates until she was red-faced— not from the exertion of the sport, but from amplifying her voice over a distant train in the background. In my observation notes, I recalled:

'Eleanor’ yelled ‘We need you! We need you! Let's go!’ It wasn't enough for a player to know they were good, but she wanted them to know that they were needed. They played hard. They played tough. And honestly, when the ball went in it seemed effortless. I was energized watching them. ‘Eleanor’ would continue to yell ‘Good work. Good work!’ to players even when they weren't scrimmaging on her side. She was obviously competitive and wanted her side to win, but pointed out the successes of all the players on the field.

(Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020)

This selflessness and communication was evident in the data analysis process. The most frequent observation codes from Eleanor’s practice were: grit, energy, toughness, encouragement, communication, and servant leadership. These and others are depicted in Figure 19 with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.

**Figure 19**

*Women’s Soccer Observation Codes*
Gary: The Encourager

Gary, 22, is a fifth-year senior who grew up in Illinois but later moved to Tennessee. He competes in two field events for his university’s track and field team—shotput and discus. Gary is teammates with Jasmine, who is on the women’s track and field team, and also a participant in this study. Gary began his track and field competition in the sixth grade under his father’s direction as a coach. He grew up playing multiple sports, but narrowed to track and field for college. He is currently pursuing a degree in finance, and identifies as Christian and as male. Gary’s faith is a significant part of his life and underlies much of his perspective on leadership. He describes his collegiate experience as “amazing” and has had an active leadership role within a student athlete organization on campus and at the conference level.

The relational aspect of sport is a priority for Gary. “We just go through the trenches together and that builds friendships and relationships” he said. “I think it’s always better if you have a relationship with somebody so they can see your walk matches your talk” (Gary). He emphasizes that these relationships need to be more than surface level. They need to be intentional. He sees it as his role as a leader on his team to bring together the 100+ team members into one unified team:

You just learn about their life and you actually care about it. Like you keep up with it.
You reach out to them. When they have a bad day, and you come up to them and you're like, ‘Man, I know that's tough. We get a hell a lot of bad days. I'm here for you. I'm thinking about you.’ (Gary)

Gary does not believe that you have to be the best in your sport to be considered as a leader on your team. He recalls “Some of the best athletes I know are some of the worst leaders” (Gary). He also challenges those who are athletically gifted to use that talent to lift others:
If you’re killing it athletically, people are going to look up to you. ‘What do you do? How can I be like you? Come on, bring me alongside you.’ So, I think they (the best athletes) have a lot of potential leadership. I don’t always think that it’s used though. (Gary)

Gary’s photograph that he provided for the photo elicitation portion of the interview is of two soccer players (Figure 20).

**Figure 20**

*Photo Elicitation: Gary*

https://pin.it/2hYaJEb

The image portrays two men in soccer uniforms smiling in a cheerful embrace on a soccer field. They are wearing red and blue uniforms and both have light skin and dark hair. Gary describes them in a “good mood” and says he chose this picture because it represents to him the beauty of a motivational, relational team leader. He suggests that this image could either represent a teammate reaching out to encourage a fellow team member who made an error or that it could represent an image of a teammate scoring a goal and being congratulated. He likens this to his leadership style as he looks for opportunities to celebrate and experience life with his teammates: “If they (teammates) did something great you celebrate with them. You shouldn’t be
jealous because they’re getting some of the spotlight from coaches or from fans… I go celebrate with them… enjoy it with them” (Gary). This image is also significant as it depicts an international soccer superstar who is often known as one of the greatest athletes to play his sport, and is known for his collaborative and team oriented leadership style. While Messi’s sport is not the sport Gary plays, their leadership styles are similar.

Gary also emphasizes the importance of consistency and commitment and giving your all in your sport, even when facing challenges. He refers to this as “grit and grind.”

I think it’s really easy to be a leader when you are doing well, when you have success. It’s really easy to be in a good mood when things are going well. It’s easy to be happy when you are winning… I think the real leaders stand out when they’re facing adversity. I think during adversity is when you get challenged with seeing if you can really walk what you are talking. (Gary)

Gary defines leadership as “somebody who's in the midst of a group who's trying to motivate and attain the group's highest potential” but he also offers:

I think leadership is random. I mean, the first part of the word leadership is leader. And when I think, leader, we think of someone who's in the front. And I think for me, I would think of someone who's in that pack with them. So it's not someone in the back yelling at people what to do, and it's not someone when in front trying to pull people along with them. (Gary)

His top leadership values and behaviors are affirmation, motivation, communication, relationships, and empathy.

When asked what I could expect to observe at a team practice he said I would likely see a lot of yelling and goofing off, a lot of encouragement, and generally speaking—a fun
environment. This was my first track and field practice or event ever, and I was not sure what to expect. The women throwers were already on the field when I arrived. About an hour later, Gary and the other male throwers arrived at the field. The energy immediately changed upon their arrival. Each time an athlete would approach the pitch to throw, Gary could be heard cheering them on “Here you go! Let’s go.” He was also discussing weekend plans with his peers, inviting them over to his house for dinner. This seemed to align with his interview account as being a relational leader. It was clear that the other team members all watched Gary—whether he was throwing, or if he was standing behind the net. He could often be seen walking into the field to retrieve thrown discs, demonstrating both trust that his teammates would not concuss him with a disc, and a selflessness that seemed to underlie his leadership approach. This particular practice also stood out to me in the amount of feedback the athletes would give and willingly receive, and the amount of coach engagement with each individual player:

*There's an emphasis on feedback--both giving and receiving, as well as trust. The athletes would walk out into the middle of the field where the hammer would be thrown and trust that they wouldn't get hit with it. There's a lot of technique in the sport and a growth mindset. Even when an athlete would botch it, they would go back out and know they could do better on the next one.* (Parish, Research Practice Journals, 2020)

The most common observation codes from Gary’s practice include growth mindset, positivity, encouragement, feedback, technique, coaching and strength. These and others are depicted in Figure 21 below, with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.
Jasmine: The Strong One

Jasmine, 22, is a fifth-year senior from Kansas City, Missouri. She started throwing at 13 and is a nationally ranked, record holding track and field member at her university. She is Gary’s teammate and is majoring in exercise science with the hopes of being a physical therapist one day. For Jasmine, sport has been an escape and a way to open doors for a bright future:

*I started to take sports more serious because I figured that this is a way I could get out and get away... I knew that I was already good at it, but I knew that I could be the best... so...I got more into it and spent more time on it and perfected my craft... it actually started to pay off. I was going places I never went. I’m just somebody from Kansas City, Missouri. I never thought I would see the ocean before.* (Jasmine)

Jasmine highlights the strength needed for her sport--both mental and physical strength and also acknowledges that while she is not a vocal leader, she is the type of leader who prefers...
the background but is always there for her teammates when they need her. She also sees her leadership role as helping to serve as an extension of the coach “somebody has to be his eyes or be the voice when he’s not around” (Jasmine).

Jasmine knows that she is looked up to by her teammates and takes that responsibility seriously. While she is unassuming in her leadership, she knows that her athletic talent positions her well for it:

*I would say still now being a record holder, I guess you could say, people tend to look up to you not only because of your success on the track but just how you carry yourself inside and outside of practice.* (Jasmine)

For the photo-elicitation portion of the interview, Jasmine shared an image of two people climbing a mountain (Figure 22).

**Figure 22**

*Photo Elicitation: Jasmine*

https://www.alphagamma.eu/entrepreneurship/3-reasons-helping-people-good-business/
The image shows two silhouettes climbing a peak at sunset. The physical details of the individuals are not visible, but they are climbing a rugged peak with a blue and pink sky and wispy clouds in the background. One person, the person at the top of the summit, is reaching out a hand to help the other to the top. Jasmine chose this image because she feels she is represented by the person at the top of the mountain:

*Personally, for my teammates, if I can reach out and help you or touch you in any type of way that can make you better, it makes me better. I don’t feel like individual success is the be-all of it all. Especially in track and field, you think that it’s an individual event... but in all, it’s really a team sport. I mean, if I’m not doing well, I still want my teammates to do well... because seeing them do good, it still makes me feel good. (Jasmine)*

She emphasizes the mental toughness required in sport and says that leaders need to be able to accept criticism and be open to doing things differently. She also emphasizes the importance of attitude and leading by example. Jasmine defines leadership as “leading by example and being somebody that others can look up to and look to for advice or help... just being the person that can guide others in the right direction” (Jasmine). Jasmine’s top leadership values and behaviors are dedication, determination, resilience, assessing the group, and keeping others in a good head space.

When asked what I could expect to see at a team practice, Jasmine said I would see teammates talking to one another and cheering each other on. She also said I would see her helping teammates get ready to throw, and offering feedback after.

When I arrived at the practice Jasmine and three of her teammates were already on the field. There was no coach present. At the exact scheduled start time of practice Jasmine got up from the bench she had been sitting on and started to do warmups. No one spoke. The other team
members immediately got up and followed her lead. This became a theme throughout the practice. Silently, she worked hard and stayed focused and in her own way, modelled this behavior for the other members of the team. Jasmine is one of the athletes in this study who has been nationally ranked in the top five of her sport, yet she approaches every exercise in practice with humility and a desire to do better. She also knows her teammates are watching her and makes it a point to very subtly encourage them from behind the net, calling each teammate by name.

I was taken aback at Jasmine’s strength. She almost effortlessly threw the hammer over head and yards away and would connect with coach to get feedback on her form, and then line up to do it again. It seemed grueling, but she barely broke a sweat. I noted this strength in my observation journal: “A teammate noticed me watching her (Jasmine). ‘She is a beast’ he said... and truly, she is. She’s one of the strongest women I have ever met” (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020). I was also struck by the focus on feedback and technique:

The coach and athletes talk a lot about their technique. The athletes seem incredibly vulnerable and open and aware and the coach knows how to talk to them about their bodies in a way that doesn’t make them uncomfortable. They all seem focused on improvement and growth. (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

The most common observation codes from Jasmine’s practice include growth mindset, positivity, encouragement, feedback, technique, coaching and strength. These and others are depicted in Figure 23 below, with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.
Jenny: The Quiet One

Jenny, 21, transferred to her university after playing basketball for two years at a junior college. While this is her first year on her university’s women’s basketball team, she is a college senior majoring in math. She is originally from Cameroon and has been playing basketball since she was 16 years old. At 6’3” she currently plays Center alongside teammate Rose, who is also a participant in this study. Jenny acknowledges that her transition to playing sports in the United States has been a challenge, particularly as it relates to juggling your sport, your body, and your studies in addition to staying in touch with friends and family who are far away. Much of her leadership roots back to her family, the influence of her parents, and her experience as a middle child.

Jenny sees herself as a leader who sets the example: “I always worked hard...I’m always like a pusher, trying to work hard so that people can follow me” (Jenny). Her father was a
professional athlete, and served as her example: “He was always the first to be at practice. The last to go. Always working hard...He’d always be the one to tell me to give my best for everything no matter what” (Jenny).

Jenny points to the cultural differences between the United States and her home country referencing that oftentimes she feels as though her team is not as open to hearing other thoughts and opinions, so she finds herself as a quieter leader on her team. She says her teammates are not very focused on collectivism, but instead would prefer to do things on their own. Because of this shift in culture, Jenny finds herself as a less vocal member on her team now than she was back at home, now focusing her energy on her actions instead of on her words. She believes that leadership can come from anywhere on the team, regardless of age or experience level: “I don’t think it depends on whether you’re the oldest or the youngest, as long as you work hard” (Jenny).

Jenny defines leadership as the person who sets example: “the person that shows how it has to be. How you make it. Why if you do it this way it's going to be right” (Jenny). Her top leadership values and behaviors are strategic thinking, resiliency, hard work, empathy, commitment. She declined participation in the photo-elicitation portion of the interview.

When asked what leadership values and behaviors I could expect to see at a team practice, Jenny said I would observe encouragement and hard work. She was right. It was one of the hardest, longest practices I observed. For three straight hours, Jenny gave maximum effort. For every drill the coach called out, Jenny was always one of the first to get to work. She hustled hard and ran fast. She was quiet but determined and very aware of her role and her performance:

*The players had a lot of self-awareness in the role they played on the court, and they owned when they messed up. The coach pushed them the whole time and the players*
responded well to that. The players referred to each other by name. They obviously had a strong culture of trust and communication. They encouraged each other along the way and the coaches affirmed that performance. They were smiling, they were having fun. It was a joyful practice. There was a sense of urgency among the team and a true desire to grow and improve. (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

At the end of the practice, the coaches asked the players to circle up and reflect on their performance throughout practice and pointed out their improvement from the beginning of practice to the end. The most common observation codes from Jenny’s practice include: encouragement, positivity, hustle communication, coaching, and grit. These and others are depicted in Figure 24 below, with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.

**Figure 24**

*Women’s Basketball Observation Codes*
Jordan: The Locker Room Guy

Jordan, 21, was born in Memphis, TN and raised in Miami, FL. He is a shooting guard/small forward, and the occasional point guard for his college basketball team. He started playing basketball at a serious level at the age of 11 which is when he recalls developing a love for the game. Jordan is currently what he refers to as a redshirt sophomore, but is a junior management major at his university. He came to college after winning a high school state championship his junior year and finishing high school at a prep school his senior year. He did not play his freshman year and used that year to get stronger and more prepared for college play.

Jordan identifies as someone who leads by example. He recalls his first year on the team when he assumed the role of a follower, taking cues from the older guys on the team. He sees his role now as “keeping everybody focused on the task ahead,” that task being a championship. Jordan emphasizes the importance of being punctual, giving maximum effort and staying focused:

Our goal is to make it to the tournament and win a national championship. To do those things you have to be the most focused and determined team in the country because they are, some of the other teams, they are working toward that same goal. (Jordan)

Jordan emphasizes the importance of knowing when to speak and knowing when to listen, trust, respect, and responsibility and he sees his role on the team as helping to facilitate each:

In the basketball world... there will be older guys, they’re called ‘locker room guys.’ So they might not be the best player on the team, but their energy is always positive and their energy is always directed towards whatever everyone’s objective is, and they keep everybody inline... You don’t really have to be the best player on a team to do that.
Really, any individual player could do that. It’s just that the leaders are more willing to do it. (Jordan)

Jordan believes that everyone on the team should be a leader and that everyone should play selflessly—for the team and not just for themselves:

You don't care for the others around you if you're selfish, you're only thinking about how you're playing or your goals, and that's not going to help the team win any games. So to be a leader, you have to be unselfish, you have to be willing to support, help, encourage your other teammate. (Jordan)

For the photo-elicitation portion of the interview, Jordan chose two images. The first image is of a team huddle (Figure 25) and the second image is of a player cheering from the sidelines (Figure 26).

Figure 25

Photo-Elicitation: Jordan (1 of 2)

[Image]
In the first image (Figure 25) you can see five basketball players standing together in a huddle with their heads leaning in. It appears that the middle player is talking and the other four players are leaning in to hear him. Their hands are on their hips with the exception of the center player who has a hand on the side of the player to his let. All five men are Black and are wearing white jerseys. Their muscular build is apparent in their uniforms. There is a large crowd in the venue. Jordan says this image represents the importance of communication in leadership:

Our coaches emphasized to us that whenever a play breaks down, just to bring everyone together to make sure that everyone’s staying on the same page. As a leader you have to be able to communicate effectively during those huddles because there’s only a short amount of time. (Jordan)

The image has been edited to remove any identifiable material including facial features, jersey numbers, jersey names or team logos.

**Figure 26**

*Photo-Elicitation: Jordan (2 of 2)*
The second image that Jordan shared (Figure 26) depicts four individuals standing on the sidelines during a basketball game. The player to the far left is standing with arms fully flexed and eyes laser focused on the court. The player to his right, in the blue long-sleeved shirt, is flexing both arms and screaming--mouth open, eyes squeezed shut. His energy is palpable--you can see veins bulging from his neck. The player on the right is facing the court expressionless but seemingly patting his head. The assistant coach on the far right is wearing a suit, screaming and also tapping his head. The head tapping motion represents a player “putting it on his head” often used in basketball to represent a major play, or an act of physical toughness on the court. Behind the bench, you can see hundreds of fans clapping, many of whom are also standing.

Jordan chose this image because it portrays:

*me getting all hyped up on the bench... just showing my unselfishness. I’m always going to be happy for the guy next to me. I’m always going to be happy whenever my teammates succeed, even if I’m on the bench or not playing. So, it’s just showing my support and that a leader should be able to put others before themselves.* (Jordan)

The image has been edited to remove any identifiable material including facial features, jersey numbers, jersey names or team logos.

Jordan defines leadership as:

*the role that other people can look up to and follow... Just like any organization or cause for something positive in society, those leaders are the ones that are able to persuade and convince others to take steps in order to achieve a certain goal that'll benefit us.* (Jordan)

Leadership can be learned from coaches, other players, and through experience, Jordan says, but a team can’t win a championship without it. He emphasizes the mental aspect of the game which he describes as “being able to trust your teammates and being able to effectively communicate
with them about what you see or what’s going on on the court” (Jordan). He also stresses the importance of commitment--“leaders don’t give up” (Jordan). His top leadership values and behaviors include: brotherhood, communication, trust, resilience, common purpose. Specific to resilience, Jordan offered that when times get tough, leaders can’t give up:

*At the end of the day, you can't just stop playing the game, right? Even if you're getting beat or the shots aren't falling or the refs aren't on your side, or whatever it may be, it's a unique situation where you don't have the opportunity to just leave. You've got to keep pushing...You've got to grind through it.* (Jordan)

Jordan also emphasized sacrifice in leadership, and claimed that if you want to win a game sometimes you need to make sacrifices for the betterment of the team:

*Let's say you're the main scorer on the team, but it might not be your night, and one of the other players on the team is hot, probably hit like four or five shots in a row, as a leader, even though the coaches might want to run the offense to you, you can go up to the coach and be like, 'Oh, this guy's hot tonight, I think we have our best shot at winning this game if we go through him.' So just being able to sacrifice your points or your stats just for the better of the team. Only a leader can be able to do that.* (Jordan)

When asked what I may observe at a team practice, Jordan noted that I would see everyone encouraging each other and cheering each other on. He noted that I would likely see players or coaches pulling players to the side to offer one on one feedback as needed, and that I would see teams huddling together to organize their plans before and during team scrimmages:

“You’ll see everyone doing their best at being a leader during our practice... we’ll always have each other’s backs” (Jordan). With that in mind, I was a bit stunned when I walked into a completely silent gym at 7am for Jordan’s practice. The players all seemed to be working
individually--some stretching while others shot foul shots. I soon learned that practice had not yet officially started because one of the team members had overslept, and another teammate had left practice to go pick him up and drive him to the gym. Once the player arrived, the head coach lined the players up on the baseline and led them in a discussion about accountability:

*The men were solemn. Somber. I almost felt like an intruder as he dressed down this young man and reminded him of what it meant to be a men’s basketball player at... It was under no uncertain terms that this young man was to rise to the occasion, or find his way out. After this conversation the mood continued to be one of focus and consternation as men moved through their practice drills with skill and confidence, but without much conversation.* (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

Thirty minutes into the practice, the energy shifted and began to pick up. The tempo increased and the communication, camaraderie, unity, and brotherhood I heard so much about in Jordan’s interview became apparent on the court. I observed the team work together toward a common goal, and I saw strength and toughness on the court. The players obviously enjoyed what they were doing, particularly when the practice shifted from drills to scrimmages. While Jordan did not play the most, he was engaged and an important member of the team. I understand why he was nominated for this study.

*Jordan probably played the least, but his attitude and energy were consistent throughout the entire practice. He was laser focused. His body was always taut, ready for action His eyes were always on the ball. He talked to coaches he talked to players but he never commanded a presence on the floor. It was obvious that the leadership contribution he made was through consistency, communication, cooperation and keeping the train on the*
tracks. He was as he described a ‘locker room guy.’ (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

The most frequent observation codes from this practice include: hustle, communication, energy, unity, strategic, and encouragement. These and others are depicted in Figure 27 below, with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.

**Figure 27**

*Basketball Observation Codes*

Kevin: The Disciplined One

Kevin, 21, is a junior member of the tennis team and he plays alongside Xander, who is also a participant in this study. Originally from the United Kingdom, about 45 minutes outside of London, Kevin has been in the United States for three years now. Kevin is majoring in business
economics and has been playing tennis since he was four years old. Of his experience as a collegiate student athlete Kevin says, “I’ve enjoyed every minute of it” (Kevin).

Kevin describes his leadership style as leading by example which for him means to work hard, show up to practice early, go above and beyond what the coaches are asking of you, stay positive, offer support, and do the right thing ‘and then the players follow suit” (Kevin). On the tennis team, a largely international population, this often means helping new players adjust to attending school in another country--setting up phone contracts, credit cards, etc. For Kevin, his example is both on and off the court.

Kevin credits his coaches for much of his growth as a leader and refers to his head coach as a father figure:

*He is more about developing you as a person, more than just a pure tennis player, so in the long run you kind of end up learning a lot more life skills and all those things then the tennis side actually comes with that because you grow up and you become more mature.*

( Kevin)

He also points to the stress and pressure college athletes manage and the mental toughness needed to navigate those challenges.

For the photo-elicited portion of the interview Kevin provided an image of a young man playing tennis (Figure 28).
Figure 28

Photo-elicitation: Kevin

In the image there is a young man in blue t-shirt and grey shorts, blue shoes swinging at a tennis ball suspended in the air. There is another player on the blue and green court, but on the opposite end. Faces of both of the depicted have been obscured to protect their anonymity. The sky is cloudy and grey. There appear to be other tennis courts nearby.

The picture is from a summer program that Kevin volunteers with back home. It is a tennis program for boys ages 12 and under who were the best in the state. He chose this image because he participated in the program himself as a young boy, starting at the age of eight. He supports the program now as a way to give back and pass on the knowledge he has gained over the years to younger players who were in the position he was once in. However, he does acknowledge that in the college environment he has “never been a huge believer that age should
Kevin defines leadership as someone who leads by example:

*just being like a good person, helpful with what you need or talkative, asking you about things, asking how you are. Just kind of being what you would describe someone as who you would get along with well... so they’re always looking out for other people not just themselves.*

Kevin’s top leadership values and behaviors include hard work, positivity, brotherhood, empathy, and trust. Kevin suggests that “*if leadership is done in the right way then it can really help the team succeed*” but he also acknowledges that leadership is not always up to one person: “Like if we were to lose, it’s not because of the captain or the leader, because there’s six guys on the court playing all worth a point”.

When asked what I could expect to observe at a team practice, Kevin indicated I would hear the players encouraging each other and see players taking the lead on various aspects of practice. When I arrived at the team practice, I learned it was one of their last practices of the semester. The focus of the practice was on partnership, which I found interesting as it helped me to understand tennis as more of a team sport, and as less of an individual sport. The team had a visiting coach who gave a bit of a pep-talk at the beginning of the practice, sharing that the goal for the day is to build upon a partnership. That helped to set the tone for the team. There was a lot of attention paid to rhythm, momentum, breathing, and focus. The players emphasized consistency and technique and despite their focus, they also modeled the encouragement Kevin indicated I would see:
There was a lot of positivity. It was the most positive practice I had seen up to this point. There was a lot of ownership and self-awareness on behalf of the players who would frequently call out ‘my bad, my bad’ when they missed a serve or ‘sorry, sorry.’ (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

They were practicing a new racquet swing at practice, one that some of the players struggled with, but Kevin quickly got into a rhythm and maintained high energy and positivity that the other players soon modeled. I was surprised at Kevin’s stature--he seemed much larger and stronger than most of his teammates and his strength was apparent in his dangerous swing. His athleticism was evident. At various intervals the players would stop for a break and review recorded games on a laptop and discuss technique with the visiting coach. All the while, they seemed completely at ease with one another and with the coach. I later learned that most of them also live together in addition to playing and practicing together, which made Kevin’s use of the word “family” to describe his team culture seem all the more accurate. For the entirety of practice, the players, including Kevin, opposed their own team members one on one and yet they still wanted their opponent to succeed:

There is a spirit of selflessness on this team. Even though they are competing against each other, just like they do actually compete against each other for playing time, they're open to telling their opponent when they do well, even if it's to their own demise. The players on this particular team and in this particular setting manage to balance focus and discipline with enthusiasm and joy (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

The most frequent interview codes gathered from the tennis practice observation include self-awareness, encouragement, positivity, coaching, strategy, joy, and feedback. These and
others are depicted in Figure 29 below, with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.

**Figure 29**

*Tennis Observation Practice Codes*

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**Maddy: The Relentless One**

Maddy, 21, is from a small town in Tennessee. She plays center field for her university’s softball team alongside Carter, who is also a participant in this study. Maddy has been playing softball since she was seven, and prior to joining her collegiate team she played for a travel softball team near her hometown where she travelled all over the country starting at the age of nine. She also played for her high school team, which she described as less competitive. She is a senior business management major, a major her coach helped her decide on. She describes herself as a “slapper,” or someone who hits on the left side. She sees herself as bringing a relentless
energy to the team: “being in the game, making sure everyone is bought into the game, is like my job” (Maddy).

Maddy described her freshman year as a challenging transition between navigating homesickness, adjusting to college coursework, acclimating to a new softball program, and revisiting her fundamentals and mechanics as an athlete. For Maddy, the seniors made all the difference. The took her “under their wings” and helped her navigate the newness. She knew it was time to really focus after her first semester: “If I was going to play, I had to step up. Regardless of if I’m a freshman, regardless if I’ve never played in a (redacted University name) uniform, I knew I had to step up” (Maddy).

Maddy paid it forward and in turn mentored the freshmen who came in behind her. She focused on getting them “dialed into” the culture and the goals of the team. Then, the season was cancelled due to COVID. This was a disappointment for Maddy as she thought their chances of winning the conference were very good--not because of their skill on the field, but “because everyone was so bought in and so gelled together” (Maddy).

Maddy defines leadership as:

someone who is strong-willed. They can take criticism just as they can give it out, but also someone who, every day, brings the best they have to the table. Regardless of what they're going through at home or in their minds, they're going to bring the best they have for everyone around them. (Maddy)

Maddy reflected on pivotal leadership moments she experienced in her sport and recounted an away-game in which she performed poorly on the field, but a little girl at a gas station wanted to meet her, claiming that Maddy was her favorite player:
I didn’t know what to say… I didn’t get on base one time the game she was watching…
but the fact that she said I’m her favorite player, it goes beyond just how I perform in the
game. It’s how I walked back in the dugout when I struck out. She’s always watching.
And not just a little girl, people. Everyone is watching. Whether you’re succeeding or
you’re failing- they’re always watching. And I think that stuck with me… I don’t care if I
strike out... I have to be a leader regardless. (Maddy)

That encounter has stuck with Maddy and has shaped her outlook ever since. She plays
selflessly, and strives to be a leader who generates positivity and sets clear standards and a solid
culture for her team. Maddy values and strives to model her authenticity: “One of my core values
that I stick to is authenticity. It doesn’t matter what role I am on the team or what I’m doing, I’m
always going to be myself” (Maddy).

Maddy sees her experience as a leader on her team as more than just winning: “It’s more
than just a game. It’s about what we believe.” She recalls an experience with a teammate who
was not eligible to practice or play, but who showed up at every game to cheer the team on from
the sidelines. This, according to Maddy, is proof that you don’t have to have a title or playing
time to be a leader. She also says that grit is important in sport:

   It doesn’t matter if you get benched because you are playing bad, or if you’re ‘0 for
   three’ in a ball game or have five errors on defense, regardless, you can’t shut down...
you have eight other people beside you on the field, eight other people counting on you,
and a dugout full of people watching you wishing they could be in your position... you
can fail 99 times but the next time you’re up, you still have to have the same composure,
the same poker face, and the same energy you have if you succeeded 99 times. (Maddy)
For the photo-elicited portion of the interview, Maddy provided a picture of a skyline (Figure 30).

**Figure 30**

*Photo-Elicitation: Maddy*


The image has a city skyline with building heights of various sizes, shining in what appears to be a setting sun against a darkening sky. The buildings vary in height and stature. The city is not identified but it is set against a body of water. Maddy says she chose this image because the differing building heights represent the ups and downs of her leadership, but like the buildings, she is still standing tall. Maddy points out that one may see the “up and down” of the buildings from this perspective of the skyline from the image provided, but if one were to take an aerial view they would not see the height differentiation, or “ups and downs.” From that angle the buildings would seem straight and even, the way she hopes that others see her leadership. For Maddy, regardless of the ups and downs “*It doesn’t matter what happens. If that’s my team, if I say I’m a leader, it’s on me always.*” (Maddy).
Maddy cautions that without a leader, a team will be out of alignment and acknowledges that she is not the only leader on her team. She says everyone on her team leads in their own ways and “it really takes an entire team to win. It can’t just be one person. That goes for any sport” (Maddy). For Maddy, sometimes that leadership comes in the form of selflessness and sacrifice:

I could care less who gets the credit for getting a walkup hit. That’s great. You came in clutch in the moment, but your pitcher had your back for those seven innings. Your defense had your back for those seven innings. The person who got on base before you that you hit in had your back. So, I think leadership is great on the field, and of course off the field, but in the moment of success if you look for credit, that’s pointless. That’s a waste of time. (Maddy)

Maddy also acknowledges that leaders have to make difficult decisions for the teams, but that role is not specific to athletic ability or class standing. Maddy sees no correlation between class standing and leadership and says, “you could play zero games your four years here and still be a leader” (Maddy). She acknowledges a strong leadership culture on her team that starts with the coaches and manifests in robust one-on-one coaching conversations and team development exercises like values clarification simulations and common reads using leadership texts. Maddy’s top leadership values and behaviors are integrity, passion, dedication, developing relationships, and self-control.

When asked what I could expect to observe at a practice, Maddy quickly said I would see players leading by example or going out of their way to help a teammate. She said I would see focus, buy in, and communication. She said I would see her getting the job done while cheering
others on. These were all accurate predictions. When I arrived at practice all of the players were on the field, including Maddy. Music was blaring and the sun was beaming down.

The women seemed comfortable with each other and with their coach. Maddy was always talking to a coach or a teammate, calling out to players across the field and cheering them on even while practicing a different drill. The women were focused on their technique and skill, often approaching the coach for feedback and moving effortlessly and with a comfortable grace. No one walks to a base, or walks to the dugout--the women always moved swiftly--either jogging or trotting. They were laser focused and hyper aware of their surroundings, yelling “Ball!” a few times as a pop fly headed my way. They took ownership of their repetitions, their mistakes, and kept their own stats for the practice. The women are tough and their black practice uniforms were quickly covered in red dust from the field as they dove, slid, and dug in:

The players are not afraid to lean into the ball or dive for a base and they hustle the entire practice. They seem to have a true sense of joy in playing softball and there is a genuine air of positivity and enthusiasm among the players. ‘Carter’ and ‘Maddy’ are very self-aware and collaborative but also maintain discipline and grit throughout the practice. If they fall down or miss a ball, the get right up and try again. (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

The most common codes that emerged from the softball practice are: communication, encouragement, positivity, feedback, focus, and hustle. These and others are depicted in Figure 31 below, with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.
Rose: The Floor Marshall

Rose, 18, is a sophomore point guard on the women’s basketball team and plays alongside Jenny who is also a participant in this study. Rose started playing basketball at ten years old and grew up in a small town in Canada. She played for the Canadian national team and her goal growing up was always to receive a Division 1 scholarship to play for a United States University.

Rose compares her role on her team to that of a quarterback on a football team. She says that the ball is literally and figuratively in her hands, and the team is trusting her to make decisions and do what needs to be done:

*You need to have a really deep understanding of the game. You obviously have a connection with the coach because everything kind of gets filtered through you, so you need to have communication on both ends.* (Rose)
Rose describes herself as quiet and reserved but also as someone who works hard and does the right thing. She says she is a leader who leads herself and who leads others by example. For Rose, leading by example means showing up to practice early, getting extra reps at practice, and earning her teammates’ respect. She places a high value on the connections she has fostered with her teammates and on role modeling and mentorship in sport. She also emphasizes confidence:

*We have a bunch of different people on the team and I would say that they all do lead in some type of way. I think that kind of comes back to the confidence thing. Whenever you’re confident, you’re going to be able to put yourself on the line more. People are going to look up to you in that role.* (Rose)

Grit and resilience are major factors in Rose’s leadership, “especially once we start losing, once we start having bodies drop out” or even when just having a bad practice, she says (Rose). The ability to lead through those challenging times rests with every player, according to Rose. There is no hierarchy based on age or class standing, although she acknowledges that confidence can grow with experience.

For the photo-elicited portion of the interview Rose provided an image that reads “perspective” (Figure 32).
Participant provided photograph.

The image has a white background and centered the word perspective is written vertically, with the letters pointing in different directions. Rose said she chose this image to reflect her leadership journey as it represents the importance that perspective has played in her leadership and in her experiences growing up. She said this image represents that she does not need to agree with what others do, but that she does try to understand or see things from their perspective. This, she suggests, is an important part of being able to understand, accept, and move forward.

Rose defines leadership as “someone you would follow who you are going to look up to” and also says that a leader is someone who is comfortable “putting the team on their back”
(Rose). Rose says that leaders aren’t perfect but they demand the best out of their team and bring out their team’s best performance. Her top leadership values and behaviors are grit, decisiveness, confidence, empathy and communication.

When I asked Rose what to expect from a team practice, she said I would observe everyone talking, high energy, encouragement both verbally and through “touches” commonly found in high fives, fist pumps, or taps on the back. She also said I would see her having conversations with players on the side reiterating what coach wants the players to focus on. At her practice, what stood out to me the most was the fact that Rose was always the first to do anything. She was the first athlete to start a set, the first down the court, the first to cheer on her teammates. She was often the player used by the coach as the example of how to run a play. She was clearly a coach on the court, a floor marshal. The players looked to her even when playing on the opposing scrimmage team. She gave a lot of high fives and “touches” to other players to offer her encouragement, and she hustled until she was red-faced and exhausted.

She was often the most skilled player on the court. Even when it wasn’t her turn to play she was guiding other players. At times, she was even telling defenders on the opposing team where to set up their defense against the offense she was going to run... even though it was to her detriment since doing so would keep her team from scoring. She hustled hard and ran fast. (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

At the end of the practice, the coach asked the players to huddle and reflect on their performance throughout practice and pointed out their improvement from the beginning of practice to the end. Each player had an opportunity to voice something they thought the team did well, which was a unique way to end a practice. The coach also pointed out the team’s hustle and grit, saying that some of the women were playing through illness. The most common observation
codes from Rose’s practice include: encouragement, positivity, hustle, communication, coaching, and grit. These and others are depicted in Figure 33 below, with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.

**Figure 33**

*Women’s Basketball Observation Codes*

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**Xander: The Positive One**

Xander, 20, is a senior finance major from Melbourne, Australia and a member of the men’s tennis team alongside, Kevin, another participant in this study. One of five siblings, Xander started playing tennis at the age of five. He redshirted his first year at his university and in his first season of competition for his university he did not play as much as he hoped. He
refers to this as a good learning experience that led to a different strategy for the following season, half of which was cancelled due to COVID.

He describes himself as a hard-worker and as someone who leads his teammates by example. For Xander, leading by example means to work hard and do the extra things on and off the court--giving 100% at practice, participating in extra training sessions, eating well, preparing for practice, and getting a good night’s sleep.

Xander participated in a tennis club as a young child and encountered a young coach who he trained with in his early years of play. This coach made a significant impact on Xander because of his dedication, positivity, and belief which Xander tries to model now:

I’ve always been someone to try and lead by example rather than to boss people around or be really verbal. I definitely do obviously speak when I need to. More so than bossing people around I’ll try and work hard and lead by example and if you are in the position to lead people will be watching and will get on board with that. (Xander)

For the photo-elicited portion of the interview, Xander chose a picture of a leadership program to describe his leadership journey (Figure 34).

**Figure 34**

*Photo Elicitation: Xander*

*Participant provided photograph.*
The image depicts approximately 100 people sitting in an event space at round tables of eight. The tables all have paper on them the participants seem to have a white bag sitting next to their chairs. There is a man in a blue polo shirt walking around the room, seemingly facilitating the event. Xander describes this picture as being from a leadership program he participated in within his college. He chose the picture because he felt it represented his leadership through the experience and knowledge he has gained over the years. Through this particular program Xander was assigned a mentor. He felt the mentorship aspect of the program was a good representation of the importance of building relationships and being able to communicate with people of different backgrounds within his sport. Specifically Xander highlights the diversity of his tennis team and there various countries of origin:

*I wouldn’t have ever come in contact with these guys if it wasn’t through college tennis. It really does bring people in from really different backgrounds... I find it’s not too difficult to connect with them because we are all quite similar and different, but we do have tennis in common.* (Xander)

Xander defines leadership as “*being in a position where you can influence people, hopefully positively. In general, to positively influence people*” (Xander). His top leadership values and behaviors are: work ethic, inspiring, positivity, resilience, bringing people together. He suggests that leadership is important in sport because “*it’s not going to work if everyone’s doing their own thing. You have to come together as a team and generally you need someone to lead you to do that*” (Xander). Xander thinks this leadership can come from anywhere on the team:

*The seniors are really looked at as leaders, but I still think younger people can be. Particularly in leading by example and stuff. Like, if someone comes in and is working*
really, really hard, the nature of a team, you don’t really want your spot taken away so if someone’s working really hard, you’re thinking ‘I don’t want to get behind here so I’m going to work just as hard if not harder.’ So, I think a younger person still can lead.

(Xander)

Xander describes his team culture as very close and that his team would define a leader as someone who is a motivation as well as an example. Xander also emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and authenticity in sport “If you are being yourself on the court, I think you’ll play better. If you’re trying to be someone else while trying to play your best tennis, I don’t think that’s going to help you.” (Xander). When I asked Xander what I could expect to see at a team practice he said I would see players working hard, motivating each other, and shouting ‘Lets Go Tigers’ and “Go Boys!” That encouragement was evident throughout the entire practice I observed, even with a few “That’s good tennis!” thrown in for good measure.

When I arrived at the team practice, I learned it was one of their last practices of the semester. NCAA practices would end, but the coach shared with me that the men would still practice on their own, informally, in the off-season as a way to stay sharp. The focus of the practice was on partnership, and the team had a visiting coach who gave a bit of a pep-talk at the beginning of the practice, sharing that the goal for the day is to build upon a partnership in preparation for doubles play. The two participants in this study from the tennis team, Xander and Kevin, happened to be paired together.

There was a lot of attention paid to rhythm, momentum, breathing, and focus with audible grunts at every swing. The players emphasized consistency and technique and despite their focus they still found time to connect with one another and with their coach. Xander looked happy, joyful even, throughout the entire practice. While he remained attentive to the task at
hand and never wavered, he did so with a smile on his face--I described Xander in my research observation journal as “less assuming, but always smiling and seemed to be having the time of his life just playing tennis with his pals.” At various intervals the players would stop for a break and review recorded games on a laptop and discuss technique with the visiting coach. All the while, they seemed completely at ease with one another and with the coach. As I shared previously, I later learned that most of them also live together in addition to playing and practicing together, including my two tennis participants who happened to also be roommates.

I left this practice with an appreciation and a reminder of the joy that can be found in sport. Oftentimes this joy can get overlooked in the hustle and bustle of collegiate athletics, but it shined true in its purest form in this practice--a place where, if I am being honest, I was least expecting to find it. As I noted in my journals, “This is a high functioning team, built on trust and belief, honesty, ownership focus and discipline, but the under rooting foundational principle seems to be joy for their craft” (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020).

The most frequent codes gathered from the tennis practice observation include self-awareness, encouragement, positivity, coaching, strategy, joy, and feedback. These and others are depicted in Figure 35 below, with the most common codes appearing as the largest in the word cloud and subsequently less frequent codes demonstrated in smaller font.
Figure 35

*Tennis Observation Practice Codes*
Table 10

**Most Important Leadership Values and Behaviors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Values and Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice</td>
<td>communication, resilience, role modeling, encouraging and inspiring others, managing conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>attitude, loyalty, strategic, accountable, confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>communication, self-awareness, building relationships, resilience, integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>commitment, common purpose, authenticity, assessing the environment, positivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>affirmation, motivation, communication, relationships, empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>dedication, determination, resilience, assessing the group, keeping others in a good head space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>strategic thinking, resiliency, hard work, empathy, commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>brotherhood, communication, trust, resilience, common purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>hard work, positivity, brotherhood, empathy, trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maddy</td>
<td>integrity, passion, dedication, developing relationships, self-control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>grit, decisiveness, confidence, empathy, communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xander</td>
<td>work ethic, inspiring, positivity, resilience, bringing people together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings**

The findings of this study illuminate that collegiate student athletes do not experience leadership in staged, scaffolded ways. Their leadership experiences do not align with current models of leadership that are staged and scaffolded (Komives et al., 2005); instead, they experience leadership through a specific set of leadership values and behaviors that are uniquely and collectively cultivated in the context of sport. Additionally, this study found that the common leadership values of collegiate athletes are self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment, growth mindset and competitive purpose. These are practiced through the
leadership behaviors of student athlete integrity, modeling, influence, communication, trust, unity, sacrifice, resilience, work ethic, and discipline.

These findings were constructed from the robust data analysis of interview data, photo elicitation data, and practice observation data, outlined in Chapter 3. The themes and subthemes that emerged from this research are outlined below and answer the research questions: “What are the staged, scaffolded leadership identity development experiences of collegiate student athletes?” And, “What are the common leadership values and behaviors of collegiate student athletes and how are they practiced?”

**Staged, Scaffolded Leadership Experiences**

This study found that as it relates to student athlete leadership identity development, there is no common sequencing, staging or scaffolding of how these leadership experiences unfold. This specifically addresses the research question: “What are the staged, scaffolded leadership identity development experiences of collegiate student athletes?” In short, there are none, and existing models, like the LID Model, that represent sequential leadership stages and experiences of collegiate students are not a good fit for the experiences of student athlete leaders. Each of the participants in this study identified moments of leadership growth which they would attribute to specific experiences in their sport. These experiences ranged from playing for national teams, to being mentored by a coach or older player, to parental influences within their sport, to being a part of a high functioning and sometimes low functioning team, however, these moments did not occur in a linear way. Rather, their unique leadership experiences in sport cultivated an appreciation for specific leadership values and behaviors including self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment, competitive purpose, and growth mindset. These are shared in greater detail in the next section.
Using the Leadership Identity Development Model (LID) as part of my theoretical framework for the intensive interviews conducted as part of this study, participants were asked to reflect upon the specific times, ages, and experiences in which they actualized each phase of the LID model. As part of this process, the participants consistently illuminated that they had experienced most of the LID Model stages prior to college. In fact, out of 72 potential stages that could be experienced in college, via a Leadership Identity Development Model predicated upon the collegiate leadership experience, only 14 unique stages were experienced in college across the 12 participants. Every participant agreed to having already experienced every stage at some point, mostly prior to college, and many participants experienced the stages out of order. This is demonstrated in Table 11 and detailed in the section that follows.

**Table 11**

*Leadership Identity Development Stages and Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LID Stage</th>
<th>Beatrice</th>
<th>Blake</th>
<th>Carter</th>
<th>Eleanor</th>
<th>Gary</th>
<th>Jasmine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration/Engagement</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Identified</td>
<td>Pre School</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Differentiated</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generativity</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration/Synthesis</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LID Stage</th>
<th>Jenny</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Kevin</th>
<th>Maddy</th>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Xander</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration/Engagement</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Identified</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Differentiated</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generativity</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>elementary school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration/Synthesis</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>high school</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>middle school</td>
<td>college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specifically, Beatrice experienced LID stages 1-3, non-sequentially, and in preschool and elementary school. She began her sport at the age of three. She references experiencing Stage 1: Awareness and Stage 3: Leader Identified in relation to the roles her parents played in her life. She experienced Stage 2: Exploration and Engagement in the context of her sport, but at a young age; whereas Stages 4-6 were also experienced in the context of her sport, but in high school.
(stage 4), middle school (Stage 5) and her freshman year of college (Stage 6), again—
nonsequential. Only one of Beatrice’s LID stages was experienced during college.

Blake experienced all of his LID stages in a nonsequential way, starting first with Stages 1 and 3 in little league, Stage 2 in Middle School, and Stage 4 in college. Blake experienced Stage 5 in Middle School and Stage 6 in High School. Only one of Blake’s 6 LID stages was actualized in college. Blake began playing competitive sports at the age of four, in little league.

Carter experienced all six of the LID stages sequentially and prior to college. She began playing her sport at the age of seven. She recalls experiencing the first two stages, awareness and exploration, when she was eight years old. She experienced Stage 3 in middle school, and the remaining three stages in high school, all prior to coming to college.

Eleanor started playing her sport at the age of four and experienced the first five stages of the LID Model sequentially in high school, with the sixth stage: Integration and Synthesis occurring in the transition between high school and college.

Gary started playing his sport at the age of nine under the coaching of his father. He experienced LID Stages 1 and 3 during Middle School and identifies his father as being part of those experiences. He experienced Stage 2 in High School, Stage 4 his freshman year of college, Stage 5 his senior year of high school, and Stage 6 his junior year of college. He did not experience these leadership stages in a sequential way.

Jasmine started playing her sport at the age of 13. She experienced the first two LID stages around that time, in Middle School. She experienced Stages 3 and 5 in High School and Stages 4 and 6 in college. She did not experience these leadership stages sequentially.

Jenny started playing her sport at the age of 16 and was the latest “starter” of a sport in this study. She experienced LID Stages 1, 3, and 4 while playing on her Junior College team before
transferring to her current university. She experienced LID Stage 2 in high school while serving as her team captain, and she experienced LID Stages 5 and 6 when she first started playing basketball at the age of 16. All of Jenny’s stages were experienced through the context of sport, but non-sequentially.

Jordan started playing his sport at the age of 11. He experienced the first two LID stages in elementary school – Stage 1 as a “follow the leader” exercise and Stage 2 in deciding he wanted to play basketball. He experienced Stage 3 in middle school in observing his parents’ leadership. He experienced Stages 4 and 6 in high school and Stage 5 at the age of 11 when he started to competitively play his sport. Jordan’s experiences were not sequential, but many involved the context of sport.

Kevin started playing his sport at the age of four. He experienced Stages 1 and 3 in elementary school, Stages 2 and 5 in High School and Stages 4 and 6 in college, completely non-sequentially but all in the context of sport -- through coaches, captains, or teammates.

Maddy started playing her sport at the age of nine. She experienced Stages 1-3 in Middle School, Stages 4 and 6 in her freshman year of college, and Stage 5 in high school. Her first recollection of experiencing meaningful leadership was with a middle school coach who approached her in the sixth grade and took her under her wing. Maddy later went on to play for that coach’s alma mater.

Rose started playing her sport at the age of ten. Her LID experiences were not sequential, but all revolved around sport. She experienced LID Stage 1 while watching the WNBA. She experienced Stages 2 and 3 in high school, and Stages 4-6 in middle school, all during her 8th grade year. This was the year Rose started playing for her Provincial team- a time when she met
a leader who made a significant impact on her, and she started to cultivate her own work ethic, ability to model leadership for others, and her own leadership style.

Xander started playing his sport at the age of five. He experienced LID Stages 1-5 at the ages of 11 and 12. These stages were formatively shaped by a role model who greatly influenced Xander’s leadership and sport experiences, and his own experience in serving as a team captain at the age of 12. Xander experienced Stage 6 when he first came to college. Xander’s leadership staging was largely sequential and all in the context of his sport.

While the LID model is often applied as a grounded theory to describe the staged leadership experiences of collegiate students, it does not accurately describe the leadership experiences of collegiate student athletes. By virtue of their many years spent in competitive team sports with positional leaders like coaches and captains, the stages of the LID model were moved through, in many cases, at a very young age by the participants in this study. When reflecting upon these staged experiences, many participants recalled memories at four or five years old, within their first sport teams or within their homes. For example, Jordan reflects on the first time he experienced LID Stage 1, Awareness:

*I think in elementary school, just starting off going to school, and teachers, when they have everyone line up to go out the class, maybe go to lunch or something, and they'll be like, 'Follow the leader,' and the person in front is the leader, and they're just helping everyone get to the right destination. That was just like the basic, growing up as a child, that they instill in you for the rest of your life that... you trust that person enough to do the right thing.*

(Jordan)

All of the participants in the study had expressed having already experienced all six of the LID stages: Awareness, Exploration/Engagement, Leader Identified, Leadership Differentiated,
Generativity, and Integration/Synthesis -- leaving no room for them to further develop within the context of this particular model. Even within the sixth and final stage, integration and synthesis, only seven participants in this study experienced this stage as late as college. One of these participants exemplified the integration and synthesis stage as she described applying her leadership from college to her post-collegiate experiences:

*It's more than just playing. It's more than just winning. It's values and culture and just stepping up because softball's four to five years, I guess, but after that what are you going to get out of softball to carry on into the real world? That's what I've had to realize this year too, is after this year, there's no more softball and I'm going to have a real job. And yeah, it scares me because I don't know what I'm going to do, but the stuff I've learned and the leadership skills that I've learned through softball I know are going to help me.* (Maddy)

Relevant to this study is the fact that while these stages were experienced many times prior to college, most of these stages were experienced within their sport, not necessarily in order, and often with the influence of an older figure in their lives including coaches, teammates, sibling, and parents as shared in the accounts above. As most of the participants acknowledged, and as the previous sections demonstrate, these were not linear experiences. Instead, the participants in this study illuminated that their leadership development was more foundationally based upon the leadership values they cultivated through leadership learning in sport. These values and behaviors, the participants shared, are learned through interactions and experiences with family, teammates, and coaches and are the foundational elements of their leadership as a student athlete. These values and behaviors are detailed as themes in the sections that follow and include the leadership values of self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment,
competitive purpose, and growth mindset; and, the leadership behaviors of integrity, modeling, influence, communication, trust, unity, sacrifice, resilience, work ethic, and discipline.

Specific to the third LID Stage: Leader Identified, this study also found that while athletic skill is certainly valued in collegiate athletics, it is not a guarantee that the most skilled athlete is also the most skilled, or identified leader: “There's no hierarchy...even if you're good. Even if you're not good...nobody's better than anyone. We're equal. Once you step on the field, once you step off... We're all one” (Beatrice). In fact, participants emphasized that leadership should be everyone’s business, and not only a coach or a captain’s job: “Good teams, coaches lead. Great teams, players lead. We say it all the time” (Blake). Participants often shared that leadership can be hard during freshman year with all of the other transitional challenges facing a student athlete, but also acknowledged that student athlete leadership was not specific to upper-classmen, captains, or coaches. Leadership can happen anywhere on a team and at any class standing, on the bench, or on the field, injured or well:

Like our coach has always said, on the greatest teams, everyone is a leader. It's not just one leader. You might have a captain or co-captain, but everyone on the team is a leader, and that's what makes them a team. So leadership shouldn't have to depend on age. (Jordan)

Additionally this study found that student athlete leadership is experienced both as a position (Stage 1: Awareness) and as a process (Stage 4: Leadership Differentiated) and that these experiences can happen simultaneously, and not only in an early leadership learning stage that over time shifts to a more developed understanding. Student athlete leaders do not believe that leadership exists only among captains, coaches, or more seasoned teammates but they do describe leadership as both an individual (positional) and a team (process) experience. When

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asked to describe leadership, most student athlete leaders in this study described traits of leaders and not acts of leadership. This is demonstrated in the participant leadership values and behaviors section presented earlier within this chapter. However, the same participants acknowledge that leadership and leaders can exist and occur anywhere on a team, and that on the best teams leadership is shared among all team members.

This study also found in relation to the Awareness stage, that student athlete leadership is not dependent upon playing time or athletic skill, however, it is of note that all of this study’s participants are skilled enough to play for a Division 1 NCAA team, so the bar of athletic skill is already set fairly high at this level of competition. However, the participants in this study claimed that their team’s best players are not always their teams best leaders, or those with the most minutes clocked but that the true leaders on their teams are instead, those who commit to living and leading according to their values and the shared values of their team. These most commonly shared leadership values are expanded upon in the section that follows.

**Leadership Values and Behaviors of Student Athletes**

This study found that there are specific leadership values and behaviors that are foundational to the leadership development experiences of collegiate student athletes. These values and behaviors emerged from the five overarching themes and ten subthemes that were constructed from the data analysis. While some of these themes are not unusual in the context of leader or leadership development, they do represent a unique collection of leadership values and behaviors that more specifically define and describe the unique leadership experiences of collegiate student athletes. Furthermore, these themes are not collectively housed within an existing student leadership identity development model. The five themes are 1) self-awareness: the ability to know and lead yourself exceptionally well; 2) meaningful relationships: the ability to cultivate
and sustain meaningful, transformational relationships with teammates and coaches; 3) selfless commitment: the ability to remain resilient and selfless in your commitment to your sport; 4) growth mindset: one’s ability to give and receive feedback and to strive to learn, grow, and evolve as an athlete and as a leader; and, lastly, 5) competitive purpose: the shared purpose of student athlete leaders to perform at their personal and team best with the goal of shared success, often framed as winning. While competition and purpose may be featured separately in some models (Cilente, 2009; George and Sims, 2007; Rath, 2009), the joining of the two adeptly describes a common experience among student athlete leaders who share a competitive purpose. This theme in particular is unique as it relates to student athlete leadership identity development as a foundational element within sport itself. As one of the study participants plainly stated: “We will have like a common goal. We all want to compete and win… no one wants to lose, do they?” (Kevin).

The sub-themes that correlate with the overarching themes of this study include integrity, modeling, communication, influence, trust, unity, sacrifice, resilience, work ethic, and discipline. In the sections that follow, each theme and associated subthemes are further described as specific leadership values and behaviors using details from participant interviews, photo elicitation, and practice observations.

Less relevant but notable findings related to COVID-19 and leadership challenges are also included below. While these do not necessarily contribute to the proposed model in Chapter 5, they are still findings worthy of consideration for future research and practice.
Self-awareness

*I feel like sport actually has a way of bringing the best out of people, or letting them express themselves in many different ways…. a lot of people use sport as a way to show others a side that they can be, but they don't know how to bring it out.* (Blake)

Self-awareness refers to the ability to know and lead yourself exceptionally well. Each participant in this study was able to share their own leadership style, leadership strengths, leadership values, and leadership contributions to their teams as described above in the section titled Participant Leadership Values, Behaviors, and Experiences. They know their own definition of leadership and are aware of how that definition impacts their experiences in sport. Some of the categories that coalesced to generate this leadership value and its embedded leadership behaviors include vulnerability, confidence, self-esteem, consciousness of self, authenticity, consistency, congruence, integrity, emotional awareness, communication, listening, encouragement, affirmation, giving and receiving feedback, motivation, leading by example, initiative, influence, support, energy, joy, charisma, presence, inspiration, engagement, passion, enthusiasm and optimism. These categories emerged from analyzing interview, photo elicitation, and observation data.

In summary, self aware student athlete leaders know their strengths and areas of opportunity, use their authentic voice to show up consistently and confidently in all they do, act with integrity and in congruence with their individual and team values, provide clear and authentic communication, encouragement, and feedback, and serve as a role model or “lead by example” by offering motivation, support, influence and inspiration to teammates and community members. According to Eleanor, to be a student athlete leader “I think you got to kind
of know who you are and know what you are capable of.” Self-awareness is to know yourself, manage yourself, and lead yourself in a way that positively inspires, influences, and impacts others. The leadership behaviors associated with self-awareness: integrity, modeling, influence, and communication, are described below and provide rich descriptions of the leadership behaviors demonstrated by self aware student athlete leaders. Each of these leadership behaviors were constructed as unique categories through the data analysis process and were reconstructed as part of the overarching leadership value of self-awareness because of their specific connection to the concept of knowing and leading one’s self exceptionally well. These behaviors are demonstrated and exhibited by self aware leaders through their individual actions.

**Integrity.** Participants indicated a need for student athlete leaders to “walk their talk” and put plainly, to do what they say they will do. Integrity also represents a student athlete leader’s ability to lead themselves honestly and authentically even when no one is watching, which the participants in this study indicated is oftentimes where leadership happens off of the court, field, or pitch. It is one’s commitment to being congruent and consistent and accountable to themselves and to their team. It is the ability to always strive to do what is honest, just, and true and to uphold one’s personal values despite pressures from coaches, teammates, or community members. The subtheme of integrity was constructed from categories developed in data analysis including honesty, consistency, congruence, and authenticity.

*If you don't have the integrity of doing little things right, and doing what you said you were going to do type of thing, then you have no right to lead other people. You can't ask them to do something you're not willing to do...because people pay attention. They notice.* (Carter)
Integrity was observed in practices by participants taking ownership of missed plays, botched throws, or dropped balls: “There was a lot of ownership and self-awareness on behalf of the players who would frequently call out ‘my bad, my bad’ when they missed a serve or ‘sorry, sorry.’” (Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020)

I think you have to be authentic. If you're a different person when you're leading the team than when you're off the field... I think that it could raise the question of are you doing that for the right reason. Everybody knows who you are on the team. So, if you're acting out of character...I think that could raise a couple questions around the team of like, "Why is she acting like that?" "Is she really being genuine about her leading us?" "Does she really buy in?" So, I think you got to kind of know who you are, and know what you are capable of. (Eleanor)

While integrity is an integral part of a student athlete’s leadership, it is enhanced by one’s ability to model the behavior one wants to see in others, including modeling integrity. The leadership behavior of modeling is expanded upon through the following section.

**Modeling.** In every interview the phrase “lead by example” was referenced. Upon further investigation, participants described this as modeling the behavior one desires to see in others and the behavior that is reflective of their individual and team values. The leadership behavior of modeling was constructed from categories developed in data analysis including initiative, support, engagement, enthusiasm, passion, and optimism. Oftentimes modeling was described as arriving to practice early, putting in extra effort, being a positive role model and example for younger players and on behalf of the university, and doing the right things on and off the court:
Give 100% effort in everything you do, that's part of the leading by example quality, and little things like being on time. In our situation, when we enter the gym, we have our gear on little laundry loops, so for us, we have a responsibility of keeping our locker room area clean and making sure we put our dirty loops in the basket. So, it's just all the little things, just to make everyone else's job easier, and it shows that you're responsible, and responsibility is really one of the biggest characteristics about being a leader, because you hold a lot of responsibility at that position. (Jordan)

Many of the participants in this study defined leadership using the concept of modeling: “the go-to and somebody who acts as a good example” (Carter).

Participants in this study were often identified by coaches to model activities, strategies, or plays during practice. Rose was often asked by her coach to set up an offensive drill while other teammates looked on; Xander was often asked to model a serve or a racquet swing during tennis practice for his teammates; and, Jordan was often called to the center of the court to model a defensive play during practice. Similarly, participants in this study often modelled leadership behaviors at practices while other athletes looked on. Jasmine was the first to begin her workouts at practice, before a coach even arrived; Gary and Eleanor’s voices were always heard above others in their practice settings as they encouraged their teammates; and Beatrice demonstrated initiative by always picking up balls or resetting the field after practice. A student athlete leader’s ability to model leadership is directly tied to their influence as a team leader. The leadership behavior of influence is explored in the section that follows.

**Influence.** Closely related to modeling, but substantial enough to stand on its own is influence. Influence refers to a leader’s ability to actively inspire and motivate teammates. While modeling refers to one’s ability to lead and to do the right thing as an example for others to
follow, influence is the act of intentionally motivating and inspiring others to achieve their personal best. The leadership behavior of influence was constructed as a theme from categories developed in data analysis including motivation, inspiration, and presence. Influence is the ability to inspire change and improvement in others and to have an established leadership presence within your team:

*My biggest thing is just to be an influencer to everybody else any kind of way, whether it be on the field or off the field. I feel like if I can guide you in any direction, that's my biggest goal. I'm always ready to help.* (Blake)

My observations of Blake and many of the other athletes in practice settings further solidified the importance of influence as a salient leadership behavior:

*He (Blake) was focused. He was observant. He was connecting with players. It was obvious that he had a lot of influence on the field whatever he was doing, people were watching him. People were modeling what he was doing.* (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

Participants modeled influence in practice settings by motivating other teammates who were struggling or disconnected, and by having a strong and steady presence within their team. They did not complain, and they did not let their energy dwindle. Oftentimes these were the leaders that other players would look to for direction or inspiration, particularly in some of the more physically challenging practices.

When asked to define leadership, the definitions that many of the participants provided included some aspect of influence.
I would say still now being a record holder, I guess you could say, people tend to look up to you not only because of your success on the track but just how you carry yourself inside and outside of practice. (Jasmine)

This finding was also supported by practice observations which revealed that influence does not always require a leader to be at the front, or to have a formal role:

I think the important piece I saw in this practice that really stood out to me is how an impact leader or player can really be a significant influence on the field, and how that influence doesn't have to be speaking in front of a team of 80 players at once, that his influence was really felt and those one-on-one connections. (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020)

As noted, influence does not require a student athlete leader to be the loudest or most outspoken teammate, however, a student athlete leader’s ability to effectively communicate is integral to their leadership experience. The leadership behavior of communication is explored in the section that follows.

**Communication.** As a blanket term, “communication” was used frequently by the participants in this study as an example of one of the most critical leadership behaviors in sport. The leadership behavior of communication was constructed as a theme from categories developed in data analysis including listening, encouragement, affirmation, and feedback. Collectively, these categories emerged from nearly 200 communication related codes from interviews, photo elicitations, and practice observations. Over half of the participants in this study specified that communication was one of the most important aspects of leadership within sport. Specifically, they referenced the importance of communication during team play, practice,
and in those moments outside of competition where they are connecting formally and informally with coaches, teammates, and constituents.

_I try to communicate about what's going on and I try to set standards or expectations that we can be held accountable to. I don't like to leave anything to chance or leave it like people don't know what's expected of them. Because that's when things can go awry._

(Carter)

Communication includes verbal and non-verbal communication, encouraging and affirming communication, the ability to be the voice of the coaching staff during competition, and the ability to listen and take direction. Many of the participants actually identified as less vocal members of their team when sharing their leadership styles in their interviews, but still placed a high value on communication as a leadership action and voiced knowing when to speak up and when to step back as an act of leadership in itself.

_I'm not somebody who's really just out there all the time. I'm quiet most of the time. I feel like for me, being able to step out of comfort zone and maybe say something that somebody probably won't say I feel like is something. So, being vocal, I guess, is one of the things that I would say is important in being a leader._ (Jenny)

Participants shared the importance of communication as it relates to team synergy and performance: “relaying your thoughts to what's going on so that everybody knows what's happening.” (Carter) Participants also emphasized that communication is critical when it comes to being able to both give and receive feedback:

“I'm going to be there. When you do something good, I'm going to tell you. When you do something bad, I'm going to very, very carefully criticize you, but while still motivating you in a positive way.” (Gary)
Participants also acknowledged that communication is critical as it relates to communicating during the game itself: “being able to effectively communicate with them about what you see or what's going on on the court” (Jordan). The leadership behavior of communication is an excellent bridge to the next overarching value of meaningful relationships, as communication is what links an individual player to the other players on their team. These relationships and others are explored in the following sections.

**Meaningful Relationships**

“It's just knowing. It's just knowing your teammates, like a brother, like the back of your hand. You have to, especially in our sport, you have to know... You have to be able to trust each other. Especially being a defensive player, you have to be able to trust the man next to you, knowing he's going to go right and we all supposed to go right, go left, we go left, just doing his job in general.” (Blake)

Meaningful Relationships is the second overarching value and refers to the ability to cultivate and sustain meaningful relationships with teammates, coaches, and community members. It encompasses the values and behaviors needed to sustain deep, transformational relationships as well as the outputs of those relationships that result in a thriving team. Some of the categories that coalesced to generate this leadership value and its embedded leadership behaviors include team, collaboration, unity, trust, respect, empathy, culture, diversity, relationships, brotherhood, and sisterhood. Eleven out of 12 participants in this study indicated at least one of the aforementioned leadership values or behaviors related to cultivating meaningful relationships as most important for effective student athlete leadership development.
As all of the athletes in this study have been playing their sport for a majority of their lives, and on multiple teams, navigating coach and player relationships is a shared experience in sport. The ability to cultivate and sustain meaningful relationships creates the capacity for student athlete leaders to translate individual athletic success into a thriving, synergistic team with the capacity to reach their shared goals and team success, where student athlete leaders are not just winning for themselves, they are winning for their teammates:

*You still have to want it for yourself, but you should want something more. You should want it for the teammate to your left and the teammate to your right and know regardless if you fail, they're going to have your back.* (Maddy)

As one participant shared, “Whether you’re an athlete or not, a good relationship will go a long way” (Blake). Meaningful relationships are the foundation of a strong team culture and can only be cultivated with intentionality and a spirit of collaboration, trust, and respect. This study found that creating and sustaining meaningful relationships is critical in team sports: “it’s a team sport, you’re going to have get on the same page as your teammates, and talk to them, and just know what needs to be done” (Rose). Student athlete leaders are in the unique position and environmental context to find themselves navigating new relationships with a great degree of frequency. This frequency shows up much more in sport than in other leadership contexts, for example through coaching and coaching staff turnover, and in the constant roster transitions. This has been shared by the participants in this study and in existing research (Schroeder, 2010).

“The coaching changes, really, they helped me grow, honestly, as a player. Because I’ve had to deal with dealing with my third defensive coordinator, third position coach...” (Blake).

For many student athletes, they do not just learn to navigate and develop meaningful coaching relationships, their team composition changes by at least 25% every year which causes them to
adjust quickly to new relationships with teammates as well (Schroeder, 2010). Savvy student athlete leaders develop an understanding and a preparedness for these shifts in relationships and are able to maintain a stable team culture throughout. The ability to quickly, authentically, willingly, and intentionally develop meaningful relationships is a unique leadership behavior that is critical to the student athlete leadership experience. The leadership behaviors associated with meaningful relationships: trust and unity: and are described below and provide rich descriptions of the leadership behaviors demonstrated by student athlete leaders who cultivate and sustain meaningful relationships through sport. Each of these behaviors were constructed as unique categories through the data analysis process and were reconstructed as part of the overarching theme of meaningful relationships because of their specific connection to the concept of developing and sustaining meaningful, intentional, and transformational relationships through sport through the collaborative leadership behaviors of trust and unity. These leadership behaviors are grouped within the value of meaningful relationships because of their focus on relational leadership behaviors.

Trust. Within the context of sport, trust among teammates and coaches is critical and is a shared experience among student athlete leaders. Every athlete in this study referenced the importance of trust as leaders in their sport. Based upon their reflections, trust in the context of leadership in sport refers to the unflappable belief that one’s teammate is going to uphold their responsibilities and hold sacred their role and the livelihood and success of their team, both on and off the court, field, or pitch. The leadership behavior of trust was constructed as a theme from categories developed in data analysis including respect, relationships, diversity, safety, and empathy.
“People are going to turn to leaders who they see are doing the right thing...Can other people trust you? That's the biggest thing” (Blake).

The participants shared that, in the context of sport, trust is the ability to rely upon the integrity of others, to rely upon one’s teammates to commit to a shared team culture and team values, to believe one’s teammates will consistently show up and do their job, to depend upon one’s teammates to live and lead with dignity and respect, and to confidently count on the man or woman to one’s left or right.

Accountability goes with trust, but trust can kind of stand alone even off the field. If you're a team, you got to make sure you're doing the right things off the field as well and that goes for having the right goals of not staying out late if you got training early in the morning and filling your body the right things. Just giving yourself the best chance to impact the team with the best ability you can. (Eleanor)

In many sports, trust is also critical to preserving the physical safety or wellbeing of teammates. “If you know one of your teammates, his weaknesses, you can be there for him. If I know he's not good going left, I want to protect his left the majority of the time” (Blake). A student athlete leader must trust their teammates to run the right plays, or to position themselves on the field or on the court as planned. A failure to do so can cause a team to lose a game, or worse, an athlete to experience a critical injury. Even in practice settings, I observed the trust cultivated among teammates and coaches. In the women’s basketball practice, I entered the practice during a period in which the team was watching game tape with an assistant coach. In my notes on that practice, I noted: “She was talking to the players about trusting one another, and the importance of looking out for your teammates” (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020). In the track and field practice, I recalled being afraid to even go near the field, but found myself in awe of the
apparent trust shared among teammates: “There's an emphasis on feedback both giving and receiving, as well as trust. The athletes would walk out into the middle of the field where the hammer would be thrown and trust that they wouldn't get hit with it” (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020). In this same practice, I had reflected:

The athletes seem incredibly vulnerable and open and aware, and the coach knows how to talk to them about their bodies in a way that doesn't make them uncomfortable. They all seem focused on improvement and growth. They're not competitive they want each other to succeed (Parish, Research Observation Journals, 2020).

Eleanor connects the concepts of vulnerability and trust in sport: “being vulnerable, it's letting down your ego. It shows that you're there for a reason. People see you whether you play or not. I think that that's just super important.”

Trust also relates to the ability of a student athlete leader to see, honor, and acknowledge the diversity on a team and to create space for individuals to demonstrate empathy and vulnerability in light of those differences. “It's all about earning trust and it's not given. That's why I think it takes time. I prove it on the field and then it translates to off the field” (Beatrice).

A team with a culture of trust promotes a unified team. Unity is explored as a leadership behavior in the section that follows.

**Unity.** Like trust, unity is something that student athlete leaders can cultivate over time. It takes shape in many different ways, often reflective of team cultures, and can be facilitated by student athlete leaders in ways that are both large and small. Unity can show up in team chants, team huddles, a team mindset, team culture, or simply in extending a hand to help a teammate up off of the court or the field. The leadership behavior of unity was constructed as a theme from categories developed in data analysis including team, collaboration, loyalty, and culture.
In tennis, it shows up in the form of team chants; in basketball, it shows up in chest-bumps and “touches;” in football, it shows up in the form of huddles and breaks; in track and field, it shows up in the off-field connections forged among players; in softball it shows up in their professionally led teambuilding workshops. What makes unity so unique, is that for each team that has it, they show it in different ways.

You just learn about their life and you actually care about it. Like you keep up with it. You reach out to them. When they have a bad day, and you come up to them and you're like, ‘Man, I know that's tough. We get a hell a lot of bad days. I'm here for you. I'm thinking about you.’” (Gary)

The participants shared that preparing, winning, and losing with, for and alongside your teammates is where unity comes into play. For many student athlete leaders, this can be described as “having your back.” Unified teams have leaders who are willing to put in the extra effort to bring the team together, and consist of teammates who play selflessly and with the goals of the team in mind. “You have to want it for yourself, but you should want something more. You should want it for the teammate to your left and the teammate to your right...regardless if you fail, they're going to have your back” (Maddy).

Student athlete leaders who promote the value of unity also exhibit the behaviors of loyalty and collaboration -- a true, genuine desire to work for, with, and on behalf of their team. For Eleanor, this means that her teammates are “all super close and we all want the same thing.” Teams with strong, unified leadership are also able to more easily tackle challenges that come their way and remain resilient in the face of adversity:
“They come from different backgrounds, have different beliefs, different views, but they are my team and regardless if I agree with what they believe or what they do, they're going to be by my side so I have to be loyal to them.” (Maddy)

Maddy’s espoused loyalty also encompasses her commitment to her team. This concept, combined with the value of selflessness, is explored in the sections that follow.

**Selfless Commitment**

“Regardless of how my day's going, how I'm performing, I play for the person beside me. And I think that's what's made me who I am, is to be selfless instead of selfish.” (Maddy)

Selfless Commitment is a term that emerged entirely from this research. Through the data analysis process it became clear that selflessness was a significant theme, as was commitment; however, they were often found aligned together. This study found that all participants referenced some aspect of selfless commitment and its corresponding categories as integral to their leadership development, and ten out of 12 participants identified an aspect of selfless commitment as one of their top leadership values and behaviors in sport. In hearing the participants’ perspectives, it was not enough for a student athlete leader to play selflessly if they weren’t committed to their team. Likewise, commitment was not relevant to the participants if it did not come with a student athlete leader’s ability to be selfless and sacrifice for the greater good. Commitment meant more in this context than committing to personal success, it meant committing to the success of one’s team, sometimes at the expense of one’s own playing time or points. Thus, the overarching value selfless commitment emerged. In the words of Carter, one of this study’s participants, selfless commitment is the desire “to help others and make them better.”
In the context of leadership in sport, selfless commitment refers to a student athlete’s ability to lead selflessly and to commit to something greater than themselves, with the dedication, discipline, resilience, and grit needed to overcome any challenges that may come their way. This showed up in team practices in the form of hard work, perseverance, and relentlessness. It is lived each day by the participants who sometimes lives thousands of miles away from home, and who make it to hours of workouts and practices each day. It comes in the form of sacrificing your own play, for the success of a teammate, and in the form of hard work. In one particular practice I noted:

*There is a spirit of selflessness on this team. Even though they would be competing against each other, just like they do actually compete against each other for playing time, they're open to telling their opponent when they do well, even if it's to their own demise.*

(Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020)

Some of the categories that coalesced to generate the leadership value of selfless commitment and its embedded leadership behaviors include: grit, resilience, work ethic, perseverance, hustle, toughness, selflessness, sacrifice, servant leadership, commitment, responsibility, accountability, strength, effort, discipline, self-control, and dedication.

In summary, selfless commitment means “Doing it for other people rather than just for myself” (Beatrice). It is closely aligned with servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), but extends beyond the concept of servant leadership and the potentially marginalizing images of servitude that phrase may convey to include resilience and grit as well as a disciplined and industrious work ethic. It reflects a student athlete leader’s unselfish motivation to sacrifice for the greater good and a genuine desire to act for the benefit of others.
The actions that we would be doing on the court will be for each other instead of our personal selves, and when you do that, everyone's happy, everyone's energized, and that's usually how championship teams are bred. (Jordan)

Selfless commitment reflects a student athlete leader’s understanding that their time on their team is limited, often less than four years, but their impact can extend beyond their time on the team. Selfless commitment is about living and leading your legacy through your sport:

I'm trying to leave a legacy, not my name behind. I don't strive for my name to be heard years down the line, but I want student athletes of the University...to share the same experiences as well as excel in the professional development realm as well as prepare for life after sport, I think that's really important. (Gary)

The leadership behaviors associated with selfless commitment: sacrifice, resilience, work ethic, and discipline, are described below and provide rich descriptions of the leadership behaviors demonstrated by student athlete leaders who are able to selflessly commit to something greater than themselves. Each of these leadership behaviors were constructed as themes from categories created through the data analysis process and were reconstructed as part of the overarching value of selfless commitment because of their unique alignment with concepts of servant leadership and selflessness, and commitment to one’s team and one’s sport.

**Sacrifice.** A salient leadership behavior, perhaps more present in the context of sport than in most other environments, is the theme of sacrifice. The leadership behavior of sacrifice was constructed as a theme from categories developed in data analysis including commitment, servant leadership, and selflessness. The participants illuminated that as student athlete leaders, they sacrifice their time, their personal lives, their extracurricular involvement, points scored, minutes played, moments in the spotlight, holidays spent with family, vacations, intended
academic pursuits, and ultimately their bodies all in the name of their sport. All the participants in this study recalled, unprompted, times when they have made sacrifices for sport like moving away from their families at a very young age, changing majors, skipping social engagements, or enduring extensive surgeries to repair sport related injuries, and yet they all deemed these sacrifices to be worth it. Blake shared that he had to make sacrifices related to his social life to ensure he was accountable to his team expectations. Participants also shared that they had to change their majors to something that would better accommodate their practice schedules which are difficult to manage with more time-restrictive majors like Nursing and Engineering.

You're very vulnerable, you're putting your body at risk, and all the things, but also, in training, and I guess, even in games, you can't show that you're tired. You can't show that you are exhausted, you can't show that. (Eleanor)

Just being able to sacrifice your points or your stats just for the better of the team. Only a leader can be able to do that. (Jordan)

It (sacrifice) means you're fighting, fighting for your sisters, because if you're not close with them then why would you want to do a slide pass and potentially injure yourself for the people around you. (Beatrice)

As Eleanor, Blake, Jordan, and Beatrice shared -- to sacrifice, a student athlete leader first needs to be committed--committed to their team culture, committed to their sport, committed to their teammates, committed to their school, and ultimately committed to leadership. There is no sacrifice in sport without commitment, belief or buy in. Sacrifice is one of the most integral, foundational elements of a student athlete leader’s DNA:

“That's how we should treat each other, that's how we should have each other's backs, as their family members have their backs. And you would be willing to sacrifice for a family
member, so if you want to win a basketball game, you must be able to sacrifice sometimes, for teammates or for the better of the team.” (Jordan)

While Jordan references the importance of sacrifice in winning and for the betterment of the team, resilience as a leadership behavior is also integral to a team’s success and is further explored in the section that follows.

**Resilience.** Athletes lose. It is just part of the game. While it is not the goal of the game, losing is an integral part of a student athlete leader’s experience and is influenced by their resilience and the categories developed in data analysis that comprise the leadership behavior of resilience including grit, perseverance, toughness, and strength.

*I think you've got to be very resilient as a leader. Especially if your team's not doing so well, to keep giving off positive energy and to keep believing in your team so they keep believing in themselves, which can be very tough if you've lost a lot of matches in a row, to genuinely keep believing. That's definitely where resiliency comes into play a lot. Grit too.* (Xander)

While there are many recent works related to resilience and grit (Crede et al., 2017; Duckworth, 2016; Ledesma, 2014), no existing leadership model includes resilience as a core value. As it relates to student athlete leadership identity development, there is no leadership without it. One would be hard-pressed to find a field or experience where one has to so frequently and readily fail and get back up again. “Things don't always go the way you want it to be. If you're not resilient about it, you're just going to lose your path” (Jenny).

For every missed shot, strike, block, failed throw, botched serve, fumble, error or interception another play is sure to follow. And “being able to push through in a sport setting or
a competition setting is always something that's important” (Jasmine). Athletes do not have the luxury of leaving the scene to privately lick their wounds and try again another day.

When it gets hard, you’re really tempted to just put your head down finish through it. But I think a really hard aspect is when the things get hard, when it gets really tough in practice, in sprints and stuff like that, or emotionally tough. I think that the thing that will stand out about a leader is that he has his head up and he's looking forward to encourage somebody else through the hard moment. (Gary)

For every practice I observed, every player on every team missed a shot, a block, a catch, a point, a throw, or an open pass. They all made fouls, turnovers, or errors and yet no one flinched or quit, they continued playing.

Sometimes when times get tough, sometimes people want to give up, and as a leader you can't let your guys give up, so you got to be extremely resilient and gritty, and those are the times when you might need to get in someone’s face and just tell them, like, ‘Hey, come on, we need you. We don't need anybody quitting on us.’ And even though they might resist that at first, you just have to keep being resilient until they snap out of it. (Jordan)

For a student athlete, their loss is public and often met with a loud response from an on looking crowd. “It's really important for someone or some people on the team to have that resiliency to push other people through. We need to keep going and bring somebody along with you… I feel that and grit go together” (Carter). Every day involves a miss, a loss, a mistake and their fortitude to push through and persevere with their head held high ready to take on another play defines a resilient student athlete leader and those who can succeed at not only performing at an elite level of competitive play, but leading in it: “I think the real leaders stand out when
they're facing adversity. And I think during adversity is when you get challenged with the aspect of seeing if you can really walk what you're talking” (Gary).

For Rose, resilience is most apparent when your team is down:

*In a game if we're down, like down 20 even... just having someone that just keep on chipping away and doesn't let it affect them, doesn’t let it bring them down, and instead is trying to... work so hard, and put everything they have on the court even though they're down.* (Rose)

As Rose shares, working hard and putting it all on the court are important leadership behaviors in sport. The concept of work ethic is further explored in the section that follows.

**Work Ethic.** Being a student athlete requires a certain level of industriousness and work ethic, and student athlete leaders are the individuals on the team to model that expectation for others. The leadership behavior of work ethic was constructed as a theme from categories developed in data analysis including hustle and dedication.

*I just lead. I walk in there every day. I clock in... It’s time to go to work on the field or whatever we’re doing, a meeting, a workout. I’m always trying to push the next person....*  
*When it’s time to go to work, I’m going to work.* (Blake)

Work ethic can be demonstrated by leaders as putting in extra time at practice, prioritizing their academic pursuits, and giving their full effort in every play, every practice, and every game. All 12 of the participants, unprompted, referenced their work ethic in the context of leadership. For, Jenny her work ethic inspires others to follow her “*I always worked hard...I’m always like a pusher, trying to work hard so that people can follow me*” (Jenny). Her leadership style is more behind the scenes, but she works hard in a way that connects both with the modeling and influence behaviors previously referenced, so that her teammates will work hard too.
Some of the participants referenced working hard to maintain their spot, or role on the team. Whereas others, like Maddy and Rose both shared that leaders do not only work hard during practice, but they make time before and after practice to go above and beyond what is expected of them: “Hard work is not just at practice, but finding time to work either before or after practice by yourself with the coaches” (Maddy). Similarly, for Rose, her work ethic comes through by “always being out there shooting before a game. Going in, getting extra reps.” She also shares “everyone has always said just how hard a worker I am, how I keep my head down and just keep on going, and that's how I earned people's respect” (Rose).

Eleanor shares that work ethic is connected to the concepts of grit and resilience mentioned earlier:

*Having the grit to kind of just put our heads down and put the work in, regardless of what happened at home, or I guess what's happening in a different country, because our entire team is basically international. So, what's happening way back home, what's happening with your roommates, with the coach's relationship, what's happening with school, letting that all go. Put your head down and let's work.* (Eleanor)

Student athlete leaders model their work ethic by never giving up, never complaining, and always being willing to push harder, farther, faster than the day before. One participant offered that sometimes hard work matters more than athletic skill: “sometimes that can mean you put in the work. Not necessarily that you're really talented, but people have to believe that you really want it and that you're putting in the work for it” (Carter). Oftentimes work ethic is described in the physicality, or toughness, of sport, but the participants shared that it also relates to a student athlete leader’s commitment to watching film, studying plays, and committing to a health and wellness regiment. I witnessed the participants’ work ethic firsthand.
in practice observations, and collected hundreds of codes that represented work ethic, grit, resilience, hustle, and toughness as a result.

Of my women’s basketball practice observations of Jenny and Rose, “One of the things I noticed the most in this practice was how hard they worked the whole time. Their hustle. They had maximum effort” (Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020). Time and again, practice after practice, the nominated participants in this study were always the athletes working the hardest. They were the first down the court, the first to arrive, the last to leave, and they gave maximum effort the entire practice.

Similarly, of my tennis observations of Kevin and Xander I noted, “They worked hard in the beaming sunshine and seemed happy to do it” (Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020). I noted how much the two athletes actually enjoyed the hard work of practice, and how their tempo and effort were modeled by those around them.

The connection between work ethic and modelling continued throughout my practice observations. A commonality among all of the practices was that the participants in this study worked the hardest of those at the practice, modeled work ethic to their teammates, and actively influenced their teammates to also work hard. In this way, multiple subthemes, depicted as leadership behaviors in this study, coalesced around this particular phenomenon. This was apparent while observing Beatrice in practice, “She was a steady force to be reckoned with. She worked the hardest. She felt the hardest. And she popped up the fastest” (Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020). At the same soccer practice, I observed of both Beatrice and Eleanor:

\[I\’ve\ never\ seen\ athletes\ work\ so\ hard.\ The\ girls\ dove\ for\ balls\ face-first\ into\ the\ grass.\]

\[The\ grit,\ the\ determination,\ the\ resilience\ the\ hustle...\ No\ one\ ever\ seemed\ fazed\ when\]
they got kicked hard slammed to the ground, or came up with a mouthful of grass.

(Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020)

Many of the participants referred to their sport in the sense a job, or going to work. In vivo codes like ‘putting in the work,’ “having a job to do,” and “clocking in” were found throughout the data analysis process and points to a student athlete leader’s association of their sport and their role as a leader within it to a job:

Sometimes when I am by myself, sometimes I just got to tell myself ‘Well, you got a job to do. We ain’t come here just to bomb it. We didn’t come all the way here just to bomb it’...

I just have to push through and say ‘Hey, we got a job to do.’ (Jasmine)

The work ethic espoused and demonstrated by the participants of this study is undergirded by discipline- the discipline it takes to commit to always pushing through, as Jasmine says, and getting the job done. Discipline is explored in the section that follows.

**Discipline.** Juggling all of the commitments and expectations of student athlete leadership does not merely require a keen ability to manage one’s time, or manage one’s self well. It requires true discipline. The leadership behavior of discipline was constructed as a theme from categories developed in data analysis including responsibility, accountability, and self-control. For the participants in this study, discipline is an athlete’s ability to show up for a 7am practice when their body is tired from the game the night before, as Beatrice and Eleanor often do. Discipline is having the self-control to say no to a social invitation that may jeopardize one’s eligibility, a difficult decision Blake has had to navigate. Discipline means having the self-management to not argue with a coach or a referee in the heat of the moment, something all athletes can related to Discipline is a student athlete’s ability to accept and honor their autonomy but not cut corners during a workout or a team practice, putting in extra effort instead. Specific to
Carter and Maddy’s practice, I noted “They are very self-aware and collaborative but also maintain discipline and grit throughout the practice. If they fall down or miss a ball, the get right up and try again” (Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020).

Discipline is knowing and acknowledging one’s area of competitive weakness and putting in the extra time and effort to build upon it -- arriving to practice early to work on foul-shots for example, for Rose and Jordan. Discipline as a student athlete leader requires maturity and ownership, and it means holding oneself and one’s teammates responsible and accountable for their own actions, and inactions despite how challenging circumstances may be:

*When it gets hard, you're really tempted to just put your head down finish through it. But I think when the things get hard, when it gets really tough in practice, in sprints and stuff like that, or emotionally tough. I think that the thing that will stand out about a leader is that he has his head up and he's looking forward to encourage somebody else through the hard moment.* (Gary)

I was able to witness the leadership behavior of discipline in a tennis practice observation in particular and was struck by the balance of discipline and enthusiasm the participants modeled in their practice:

*This is obviously a sport that emphasizes consistency and discipline. And it was interesting to watch the players and coaches, focus on consistent improvement and development along the way....The players in this particular team and in this particular setting managed to balance focus and discipline with enthusiasm and joy. It was the only practice I had attended, where there was no music playing.* (Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020)
This practice in particular emphasized body awareness and breathing, as well as the tiniest modifications that could improve technique and overall performance.

Similarly, my observations of the track and field practice illuminated the immense amount of discipline required for this particular sport “it requires significant strength but even more than that focus and discipline” (Parish, Practice Observation Journals, 2020). Gary and Jasmine had to maintain control of their own bodies, while maintaining an understanding of the environment around them. They willingly accepted and applied feedback from their coaches and modified their technique accordingly to enhance their performance. They had to demonstrate mental and physical strength and discipline to not release the disc or shotput until the absolute perfect moment, acting with accuracy and precision that ensured their safety and success. They stayed focused, unaware of the distractions around them, and mindful of their muscle movement and physical motion. If they felt frustration or annoyance, they never showed it. My interview with Jasmine affirmed the importance of discipline in her sport as she shared:

Specifically, in sport, I feel like…there are a lot of times when you as a person can get pulled off track or be easily distracted by things that not only happen in your sport but also just in life, period. Sometimes you do need somebody that can pull you out of that bad spot, I guess you could say, and help you and guide you to where you should be.

(Jasmine)

In each of the practices I attended, there was also an element that was somewhat unsupervised, or uncoached. In these moments of foul shots, warmups, weightlifting, sprints, practice reps, etc. it was incumbent upon the athletes to hold themselves accountable to completing the assigned task. No coach was there during those moments to ensure the participants were doing as they were instructed, and not cutting corners. Instead, each participant
not only demonstrated the discipline necessary to accomplish each of these expected tasks, they did so with a focus and determination that illuminated why they were seen as leaders on their teams. This aligns with the leadership behavior of integrity, as it demonstrates their desire to do what is right, even when no one is watching. It also aligns with the overarching value of growth mindset, explored in the section that follows, as one must demonstrate discipline to grow and improve both as an athlete and as a leader.

*Growth Mindset*

*In order to lead others, you need to know how to lead yourself." And so that could be a pretty big aspect in learning how to mature and grow as a person.* (Gary)

The concept of having a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset is a consistent theme that emerged through this study, and represents an overarching value in student athlete leadership identity development. This value is representative of other categories that emerged in the research including growth, coaching, flexibility, change, improvement and hope. Growth mindset is often used in elementary and secondary education to refer to a student’s belief that they can develop intelligence overtime (Dweck, 2010). In the context of sport, it refers to a student athlete leader’s ability to engage in deep, purposeful learning -- both as it relates to leadership and as it relates to their sport (Dweck, 2010). Specifically, as an overarching value in this study, growth mindset refers to a student athlete leader’s ability to develop skills and abilities, translating to leadership behaviors, through dedication, hard work, self-awareness, resilience, and relational chemistry.

For leaders in sport, this growth mindset is a foundational element of their ability to see leadership as a continuously evolving and growing phenomenon across the other overarching
values of self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment, and competitive purpose. The participants in this study all reflected on moments of leadership growth within their sport. For Beatrice, her growth as a student athlete leader came in the form of transitioning from a more self-oriented leader, to a leader who is now more team focused (selfless commitment). That growth included Beatrice’s development of her ability to better understand others (develop meaningful relationships) and adapt to changing situations (self-awareness). Similarly, Gary reflected upon his growth as a leader from a more self-centered approach, to the selfless style he maintains now (selfless commitment). For Gary, this growth has taken a few years and now positions him as a leader who selflessly gives of himself to his teammates, and relishes in their successes without the need for his own turn in the spotlight (meaningful relationships, selfless commitment). Kevin’s experience has been similar, and he attributes his growth mindset to experience, maturity, and coaching which has allowed him to open lines of communication with others to give and receive feedback (self-awareness). In this regard, within each overarching value, a growth mindset allows a student athlete leader to develop an attitude of continuous growth and improvement in the areas of self-awareness, meaningful relationships, and selfless commitment.

Student athlete leaders with a growth mindset engage in a productive struggle that results in growth within the context of their sport (Dweck, 2010). Sometimes this struggle comes in the form of an injury that forces a student athlete to learn a new way to contribute meaningfully to their team, as was Carter’s experience. Other times, the productive struggle is within one’s self and in determining the mindset and role one has within their team, as was Blake’s experience. This awareness of the productive struggle allows student athlete leaders to tackle problems head on with honesty, authenticity, and integrity and the discipline to drive results and overall growth.
A student athlete leader with a growth mindset sees growth not only as an option, but as an expectation. They actively engage in coaching behaviors— not only with the traditional team “coach” but also through peer leadership coaching experiences. In this sense, coaching is not specifically for those with the formal title of “Coach” but instead refers to the act of coaching and the willingness to both give and receiving coaching for growth and improvement. This correlates with previously mentioned leadership behaviors including communication, modeling, influence, work ethic and trust.

Even with this last season, we had a lot of success, championship, (redacted) Bowl, players going and getting drafted. All of that happened because we decided to make a change and be leaders. (Blake)

Student athlete leaders see the opportunity for growth and improvement as an opportunity for individual improvement, but also through their selfless commitment, a student athlete leader sees growth and improvement from a team perspective as well. Additionally, a student athlete leader with a growth mindset understands and is flexible to change within the context of their sport. As previously mentioned, this change can often come in the form of players and coaches rapidly transitioning and impacting the culture and dynamic on a team: “You build those relationships for time period, but you have to understand eventually, they have to move on, you have to move on” (Blake). Or, these changes can come in the form of position changes, and changes in formal and informal team roles as was Carter’s experience when navigating injuries.

In addition to having and maintaining a growth mindset as a leader in sport, maintaining a competitive purpose is also a leadership value unique to the student athlete experience. This concept is further explored as an overarching value in the section that follows.
Competitive Purpose

The main goal is to get that championship trophy. Without a coach or a player who possess the right leadership qualities, it's very difficult to have everyone focused and determined to reach that same goal because of emotions, selfishness, there's so many negative aspects that could distract the teams from just being able to win games, so leaders are able to take those negatives away and make them positives, and eventually just keep everyone in line. (Jordan)

Competitive purpose refers to the shared purpose of student athlete leaders to perform at their personal and team best with the goal of shared success, often framed as winning. Competition and common purpose both emerged as categories during the data analysis phase of this research, however, after further analysis it became evident that the two are inexplicably intertwined for a student athlete leader. The joining of these two categories into a theme, and overarching value, adeptly describes a common experience among student athlete leaders who share a competitive purpose. The overarching value, competitive purpose, was constructed from categories developed in data analysis including purpose, skill, experience, position, playing time, focus, strategy, tempo, alertness, urgency, and winning. Unlike many of the other categories in this study, these categories are very sport-focused in nature.

This value in particular is unique in the context of leadership, as it positions competition as a positive leadership value when aligned with a purposeful goal or cause. At the end of the day, all of the athletes in this study agree that they want to win. And while winning may not be everything, it is certainly something and is a critical aspect of what it means to be a student athlete leader. Even if these athletes do not always win, and they do not, the goal, the purpose is
still to strive for winning and to cultivate the self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment, and growth mindset needed to make winning a reality.

A student athlete leader with competitive purpose understands their role in the context of the larger goals and objectives of a team. Each participant in this study could articulate their own role and purpose as a leader on their team, and the ways in which they help to center their teammates on that common purpose. They do this through the previously mentioned leadership behaviors of modeling, influence, communication, unity, and discipline. Competitive purpose also gives credence to the impact that athletic skill, experience, playing time, and positions have on a student athlete leader’s ability to demonstrate and engage in acts of trust, resilience, sacrifice and unity within their team. These are not commonly held concepts in leadership, but are of great importance in sport. Competitive purpose allows all of these concepts and categories to coalesce into one overarching value which connects them in the context of leadership and sport.

As part of the intensive interviewing process, linkages between class standing, athletic skill, playing time and leadership were explored. While the participants in this study do acknowledge that leadership does not necessarily belong exclusively to the upper classmen players or those with the greatest athletic skill or playing time, they do acknowledge that each of these plays a role in team leadership dynamics:

*I do think athletic ability plays a huge role in it, because it’s trust and people want to win. It’s the confidence. If you don’t have the ability to make the shot at the end of the game, people aren’t really going to look at you like they want you to lead.* (Rose)

Practice observation data also revealed that the participants in this study modelled and influenced focus, strategy, tempo, alertness, and urgency on their teams. This was demonstrated
in the data analysis of the practice observation data, and later represented in the word clouds from each practice. As these codes coalesced into categories and themes, they constructed the overarching value of competitive purpose which also aligns with the previously mentioned leadership behaviors of modeling, communication, influence, trust, unity, work ethic, and discipline. Each sport has their own unique culture related to strategy and tempo, but ultimately both play a role in a team’s ability to be cohesive and successful. The participants in this study model a specific athletic intelligence that helps them to navigate these concepts in sport-based settings with skill and ease that allows the team to realize their ultimate goals:

Well I think as a team you're all working towards the same goal. You are brought together and you've got the same purpose so that does bring everyone together and you've got a leader to get you there. People will look up to them because they want to get there as well. (Xander)

Lastly, as it relates to competitive purpose is the concept of winning. The athletes in this study are all keenly aware that they are in their roles to get a job done, and that job is to win and winning is not merely for themselves but for something greater. It is their ultimate competitive purpose:

And I think a lot of us, yes, we love winning. These are some of the most competitive people I've ever been around. But what we have as a team, what we believe in, and when everyone is bought in, that's what makes the winning feel good, not just the score of the game. (Maddy)

But, as Maddy eloquently expressed, winning feels good when the team is connected and unified, not necessarily just when they score more than their opponent. In this regard, winning
relates to the leadership behaviors of integrity, influence, trust, unity, sacrifice and resilience previously described in the findings.

**Additional Findings for Consideration**

**COVID-19**

As was shared earlier in this chapter, less relevant but still notable findings related to COVID-19 and leadership challenges also emerged through this study. While these do not necessarily contribute to the research questions posed in this study, they are still findings worthy of consideration for future research and practice.

Specifically, the research for this study was conducted in the midst of a global pandemic that had resulted in halted seasons, stay at home orders, mandated COVID-19 testing and adjustments made to every facet of the student athlete experience including attending classes virtually, canceling practices, participating in homebound conditioning sessions, and navigating extended years of eligibility. Many of the participants in this study participated in quarantine within their homes due to an exposure to a COVID-19 positive teammate, and all of the participants had navigated modifications made to practice, travel, and compliance requirements.

Masks were often worn in team practices that I attended, and athletes navigated complexities related to the atypical leadership transitions on their teams where recruitment was reimagined and many of the students who should have been graduating and ending their eligibility remained on the team for an additional season, in some ways creating compression within the team. Many of the practices I observed were the first the athletes had participated in in weeks due to COVID-19 related practice cancellations. Throughout the study bad decisions made by teammates related to breaking COVID-19 protocols were referenced, and the participants recalled experiences of navigating leading through a public health crisis and a $4
million athletic department budget cut at their institution that resulted in the loss of many of the staff who had supported their athletic experience. In short, the pandemic had forced the adjustment of expectations and engagement of the participating athletes and they were navigating their sport and leading within their sport in a completely new and different way.

**Negative Leadership**

Despite the study not assigning a moral, amoral, or immoral philosophical stance toward leadership, participants often found themselves discussing what “bad leadership” looks like when asked about their leadership values, behaviors, and experiences. While this study did not aim to identify the negative leadership aspects of sport, the concept came up enough that it is worthwhile to note that leadership positions do not always promote positive leadership actions within the context of sport, according to the experiences of this study’s participants. Specifically, some of these negative leadership components shared by participants in this study include negative attitudes, being “fake,” misuse of positional power, poor communication practices, ego, lack of accountability or dependability, and self-involvement. Participants identified these negative leadership experiences as impacting team dynamics both on and off the field. As Blake put it:

>You can't expect anything to go right in football if you're not having a good scene off the field...In my time being here, 2018 may have been our rockiest season...And that year, it was just a lot of negativity on the team at the time. There was a lot of ego at the time. And it just wasn't a team full of leaders at that time. It was kind of a lot of players in their own world, and you could see it. (Blake)

For many of these participants, examples of negative leadership on their teams have inspired them to lead in a more positive and productive manner:
Her tone and the way she talked to everyone made everyone just not want to listen because she was hateful. And the other seniors, they just thought because they were seniors, they were given the title of leaders. And it aggravated me because our team, just the chemistry, everything was off. Even our season in the spring, nothing changed, it was awful. We played awful. Everyone's stats from the previous year did not even compare. These were low and I was like, this can't happen. (Maddy)

Additionally, while not necessarily aligned with negative leadership values or behaviors, many of the participants identified having a challenging freshman year. Many of the participants struggled to adjust to a new academic and athletic culture, being away from home, and the ultimate transition of shifting from being the most experienced, talented, seasoned player on their high school team to the least experienced player on their collegiate roster. Participants reflected upon trying to assimilate into a new team culture, sometimes assimilating simultaneously to a new country, and trying to navigate how to step up and step back- learning how to use their voice, but to balance it with existing team norms:

Freshman year I came in and I was ready to work, of course. I was like, hey I'm going to work hard… Then everything hit. It's like school, different classes, being away in a different culture from my family. It's a 33-hour drive if my family wanted to come visit me from where I'm from to here, so it's very far. Being home sick, all those factors played into where I'm at now, but freshman year it was very hard to adapt to all of that kind of stuff….Freshman year was hard, it really was. There was more of a ‘Hey, let's get through this year, let's get out of the dorms…let's give it another chance, we'll see how it goes in sophomore year.' Sophomore year- that's when everything switched. (Beatrice)
This experience is of note as it can impact how a greater understanding of student athlete leadership identity development could specifically target the first-year transition of student athletes to ensure it is promoting a solid leadership foundation for the incoming students.

**Variance and Inconsistencies**

*I feel prior to becoming a collegiate student athlete, you can't really imagine what the experience is like. You have all of these ideas and then, and never usually in a bad way, it's just always something different.* (Carter)

**Leadership Training.** The participants in this study indicated, similar to what existing research has already informed (Voight & Hickey, 2016), that universities do not consistently provide specific leadership training to student athletes, and most participants in this study admitted to never having experienced any formal leadership programming through their sport. However, this was inconsistent depending upon personal opportunities sought out by the individual student athletes or by opportunities provided by team coaches. For example, Gary and Beatrice, both enrolled in a leadership class of their own accord. Gary has also served in a leadership position within a student organization. Participants from the softball team, Carter and Maddy, have engaged in team leadership trainings and team leadership book clubs, led by their coach who has a particular interest in the leadership development of her plays. Leadership as a Position or Leadership as a Process. Additionally this study found that student athlete leadership is experienced both as a position and as a process. The participants in this study defined leadership as a set of individual values and behaviors, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter, however, they also identify leadership processes within their teams. Specifically, this study found that while the participants do not believe that leadership exists only among captains,
coaches, or more seasoned teammates, they do describe leadership as both an individual (positional) and a team (process) experience. When asked to describe leadership, many student athlete leaders describe trait’s of leaders and not acts of leadership but acknowledge that leadership and leaders can exist and occur anywhere on a team, and that on the best teams leadership is shared among all team members. Participants were inconsistent in how they described the influence of playing time or athletic skill, on one’s leadership capacity. While all of the participants indicated that one did not need to be a star player or performer to be a leader, they were inconsistent in whether athletic skill still impacted perceived leadership ability. For example, Jordan offered:

   *it's more common for the older players to assume that leadership role, but if you're a young guy coming in and you already possess those qualities, then I'm sure that the older players are mature enough to see that you have those qualities and let you be a leader also.* (Jordan)

Similarly, Rose suggests that the more seasoned players may have the experience needed to be better prepared for a leadership role, even though a formal hierarchy may not be present:

   *I don't really think there's a hierarchy. Seniors, juniors, sophomore I think we're all at a point now where it's... we're all on the same team....If you're a senior, you're not automatically going to be the leader, right? I think that there probably is more of a correlation between the confidence, once you've been here for four years... you're going to know the competition, you're going to know the systems in and out. You're not just going to know what your role is or where you have to go and play and everything. You're going to know where everyone else needs to go. You're going to see the game, see the read. You're just going to have that much more confidence and ability, and you're also*
used to it... on a comfort level. You should be able to talk to the coaches. You should be able to have those types of conversations where you can ask questions. Kind of tell them what you're thinking, how you're feeling… If you haven't been here longer than the other players have, you're just not going to have the same level of comfort and confidence.

(Rose)

Eleanor described different roles across classes:

*I think there's roles in all different classes. And I don't necessarily think that it's seniors who have to be the captains, I think it could be sophomores, I think it could be freshmen, if they're willing to take that role and do it well, I think everybody will respect that.*

(Eleanor)

Blake does not see a correlation between class standing and leadership: “*I feel like no matter what your age is or the class you're in, I feel like, leadership is leadership at the end of the day.*” However, he does see a correlation between athletic skill and leadership positions: “*Captains, a lot of times, captains are your highly skilled players, and sometimes they are leaders.*” Each team and each participant had their own opinion and experience as it related to the confluence of leadership roles, class standing, captains, and team leadership culture. This demonstrates an outstanding opportunity for further research on this topic.

**Leadership Learning.** All of the participants in this study agreed that leadership is not merely learned in a classroom or from books, but rather from experiences which aligns with concepts of social and situated learning shared in Chapter 2 (Lave & Wenger, 1990). However, the findings were inconsistent in terms of the best way for student athletes to learn leadership and reflections on this topic ranged from learning leadership from one’s parents, as was in Jordan’s case, to learning leadership from a mentor, as was Kevin’s case, to learning leadership from
one’s coach, as was Xander’s case, or to learning leadership from one’s teammates, as was Beatrice’s case. While all of the participants did identify moments when they learned or developed leadership in the context of sport, Carter also shared that “you don't have to have learned everything about leadership from softball. It could be...in family or ... and general things that you do. ... I think you can learn it from anywhere.”

**Conclusion**

*If you aren't bought in and aren't trying to make things work with someone, then it's pointless. In my opinion, no one wants to follow a leader that's all about himself. To be a leader and have leadership characteristics, you have to be selfless, you have to be loyal, honest, you have to have integrity, you have to be responsible.* (Maddy)

In summary, through qualitative research conducted with 12 participants, the findings of this research indicate that the leadership experiences of student athlete leaders do not align with current models of leadership that present leadership development as a staged and scaffolded experience. Instead, they experience leadership through a specific set of leadership values and behaviors that are uniquely and collectively cultivated in the context of sport. This study found that the common leadership values of collegiate athletes are self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment, growth mindset and competitive purpose. This study also found that these are practiced through the leadership behaviors of student athlete integrity, modeling, influence, communication, trust, unity, sacrifice, resilience, work ethic, and discipline. While some of the themes that emerged from this study, presented as leadership values and behaviors, are not unusual in the context of leader or leadership development, they do represent a very unique collection of leadership values and behaviors that more specifically define and
describe the unique leadership experiences of collegiate student athletes. Alone, these values and behaviors are not collectively housed within an existing student leadership identity development model and provide a solid, research-based foundation for a student athlete leadership identity development model to emerge based upon the specific leadership values and behaviors embraced and expressed by student athlete leaders. This study also found that student athletes view leadership as a position and as a process, and that the relationships cultivated in sport are critical to their experiences as student athlete leaders.

These findings are further explored in Chapter 5 through the proposal of a Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model that represents the leadership values and behaviors most salient to this student population. Chapter 5 concludes with discussion, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

In this chapter, I present the conclusions and implications of this study. I conclude that student athlete leaders experience leadership in a unique way, specific to the context of sport. This experience is not directly aligned with any existing model for student leadership development and does not occur in a linear, staged, or scaffolded way but does reflect a core set of leadership values and behaviors that are foundational to the leadership development experiences of collegiate student athletes. These values and behaviors emerged from the five overarching themes and ten subthemes that were constructed from the data analysis and are represented in a proposed Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model presented in this chapter. This model and its component parts would be instrumental in helping to support the growth and development of collegiate student athlete leaders. This model is reflective of the specific leadership values and behaviors experienced by this population and could be used in practice as a grounded theory to enhance student development, promote leadership learning through sport, and to reimagine coach and captain roles. I conclude with opportunities for future research.

My originally established research questions included:

1. What are the staged, scaffolded leadership identity development experiences of collegiate student athletes?

2. What are the common leadership values and behaviors of collegiate student athletes and how are they practiced?

In relation to question one, collegiate student athletes do not experience leadership in staged, scaffolded ways as other leadership models present. Their leadership experiences do not align with current models of leadership that are staged and scaffolded, as was demonstrated in Chapter
4. Instead, they experience leadership through a specific set of leadership values and behaviors that are uniquely and collectively cultivated in the context of sport. In relation to question two, the common leadership values of collegiate athletes are self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment, growth mindset and competitive purpose. These are practiced through the leadership behaviors of student athlete integrity, modeling, influence, communication, trust, unity, sacrifice, resilience, work ethic, and discipline. Student athlete leaders experience leadership as both a position and as a process, and meaningful relationships are critical to their leadership experience. These findings were further expanded upon in detail in the prior chapter and are discussed in the sections that follow as implications for a Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model.

Discussion

This chapter proposes a Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model based upon my research, the existing literature, and my experiences. The model (depicted in Figure 36) presents a comprehensive leadership development model that describes the leadership values and behaviors specific to the experiences of student athlete leaders. The model includes the leadership values of self-awareness, meaningful relationships, selfless commitment, growth mindset, and competitive purpose and the leadership behaviors of integrity, modeling, communication, influence, trust, unity, sacrifice, resilience, work ethic, and discipline. These leadership values and behaviors were shared in the findings of Chapter 4 as the most salient themes and sub-themes that emerged from this study. The Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model provides a comprehensive resource to further define and describe the leadership experiences, values and behaviors unique to collegiate student athletes and may be
aligned to existing models or implemented into practice in ways that enrich the leadership learning of this student population.

As depicted in Figure 36, the leadership behaviors are physically aligned above and below their corresponding value, and color coded to demonstrate alignment. Three of the overarching values are centered in the model as three unique domains. Centered in the model is the value of Meaningful Relationships. This value is positioned intentionally to represent that leadership and sport is a relationship in itself and to signify the importance of cultivating and sustaining meaningful relationships as a self aware, selfless leader. In this regard the value of Meaningful Relationships serves as a connection point between the other two values of Self-Awareness and Selfless Commitment. They are not depicted as overlapping, but are encircled with two additional overarching values of Competitive Purpose and Growth Mindset which are positioned as such to demonstrate their relationship across all leadership values and behaviors depicted in the model. The proposed Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model presents a comprehensive leadership development model that describes the leadership values and behaviors specific to the experiences of student athlete leaders. These are further detailed and discussed in the sections that follow.
As outlined in Chapter 2, there are several theoretical models and approaches to define and shape the leadership identity development of college students including the Leadership Identity Development Model, the Social Change Model, Emotionally Intelligent Leadership and Servant Leadership, however, none of them adequately frames the specific leadership identity development of collegiate student athletes in the unique way that this model presents (Allen et al., 2016; Dugan, 2017; Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014; Komives et al., 2006; Komives & Wagner, 2017; Northouse, 2019; Salovey et al., 2002; Voight, 2016). However, some aspects of the model proposed through this study do harken back to some of the elements embedded within existing leadership models including the Leadership Identity Development
Model, the Social Change Model, Emotionally Intelligent Leadership and Servant Leadership (Allen et al., 2016; Cilente, 2009; Greenleaf, 1970; Komives et al., 2006; Komives & Wagner, 2017). These aspects include the student athlete leadership values and behaviors of integrity, modeling, self-awareness, influence, meaningful relationships, unity, sacrifice and resilience which can be found in iterations of previously published leadership models, although not cohesively or collectively and often not referenced in the same vernacular this proposed model provides (Allen, et al., 2016; Cilente, 2009; Dweck, 2016; George & Sims, 2007; Greenleaf, 1972; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Komives & Wagner, 2017; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Ledesma, 2014; Salovey, et al., 2002; Shankman, 2008). These are reflected in Table 12 and are important to note, as components of the existing models referenced in this study may not be comprehensive enough to fully represent the student athlete leadership experience, aspects of these existing models when appropriately aligned with the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development model presented within this study may still prove to be helpful tools through which to teach and engage students in dialogue or programs related to the specific elements of the model.
### Table 12

*Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model Alignment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model Component</th>
<th>Alignment to Existing Model</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Social Change Model: Congruence (Cilente, 2009); Trait Theory (Kirkpatrick &amp; Locke, 1991)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership: Model the Way (Kouzes &amp; Posner, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Awareness</td>
<td>Social Change Model: Consciousness of Self (Cilente, 2009); Emotional Intelligence: Consciousness of Self (Shankman &amp; Allen, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Some alignment within Servant Leadership tenets of listening and persuasion (Spears, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive Purpose</td>
<td>Social Change Model: Common Purpose (Cilente, 2009); Authentic Leadership: Purpose (George &amp; Sims, 2007); no direct alignment on competition or aligning competition and purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model Component, cont.</td>
<td>Alignment to Existing Model, cont.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful Relationships</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence: Consciousness of Others (Shankman &amp; Allen, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>No direct alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>Social Change Model: Common Purpose (Cilente, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1972)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Resilience Theory (Ledesma, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfless Commitment</td>
<td>Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1972); Social Change Model: Commitment (Cilente, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Ethic</td>
<td>No direct alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>No direct alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth Mindset</td>
<td>Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the sections that follow, each leadership value and corresponding leadership behaviors constructed from this study are detailed and further described through the lens of a Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development model, with opportunities for alignment with existing models noted.

**Self-awareness**

Self-awareness refers to the ability to know and lead yourself exceptionally well. As a leadership value, Self-awareness, is inclusive of the following leadership concepts: vulnerability, confidence, self-esteem, consciousness of self, authenticity, consistency, congruence, integrity, emotional awareness, communication, listening, encouragement, affirmation, giving and receiving feedback, motivation, leading by example, initiative, influence, support, energy, joy,
charisma, presence, inspiration, engagement, passion, enthusiasm and optimism. In existing literature, Self-awareness aligns with the Consciousness of Self elements of both the Social Change Model and the Emotional Intelligence Model (Cilente, 2009; Shankman and Allen, 2008).

In summary, self aware student athlete leaders know their strengths and areas of opportunity, use their authentic voice to show up consistently and confidently in all they do, act with integrity and in congruence with their individual and team values, provide clear and authentic communication, encouragement and feedback, and serve as a role model or “lead by example” by offering motivation, support, influence and inspiration to teammates and community members. Self-awareness is to know yourself, manage yourself, and lead yourself in a way that positively inspires, influences, and impacts others. A self-aware student athlete leader knows what he or she can contribute to the team, both on and off the field or court. He or she uses their influence to model the behavior they desire in their teammates and to uphold and remain congruent to team values. A self-aware student athlete leader leads with integrity and inspires their teammates to do the same. Lastly, a self-aware student athlete leader is able to communicate verbally and non-verbally to their teammates, coaches, and constituents in a way that represents themselves, their sport, and their university in a positive light. Self-Awareness in sport includes the athletic intelligence to step up and step back, and to know your role in the context of the larger organization. The leadership behaviors associated with self-awareness follow and are depicted in figure 37.
To demonstrate integrity, athlete leaders must “walk their talk” and put plainly, do what they say they will do. Integrity also represents a student athlete leader’s ability to lead themselves honestly and authentically even when no one is watching. It is the ability to always strive to do what is honest, just, and true and to uphold one’s personal values despite pressures from coaches, teammates, or community members. This leadership behavior is also inclusive of other behaviors that emerged categorically in the research such as honesty, consistency, congruence, and authenticity. Existing research aligns the leadership behavior of integrity with the concept of congruence in the Social Change Model and elements of trait theory (Cliente, 2009; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991).
**Modeling**

Student Athlete leaders must lead by example or model the behavior one desires to see in others and the behavior that is reflective of their individual and team values. Oftentimes modeling may include arriving to practice early, putting in extra effort, being a positive role model and example for younger players and on behalf of the university, and doing the right things on and off the court, field, pitch, etc. This leadership behavior is representative of other leadership behaviors that emerged categorically in the research including initiative, support, engagement, enthusiasm, passion, and optimism. Existing research aligns the leadership behavior of modeling with the concept of Model the Way, one of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, a popularly referenced transformational leadership approach (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

**Influence**

Influence refers to a leader’s ability to actively and intentionally motivate and inspire others to achieve their personal best. It is the ability to inspire change and improvement in others and to have an established leadership presence within your team. This leadership behavior is also representative of leadership behaviors that categorically emerged in the research including motivation, inspiration, and presence. The leadership behavior of influence aligns with existing research related to the capacity of Inspiring Others as outlined in the Emotional Intelligence Model (Shankman & Allen, 2008) and Inspiring a Shared Vision in Kouzes & Posner’s (2007) model.

**Communication**

As a leadership behavior, student athlete leaders need to demonstrate strong communication skills during team play, practice, and in those moments outside of competition
where they are connecting formally and informally with coaches, teammates, and constituents. Communication includes verbal and non-verbal communication, encouraging and affirming communication, the ability to be the voice of the coaching staff during competition, and the ability to listen and take direction. Communication also includes giving and receiving feedback and knowing when to speak up and when to step back. This leadership behavior is inclusive of other behaviors that categorically emerged in the research including listening, encouragement, affirmation, and feedback and partially aligns with existing approaches in Servant Leadership related to listening and persuasion (Spears, 1996).

**Meaningful Relationships**

Meaningful Relationships refers to the ability to cultivate and sustain meaningful relationships with teammates, coaches, and community members. It encompasses the values and behaviors needed to sustain deep, transformational relationships as well as the outputs of those relationships that result in a thriving team. It also represents the concept that sport and leadership are both relationships in themselves, and neither can exist without the engagement of others. As shared in the previous chapter, this study revealed that student athlete leaders see leadership as both a position and as a process. Participants in this study often described the act of leadership through a positional lens, describing traits of individuals rather than the aspects of the leadership process when asked to define leadership. However, they all agreed that leaders in sport were not necessarily those given the title of captain or coach—but those who developed and demonstrated specific leadership values and behaviors in the context of sport, and thereby enacted the process of leadership through the meaningful relationships they cultivated with coaches and teammates. If leadership is indeed both a position and a process, the meaningful relationships value of this model is the link between the two.
Some of the categories that coalesced to generate this value and its embedded behaviors include team, collaboration, unity, trust, respect, empathy, culture, diversity, relationships, brotherhood, and sisterhood.

In summary, meaningful relationships are the foundation of a strong team culture and can only be cultivated with intentionality and a spirit of collaboration, trust, and respect. The ability to develop meaningful relationships quickly, authentically, willingly, and intentionally is a unique leadership behavior that is critical to the student athlete leadership experience. Meaningful relationships have the capacity to translate individual athletic success into a thriving, synergistic team with the capacity to reach their shared goals and team success. A student athlete leader who is able to build and maintain meaningful relationships is able to transform a group of strangers into a highly functioning team. They are able to connect and transform individuals into a community. The ability to cultivate meaningful relationships involves the ability to build trust and unity upon the foundational commonality of sport. The leadership behaviors associated with meaningful relationships follow and are depicted in figure 38. The leadership value of Meaningful Relationships aligns with existing research on Emotional Intelligence’s Consciousness of Others (Shankman & Allen, 2008).
Within the context of sport, trust among teammates and coaches is critical and is a shared experience among student athlete leaders. Trust in this context refers to the unflappable belief that one’s teammate is going to uphold their responsibilities and hold sacred their role and the livelihood and success of their team. It is the ability to rely upon the integrity of others, to rely upon one’s teammates to commit to a shared team culture and team values, to believe one’s teammates will consistently show up and do their job, to depend upon one’s teammates to live and lead with dignity and respect, and to confidently count on the man or woman to one’s left or right. In many sports, trust is also critical to preserving the physical safety or wellbeing of
teammates. This leadership behavior is representative of other behaviors that categorically emerged in the research including respect, relationships, diversity, safety, and empathy and is not tied directly to any existing leadership models referenced in this study.

**Unity**

Like trust, unity is something that student athlete leaders can cultivate over time. It takes shape in many different ways, often reflective of team cultures, and can be facilitated by student athlete leaders in ways that are both large and small. Unity can show up in team chants, team huddles, a team mindset, team culture, or simply in extending a hand to help a teammate up off of the court or the field. Unity shows up in how an athlete prepares, how an athlete wins, and how an athlete loses. For many student athlete leaders, this can be described as “having your back.” This behavior is representative of other leadership behaviors that categorically emerged in the research including team, collaboration, loyalty, and culture. Unity finds some alignment in existing leadership models with the “common” of the Social Change Model’s Common Purpose (Cilente, 2009).

**Selfless Commitment**

In the context of leadership in sport, selfless commitment refers to a student athlete’s ability to lead selflessly and to commit to something greater than themselves, with the dedication, discipline, resilience, and grit needed to overcome any challenges that may come their way. Some of the categories that coalesced to generate this value and its embedded behaviors include: grit, resilience, work ethic, perseverance, hustle, toughness, selflessness, sacrifice, servant leadership, commitment, responsibility, accountability, strength, effort, discipline, self-control and dedication. These categories align, somewhat, with the existing leadership models: Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1972) and the commitment element of the Social Change Model (Cilente, 2009). Selfless commitment reflects a student athlete leader’s
unselfish motivation to sacrifice for the greater good and a genuine desire to act for the benefit of others. Selfless commitment reflects a student athlete leader’s understanding that their time on their team is limited, often less than four years, but their impact can extend beyond their time on the team. Selfless commitment is about living and leading your legacy through your sport. A student athlete leader who demonstrates selfless commitment is willing to make difficult choices for the benefit of their team, and demonstrate grit and resilience in the face of loss and adversity. A student athlete leader with selfless commitment will show up to practice early, or stay late after a game—modelling strong work ethic and a commitment to their craft. And lastly, a student athlete leader with selfless commitment will maintain the discipline and commitment needed to hold themselves and their teammates to a higher standard of success. The leadership behaviors associated with selfless commitment follow and are depicted in Figure 39.

**Figure 39**

*Selfless Commitment Values and Behaviors*
**Sacrifice**

A salient leadership behavior, perhaps more present in the context of sport than in most other environments, is the concept of sacrifice. Student athlete leaders sacrifice their time, their personal lives, their extracurricular involvement, points scored, minutes played, moments in the spotlight, holidays spent with family, vacations, intended academic pursuits, and ultimately their bodies all in the name of their sport. To sacrifice, a student athlete leader first needs to be committed—committed to their team culture, committed to their sport, committed to their teammates, committed to their school, and ultimately committed to leadership. There is no sacrifice without commitment, belief or buy in. With that in mind, the leadership behavior of sacrifice aligns in part with Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1972) and the commitment element of the Social Change Model (Cilente, 2009). A true student athlete leader is willing to sacrifice for their team—for the greater good. They play without an ego and without a need for personal fame or attention. It is one of the most integral, foundational elements of a student athlete leader’s DNA. This leadership behavior is representative of other behaviors that emerged categorically in the research including commitment, servant leadership, and selflessness.

**Resilience**

Resilience is a critical aspect of a student athlete leader’s success, and is the behavior that determines how a student athlete responds to loss and bounces back for the next opportunity. While there are many recent works related to resilience in education and in communities (Duckworth, 2016; Ledesma, 2014), no existing leadership model includes resilience as a core value or leadership behavior. As it relates to student athlete leadership identity development, there is no leadership without it. One would be hard-pressed to find a field or experience where one has to so frequently and readily fail and get back up again. This leadership behavior is
representative of other leadership behaviors that categorically emerged in the research including grit, perseverance, toughness, and strength.

**Work Ethic**

Being a student athlete requires a certain level of industriousness and work ethic, and student athlete leaders are the individuals on the team to model that expectation for others. Work ethic can be demonstrated by leaders as putting in extra time at practice, prioritizing their academic pursuits, and giving their full effort in every play, every practice, and every game. Student athlete leaders model their work ethic by never giving up, never complaining, and always being willing to push harder, farther, faster than the day before. Oftentimes work ethic is described in the physicality of sport, but it also relates to a student athlete leader’s commitment to watching film, studying plays, and committing to a health and wellness regiment. This leadership behavior is representative of other behaviors that emerged categorically in the research including hustle and dedication and is not currently referenced in an existing leadership model.

**Discipline**

Discipline in sport extends to a student athlete leader’s ability to manage time, expectations, and emotional responses. It relates to self-control, timeliness, preparation, self-management and autonomy. Discipline as a student athlete leader requires maturity and ownership, and it means holding oneself and one’s teammates responsible and accountable for their own actions, and inactions despite how challenging circumstances may be.

This behavior is representative of other leadership behaviors that emerged categorically in the research including responsibility, accountability, and self-control. Discipline is not currently referenced in an existing leadership model.
**Growth Mindset**

The concept of having a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset is a consistent theme that emerged through this study, so significantly in fact that it has been identified as a leadership value that encircles or encompasses all of the others in the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model. The placement of growth mindset alongside competitive purpose as a value that encircles all others represents its connection to all of the other leadership values and behaviors within the model. Growth mindset is often used in elementary and secondary education to refer to a student’s belief that they can develop intelligence overtime (Dweck, 2010). In the context of sport, it refers to a student athlete leader’s ability to engage in deep, purposeful learning- both as it relates to leadership and as it relates to their sport (Dweck, 2010). Specifically, as an overarching value in this model, growth mindset refers to a student athlete leader’s ability to develop skills and abilities, translating to leadership behaviors, through dedication, hard work, self-awareness, resilience, and relational chemistry.

**Competitive Purpose**

Competitive purpose refers to the shared purpose of student athlete leaders to perform at their personal and team best with the goal of shared success, often framed as winning. The joining of the two concepts of competition and purpose into a cohesive value that joins Growth Mindset in serving as an overarching value within this model adeptly describes a common experience among student athlete leaders who share a competitive purpose. This value in particular is unique in the context of leadership, as it positions competition as a positive leadership value when aligned with a purposeful goal or cause. At the end of the day, athletes want to win. And while winning may not be everything, it is certainly something and is a critical aspect of what it means to be a student athlete leader. Even if student athlete leaders do not
always win, and they do not, the goal, the *purpose* is still to strive for winning and to cultivate the self-awareness, meaningful relationships, and selfless commitment needed to make winning a reality. This value is representative of other leadership and sport concepts that emerged in the research including purpose, skill, experience, position, playing time, focus, strategy, tempo, alertness, urgency, and winning. While there is no direct linkage of competitive purpose to an existing model, purpose aligns with concepts of purpose found in both the Social Change Model (Cilente, 2009) and in the Authentic Leadership Model (George & Sims, 2007).

**Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study address the lack of knowledge that specifically defines and frames the leadership experiences of collegiate student athletes and fills the historical gap that has existed between current leadership models and the lived experiences of the student athlete populations (Fransen et al., 2014). These findings also provide a research-based approach to address the lack of consistency in student athlete leadership development content delivery, program implementation, and measurement of impact or effectiveness (Voight, 2016) by proposing a leadership model that more specifically describes the student athlete leadership identity experience. Instead of practitioners attempting to apply existing leadership theories and models to this sub-population of students in a “one size fits all” approach that vastly underserves and underrepresents the unique experiences of this student population (Hall, 2015), this model proposes a grounded theory from an exploratory study to describe the leadership values and behaviors specific to student athletes. This allows for more explicit and direct engagement of student athlete leaders and a framework upon which athletic departments could begin to build a system-wide leadership culture to help define and shape both the position and the process of leadership in sport. The findings of this study provide valuable and theoretically rooted
information for scholars and practitioners to better support the experiences of student athletes and for collegiate leadership programs to be strategically structured to meet the unique leadership needs of this student population, however, it is worth noting that this is an exploratory study based upon the lived experiences of 12 athletes and one institution, so additional empirical research is needed before this model can be fully and universally applied. Faculty, staff, coaches, and leadership practitioners within higher education can use the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model as one resource to better inform and scaffold specific programming for student athlete leaders. With additional empirical research, higher education fundraising professionals could also communicate the model’s embedded leadership values and behaviors to potential funders to demonstrate broad based value and impact, and higher education Career Consultants could use this model to express to employers the skills and abilities the student athlete population is capable of bringing with them into the workforce. As the body of research on this particular model grows, academic programs could be built around this model, thereby supporting a number of Kuh’s (2012) high impact practices for student success. Student athlete advising programs could also be shaped with this theory in mind. And, perhaps most importantly, student athlete leaders would have an extensively and empirically researched grounded theory through which to best describe their lived experiences and the value they bring to higher education and the community at large.

My findings support previous research which indicates that student athlete leadership behavior supports team success (Worley et al., 2020) and athlete leaders impact team cohesion, confidence, and satisfaction (Fransen et al., 2014). However, it also addresses the lack of research to specifically indicate what those behaviors are, how they are cultivated, and how they are theoretically framed. In short, similar to other subpopulations on college campuses that
researchers have demonstrated to have unique experiences in college, the student athlete population is a subpopulation that is half-a-million students strong any given year, with no existing leadership model to describe their experiences until now. The Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model also proposes a new concept in leadership and sport in the form of Competitive Purpose. This finding presents a new, unique concept to the field and provides an opportunity for further research and exploration.

As leadership can be learned and developed in the context of sport, the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model proposed by this study can be used as an initial, exploratory theory to better support and frame the student athlete leadership experience on college campuses across the world. With additional research to further support the efficacy and transferability of the grounded theory and the resulting model, if implemented effectively, this model could serve as a jumping off point for the development of half-a-million collegiate student athletes each year and the collegiate athlete experience on the whole (NCAA, 2020). This grounded theory could help to more intentionally frame student athlete development programs, the roles of coaches and captains, and approach leadership learning through situated and social learning models. Specifically, if the values and behaviors identified within the model are woven throughout a student athlete’s experience and taught through the lens of situated and social learning, and within a community of practice, deeper leadership learning and practice can occur. While this leadership learning and practice as framed within the context of the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model undoubtedly has benefits specific to individual student leaders, the participants in this study would also suggest that this leadership learning would have an overall impact on team culture and success as Worley’s (2020) earlier research indicates. This presents an opportunity for further research.
Specific implications for practice related to student development, leadership learning, and engagement of coaches and captains in relation to this grounded theory follow.

**Student Development**

As Weaver’s research has indicated, leadership programming and education has increased across college campuses, yet intercollegiate athletics is still relatively new to implementing a leadership development program or integrating leadership models into daily practice (Weaver, 2015). The participants in this study indicated, similar to what existing research has already informed, that universities do not consistently provide specific leadership training to student athletes, often due to their already packed schedules, lack of departmental talent or divisional buy-in, or the all-too-often limited resources (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014). In a best-case scenario, an alumni student athlete who was able to advance to the next level of their athletic career will come back and share their lessons learned, but there has not historically been a leadership model or theoretical foundation to inform these conversations (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et al., 2014) and most participants in this study admitted to never having experienced any formal leadership programming through their sport. Likely due to the lack of having a consistent or researched framework or model in place, a number of universities around the country have attempted to facilitate their own student athlete leadership development programs with no standard, or student-athlete specific leadership identity development model in place. This number is on the rise and has been met with varying degrees of success (Voight & Hickey, 2016). The Student Athlete Identity Development Model that has resulted from this study could provide a model to serve as a foundational cornerstone for student athlete development programs around the country. Programs will no longer have to rely on untrained staff, or overloaded campus partners who do not have the content expertise that
requires knowledge of both the student athlete experience, and leadership theory. Instead, the resulting model from this study could inform scholars, practitioners, coaches, students, athletic staff, and advisors alike so that student athletes are receiving a comprehensive, consistent, and intentional leadership identity development experience specific to their needs. In Voight & Hickey’s (2016) content analysis of NCAA Division 1 leadership programs it was revealed that 75% of Division 1 student athletes were offered no leadership identity development experiences at all. Of the 25% who were, the delivery was inconsistent across a variety of delivery methods. Table 13 includes recommendations for how programs may implement this model within their athletic programs. These are not exclusive of all implementation options and are not mutually exclusive of each other, but does provide an initial roadmap to translate the grounded theory into practice at varying levels of engagement, remembering that this study is only intended to produce a grounded theory, resulting in a partial model, that without further empirical research may not fully apply to all athletic programs, sports, or collegiate athletic structures.

Table 13

Student Athlete Identity Development Implementation Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1: Passive Implementation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This includes light touch-points throughout a student athlete’s experience to expose them to the model and to create co-curricular experiences based on the model that students may elect to engage in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Introduce the Model to Athletic Department Faculty and Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Introduce the Model to athletes in a meeting or workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Plan co-curricular events based on the model (thematic speaker series, workshop, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Build the model into existing award structures</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Facilitate a community wide common-read or conference for student athletes that focuses on an aspect or aspects of the model</td>
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### Level 2: Targeted Implementation

This includes more targeted approach to implementation, focusing on providing curricular and co-curricular opportunities to engage specific roles, age groups, teams, or organizations. It is possible to facilitate a passive and targeted implementation simultaneously (passive for all, but targeted for captains, for example). Some or all could be simultaneously implemented from this list, dependent upon interest and investment.

- Identity a specific group or groups within the student athlete community and provide more robust, targeted engagement within the model. Groups could include: first year athletes, seniors, student athlete advisory committee members, nominees per sport, captains, redshirt athletes, a specific team, etc.
- Identify a specific group of staff who can target student support within the model and provide training for them to embed the model within their practice (student athlete academic support staff, coaching staff, career advisors, counseling staff, etc.)
- Identify (or allow students to self-identify or solicit nominations from coaches) a population to engage in more targeted Student Athlete Identity Development curricular implementation including an academic leadership course built upon the elements of the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model. The course would be a survey course which would lightly cover all content in the course of a semester.
- Identify (or allow students to self-identify or have nominations from coaches) a population to engage in a service-learning immersion program which allows participants to engage the model in a service-oriented setting (local or abroad).
- Identify (or allow students to self-identify or have nominations from coaches) a population to engage in more targeted Student Athlete Identity Development co-curricular programs including a series of skill-development workshops built specifically upon the elements of the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model. The workshop series would include a weekly engagement that would extend over a 15-week (semester long) period, culminating in an opportunity for celebration and recognition.

### Level 3: Holistic Implementation

This includes a fully integrated approach by the entire athletic department that offers both depth and breadth of content and engagement related to the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model. This becomes part of the department’s culture and all athletes and athletic department staff are active participants and stewards of the model.

- Introduce the Model to Athletic Department Faculty and Staff with expectations for how they integrate it into their work.
- Hire a Student Athlete Leadership Coordinator or embed this role into an existing position so there is ownership in enacting the model holistically.
- Introduce the Model to all athletes in a meeting or launch workshop; reinforce the model in team meetings and set team goals and expectations based upon the model.
- Recruit new athletes and staff using the model as the leadership framework for the department.
- Embed in new athlete and new athletic staff orientation.
- Brand athletic events and opportunities using the model.
- Engage teams in a common-read focusing on one element of the model every semester
- Develop an internal system (co-curricular transcript, etc.) to track student participation in the model
- Scaffold the content so that students experience different aspects of the model in different years of their eligibility:
  - Year 1: Selfless Commitment and Competitive Purpose
  - Year 2: Meaningful Relationships
  - Year 3: Growth Mindset
  - Year 4: Self-awareness
- Embed Year 1 content within a first-year seminar course that all students participate in
- Embed Year 2 content within a retreat or teambuilding day and through a mentorship program
- Embed Year 3 content in a yearlong workshop series or quarterly conference and in advising conversations with career/academic advisors and coaches
- Embed Year 4 content in a senior capstone leadership course for student athletes (look for academic partners in sport management, business/management, liberal studies, communications, or leadership departments to help support)

**Leadership Learning**

While learning is often considered a formal activity that happens in a classroom, the findings of this study imply that leadership learning also occurs in the context of one’s sport. This aligns with Lave’s (2009) work previously addressed in Chapter 2 which suggests that learning is situated, embedded within one’s activity, context, and culture. Situated learning theory attempts to bridge the gap between education and application and asserts that learning occurs through practice, specifically communities of practice that are often influenced by a social theory of learning (Lave, 2009; Wenger, 2015). The implications of this study related to situated learning would indicate that leadership learning in sport occurs through practice in the context of sport, within a sport-based community of practice. As Lave (2009) posits, situated learning theory defines learning as knowledge that occurs in an authentic context and incorporates social engagement and collaboration. In this study the authentic context is sport, and the team environment promotes social engagement and collaboration. Specifically, the findings of this study support the work of Masika & Jones (2015) which suggests that over time, when examined
through the lens of social learning theory, learning becomes less formal and more dynamic connecting community, practice, meaning, and identity in a way that produces engagement, alignment, and imagination. Specific to this study, informal learning occurs through the connections of the athletic community, the practice of leading in sport, making meaning of your leadership experiences in sport, and cultivating a student athlete leadership identity.

Situated learning involves communities of practice which are formed when individuals share a process of collective learning and in doing so their shared passion or commitment propels them to learn more and do better as a result (Wenger, 2009). The findings of this study align with Kirk & Kinchin’s (2004) specific identification of the community of sport as a community of practice, as team members relate their learning to the community of sport as a whole, the community of their specific sport, and even in some instances the community of their specific position. This aligns with the prior findings of Christensen et al. (2011) who suggest sport-based communities of practice may take form via a team-based community of practice, and a smaller position-specific community of practice. This study also aligns with Christensen et al.’s (2011) previous findings related to sport-based communities of practice which suggests that teams develop a culture that results in collective stories, skills, expectations, language, symbology, songs, and concepts that define and drive their community through the context of their sport. These skills, expectations, and concepts within a community of practice are well aligned with leadership skills, expectations, and concepts that each of this study’s participants shared as significant to their lived leadership experience in sport.

Lastly, Kirk & MacDonald (1998) assert that situated learning allows educators to expand their focus on the learner from an isolated individual to the social settings that “construct and constitute the individual as a learner” (p. 380). Their testament to learning as social in nature, refers
to the interactions between the learners and others, as well as with the environment itself. The implications of this study should be used to help educators identify sport as the social setting that constructs and constitutes student athlete leaders as learners. In doing so, practitioners can cultivate student athlete leaders within their communities of practice to leverage the social context of sport as a powerful vehicle for leadership learning and meaning making through the use of the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model. This can be done through embedding the model intentionally into team meetings, guided reflection, intentional programming, retreat settings, common-reads, experiential learning opportunities, and simply by providing student athletes and those who support them with the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development model as one limited resource that may help to promote leadership learning in communities of practice through the use of a grounded theory approach.

**Coaches and Captains**

Until this point, lacking a leadership identity development model specific to student athletes, researchers have demonstrated that student athlete leaders tend to be identified most often as the team’s skilled performers, individuals with critical playing positions, and/or the team’s veteran players (Duguay, 2018). As this study has demonstrated that student athlete leaders do not exclusively see the team’s most skilled or most experienced athletes as the legitimate leaders of their teams, the findings of this study imply that many teams require a culture shift related to how leadership is seen, understood, and experienced within sport. As the participants in this study see leadership as both a position and a process, coaches should consider ways to cultivate leadership at all levels within the team, and not presume or align it only with those seen as having the most experience or athletic talent.
Additionally, the findings of this study align with Weaver’s (2015) research which indicates that the athletic team and departmental structures tend to promote the slow growth of a student athlete, which allows for the emphasized growth of the positional leader. Many athletes in this study suggested that while leadership exists at all levels within team settings, that oftentimes it goes unnoticed due to existing structural barriers. The findings of this study align with Weaver’s (2015) suggestions that the role and selection of team captain is an example of hierarchical, positional leadership that one may witness in sport, but that these roles often come with no instruction, development, skill, or competency needed to navigate unfamiliar leadership terrain. This study would further imply that team captain roles are often seen as unnecessary and superfluous with no more responsibility than identifying team uniforms for practice, however, the findings related to the captain role were inconsistent in this study and are the subject of future research. Ultimately, this study would suggest that if captains are used on teams that they are used with intent and expected impact. As Weaver (2015) suggests, these positional leaders should be given adequate leadership training to be successful in these given leadership roles and the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model provides a framework through which to deliver this training and the expected leadership values and behaviors associated with their positional leadership role.

As it relates to growth mindset, a 2008 study of leadership in NCAA coaching staff revealed that growth mindset impacted coaching style and positions (Chase, Galli, Myers, and Machida, 2008). Specifically, this study revealed that head coaches perceived their coaching ability through a growth mindset and assistant coaches viewed their leadership ability through a fixed mindset (Chase et al., 2008). The implications of this are vast, as previous research indicates that coaches with a fixed mindset may not have long-term athletic success in the form
of wins, and that these coaches struggle to improve, thereby creating leadership cultures with their athletes built upon fear and lack of effort (Chase, 2010). As the findings of this study indicate and previous research supports, a growth mindset in a team environment is critical for leadership to occur, and that mindset is important in students and coaches alike.

Ultimately, this study informs some and reminds others that being a star athlete and a star leader are not synonymous and supports existing research which suggests that coaches should cultivate opportunities to share leadership responsibilities with student athletes beyond the traditional, positional leadership role of captain (Weaver, 2015). This model can be used to support coach performance and captain engagement by providing common leadership values and behaviors upon which to create a team leadership culture that extends from the coach, to the captains, to players, and recruits. Coaches can use the model to select captains, and captains can use the model to inform their own leadership learning and to better understanding the leadership identity experiences of their teammates through formal and informal opportunities for reflection and practice.

**Future Research**

This study was conducted in the year following the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic which had substantial impacts on higher education and intercollegiate athletics. Undoubtedly, this impacted participation, team culture, and resulting data. The impact of COVID-19 on the experience of student athletes, athletic programs as a whole, and the leadership experiences of student athletes provides a wealth of opportunity for future research within this field, as it likely does for many others.

Additionally, this study only describes the leadership experiences of intercollegiate athletes competing in NCAA Division 1 team sports enrolled at a mid-size urban, public
institution in the mid-south. There is tremendous opportunity for further research on this model, and on the values and behaviors embedded within this model, to determine its applicability and efficacy across student athlete leader populations. Further empirical research is needed to determine its applicability to a wider range of students and sports. Further research is also needed to determine the unique impacts of this model as it relates to specific populations of student athletes including race, nationality, gender, and class. Additionally, as this study did not engage student athletes at smaller, public, faith based, or rural institutions or athletes at the high school or professional level there is opportunity to further research the application of this model to those specific populations.

Additional concepts that came up in this study that would provide fodder for additional research include the concept of negative leadership in sport, leadership in individual sports versus leadership in team sports, first year leadership experiences of student athletes, and the leadership experiences of team captains within the context of the Student Athlete Leadership Identity Development Model. Additional quantitative research along this topic would also provide additional knowledge, particularly research that could translate the model into a valid and reliable assessment tool to measure leadership identity development of student athletes using an instrument similar to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the Leadership Practices Inventory. Lastly, further research on the newly introduced concept of Competitive Purpose, would provide greater knowledge to the field on this particular phenomenon and the impact it has in collegiate athletics and student athlete leadership identity development.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, leadership is as complex as the student athlete leaders who practice it. And, just as these students train and condition and refine their skill set and build their muscle
mass to excel in their sport, leadership is a muscle that can also be grown, developed, trained, and refined. This study demonstrates that collegiate student athletes experience leadership in unique ways specific to the context of sport. Unlike other leadership identity development models, they do not experience leadership in staged, scaffolded ways that other models present. Instead, they experience leadership through a specific set of leadership values and behaviors that are uniquely and collectively cultivated in the context of sport. These leadership values and behaviors are reflected in the Grounded Theory Student Leadership Identity Development model created through this study. This model can be used to frame student athlete leadership development experiences, refine, and reimagine the roles of coaches and captains, and to teach leadership to student athlete leaders through the lens of situated and social learning theory. This model can transform the experience of student athlete leaders, cultures of athletic departments, leadership structures of teams and coaching staffs, and ultimately the perceived value of sport in higher education and in the workforce, as graduating student athlete leaders transition out of the collegiate environment. As this study demonstrates, leadership is not only for the most athletically skilled, most seasoned, or most title-laden individuals. Leadership is everyone’s job, and is everyone’s opportunity, and cultivating leadership within sport can have powerful impacts on our students, campus, and community if we structure it with intent and through meaningful, theoretically informed practice.
References


and talent development in an age of situated approaches to knowing and learning.

*Educational Psychologist* 37, no. 3: 165–82


Advances in sport and exercise psychology measurement (pp 227-253). Fitness Information Technologies


https://doi.org/10.1002/da.10113


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http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/leadership-development.


Appendix A: Interview Protocol
Semi-structured Interview Protocol

You are being asked to participate in a semi-structured interview for a research project. The purpose of the interview is to investigate the leadership identity development experiences of student athletes. During the interview, you will be asked to respond to several open ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure will involve audio taping the interview, and the recording will be transcribed verbatim. All information collected from you will be confidential and you will not be identified individually.

Please sign the informed consent form signaling your willingness to participate.

To protect your identity in this project, I would like for you to identify a pseudonym, or a name different than your own, that you would like for me to use in my project. Do you have a preferred pseudonym in mind?

Pseudonym: __________________________________

Background Questions:
A. Tell me a little bit about your background- how do you identify your gender, race, socio economic status, etc.?
B. Where are you from?
C. What sport and what position do you play?
D. How old were you when you started playing? How old are you now?
E. Have you played other sports?
F. What year of school are you in? What is your major?

Research Question 1: What is the theory that best describes the staged, scaffolded leadership identity development experiences of collegiate student athletes?

Lead Question 1A: Tell me about your time as a student athlete...

Follow-up questions:
A. You were nominated as a leader on your team to participate in this study. Why do you think you were nominated?
B. Tell me about the time when you first witnessed or experienced leadership in sport? This can go back to childhood if you like.
C. Were you considered to be a leader on your high school team?
D. Tell me about yourself as a leader on your team now.
E. Tell me about the connections between athletic skill and perceived leadership ability in your sport.
F. Tell me how your coaches have influenced team leadership.

**Lead Question 1B: PHOTO-ELICITATION** Using the photo you have brought with you, if you had to describe the steps in your leadership development journey, what steps would those be?

A. How does this showcase the individual steps of your leadership journey? What are those steps? Can you break them down for me?

B. At what age did that journey start and what was the defining moment of that step?

C. What step followed? How would you define that step?

D. What influences in your life impacted this journey?

E. What do you think is the starting point and the end point? Where are you now?

F. Tell me about any key moments or experiences that helped you to grow in this journey?

**LQ1C: What makes a great leader in sport?**

Follow-up questions:

A. What does leadership mean to you?

B. What role does it have in sport?

C. Why is leadership important in sport?

D. What impact does team success have on team leadership?

E. The same question, but conversely- tell me about the impact team leadership has on team success.

F. What impact does class standing have on perceived leadership ability?

G. Have you ever participated in a formal leadership program through your sport, or through the university? Tell me about that OR why do you think that has not been offered?

**LQ1D: How do you define leadership?**

Follow-up questions:

A. How has your definition of leadership changed over time?

B. How does your team define leadership? Is it process or position oriented? Examples?

C. How does that impact team culture or success?

D. Referring back to your photo- how is your definition of leadership depicted here?
RQ2: What are the common leadership values and behaviors of collegiate student athletes and how are they practiced?

$LQ2A$: What do you think are the most important leadership values and behaviors in sport?

Follow-up questions:

A. How do you learn these?

B. How are these developed or influenced in sport, and when?

$LQ2B$: Tell me about the specific experiences that sport provides that you feel cultivates stronger leadership skills?

Follow-up questions:

A. Tell me about your experiences and which leadership skills they helped to cultivate?

B. Many leadership theories and approaches emphasize authenticity and self-awareness. Tell me about how sport promotes or discourages these?

C. Tell me about the way in which resilience or grit factored into your experience as a leader in sport.

D. What do you think are the most important leadership values and behaviors for student athletes?

$LQ2C$ Tell me about a time that you saw yourself or another teammate exercise outstanding leadership and what they exemplified.

Follow-up questions:

A. Tell me about the role of captains as leaders.

B. What leadership traits or behaviors are cultivated in individual sports versus team sports?

C. How do members of the team identify as leaders? Do they join the team as leaders or develop as leaders?

D. What evidence of leadership do you think I would, or would not see, in a team practice?

$LQ2D$: How are the key leadership capacities of student athlete leaders different than those of non student athletes?

A. I am going to read a list of leadership experiences. I want you to tell me when you first practiced each, if ever, ages or years in school would be fine, as would a specific experience:

1. Understanding that leadership exists

2. Exploring opportunities to get engaged or involved in something

3. Identifying someone who is a leader like a coach or a captain
4. Understanding that leadership is a process that anyone can engage in, not just those in specific positions.

5. Committing to something you are passionate about and dedicating your leadership to that passion.

6. Understanding that leadership can happen from anywhere on the team and that walking my talk, and being trustworthy is important in leadership.

B. I am going to read a list of capacities to you, after each I would like for you to tell me if you think it is highly important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all for student athlete leaders. You can use the key 4, 3, 2, 1 if that is easier for you with 4 being the most, 1 being the least:

1. Consciousness of Self
2. Congruence
3. Commitment
4. Collaboration
5. Common Purpose
6. Civility
7. Citizenship
8. Positive Change
9. Emotional self-perception
10. Emotional self-control
11. Authenticity
12. Healthy self-esteem
13. Flexibility
14. Optimism
15. Initiative
16. Achievement
17. Displaying empathy
18. Inspiring others
19. Coaching others
20. Capitalizing on difference
21. Developing relationships
22. Building teams
23. Demonstrating citizenship
24. Managing conflict
25. Facilitating change
26. Analyzing the group
27. Assessing the environment

C. Do you have any capacities that you would add that I did not read aloud?

*What about grit, resilience, passion, dedication, initiative, charisma, strategic thinking, focus, flexibility, ability to navigate change, brotherhood/sisterhood?*

D. What are your top 5?

E. Do you have anything else to add?
## Appendix B: Observation Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site Description:</th>
<th>Observed Leadership Behaviors:</th>
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<th>Observed Leadership Values:</th>
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<th>Observed Leadership Language Used:</th>
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<th>Items for follow up:</th>
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## Appendix C: Informed Consent

### Consent for Research Participation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Student Athlete Leadership Identity Formation: Developing a Theoretical Model to Define The Student Athlete Leadership Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher(s)</td>
<td>Sally G. Parish, University of Memphis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researchers Contact Information</td>
<td>(<a href="mailto:sally.parish@memphis.edu">sally.parish@memphis.edu</a>)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher(s) any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you volunteer, you will be one of about 10 people to do so.

| Key Information for You to Consider |
|---|---|
| **Voluntary Consent**: You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate or discontinue participation. |
| **Purpose**: The purpose of this research is to describe the leadership identity development of student athletes through a grounded theory study. |
| **Duration**: It is expected that your participation will last 3 months. |
| **Procedures and Activities**: You will be asked to participate in an individual interview, a photo-elicited interview, and an observation conducted during a team practice setting. The interview content will include questions about your past and present experiences as a student athlete including leadership experiences, behaviors, and values. You will be asked to bring a photograph to an interview that describes your leadership journey. This photograph cannot contain identifiable information about you or any other individual. |
| **Risk**: No discomforts or stresses are expected during the interview or participant observation process. There are no significant risks to participation in the study. If your reflection on experiences leads to any type of emotional upset, the researcher is prepared to give you contact information for local counseling services and support. |
| **Benefits**: Some of the benefits that may be expected include a greater understanding of your own leadership identity as a student athlete, and a theoretical model that can be used to define and describe that unique leadership identity for other athletes to use for their own growth and development. |
| **Alternatives**: Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate. |

Who is conducting this research? Sally Parish a doctoral candidate at the University of Memphis in the Higher and Adult Education program is in charge of the study. Her faculty advisor is Dr. Edith Gnanadass. 

Why is this research being done? The purpose is to create a theoretical model to define and describe the unique leadership identity development experiences of student athletes competing in Division 1 team sports. You are being invited to participate because a coach or athletic staff member nominated you as a student-athlete competing in team sports who demonstrates outstanding individual or team leadership within their sport.

How long will I be in this research? The research will be conducted at an on-campus site. It will include two in-person one-on-one interviews, and observation of your performance in team practice settings. In total, the study should take about three active hours of
your time. The investigator may reach out with follow up questions within 3 months of your final interview or observation. You will be contacted via email and follow up interviews will occur via phone or zoom. You may decline to respond and will still be included in this research.

What happens if I agree to participate in this Research?
If you agree you will be asked to attend two individual interviews where you reflect on your individual leadership experiences. You will be asked to answer questions about your leadership background, how you feel about leadership, and the role of leadership in your sport. The research will be done on campus and through observation at your practices. Your interview sessions will be audio-recorded and your confidentiality will be protected through the use of a pseudonym. You can skip any questions or stop the interview at any time if you are uncomfortable for any reason. The researcher’s presence at your practice will not involve any direct engagement with you or any team members at any time.

What happens to the information collected for this research?
Information collected for this research will be published in a study to describe the leadership experiences of student athletes. Your name and identifiable information will be de-identified immediately upon receipt through the use of a pseudonym. Your name and identifiable information will not exist in notes or in the published findings. Only your pseudonym will be used. Your name and identifiable information not be published or shared. Any email communication using your name or email will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Data will be shared via academic publications and presentations.

How will my privacy and data confidentiality be protected?
We promise to protect your privacy and security of your personal information as best we can. Although you need to know about some limits to this promise. Measures we will take include:
Conducting research in a discreet location to protect your participation;
Data will be coded and stored in a secure location and destroyed when no longer in use;
Your name and identifiable information will not be published or shared.
Individuals and organizations that monitor this research may be permitted access to inspect the research records. This monitoring may include access to your private information and any documentation from this study. These individuals and organizations include:
Institutional Review Board
Faculty from the University of Memphis College of Education
Research team members are required to report the following if a team member suspects child abuse or neglect, or suicidal thoughts. TN Laws may require this suspicion be reported. In such case, the research team may be obligated to breach confidentiality and may be required to disclose personal information.

What if I want to stop participating in this research?
It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for this study. It is also ok to decide to end your participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decided to withdraw your participation. Your decision about participating will not affect your relationship with the researcher(s) or the University. To withdraw from the study once it has begun, you may email your withdrawal to the researcher.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?
There are no costs associated with participation in this research study.

Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?
You will not be compensated for taking part in this research.

Who can answer my question about this research?
Before you decide to volunteer for this study, please ask any questions that might come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Sally G. Parish at sally.parish@memphis.edu. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Edith Gnanadass at E.Gnanadass@memphis.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. We will give you a signed copy of this consent to take with you.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT
I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to
decide about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.

As described above, you will be audio recorded while performing the activities described above. Audio recording will be used for collecting interview data. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audio recording as described:

____ I agree to the use of audio recording

There is a possibility that pictures you have shared for the photo-elicited interview could be used in publications or presentations. To protect your identity and the identity of any of your past or present teammates, no identifiable information of players including yourself may be used in the photograph (names, jersey numbers, likeness, etc). Please initial below if you consent to the use of the photograph as described:

____ I agree to the use of the photograph

Name of Adult Participant __________________ Signature of Adult Participant __________________ Date ________________

Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understand the information described in this consent and freely consent to participate.

Name of Research Team Member __________________ Signature of Research Team Member __________________ Date ________________
Appendix D: IRB Approval

IRB #: PRO-FY2020-561
Title: Student Athlete Leadership Identity Formation: Developing a Theoretical Model to Describe The Student Athlete Leadership Experience
Creation Date: 6-19-2020
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Sally Parish Review Board: University of Memphis Sponsor:

Study History

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Key Study Contacts

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<th>Role</th>
<th>Contact</th>
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<tr>
<td>Edith Gnanadass</td>
<td>Co-Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gnnadass@memphis.edu">gnnadass@memphis.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally Parish</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sdgates@memphis.edu">sdgates@memphis.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally Parish</td>
<td>Primary Contact</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sdgates@memphis.edu">sdgates@memphis.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Coach Nomination Email

Nominee SCRIPT

My name is Sally Parish and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Memphis.

I am doing a research project to describe the unique leadership identity development experiences of student athletes. The participants of this study will be: Student athletes from Division 1 team sports who have been nominated by their athletic coaches, trainers, and student services staff as leaders on their teams. For the purposes of this study, leadership is defined as: the process of positively and ethically influencing an individual or group to achieve their personal best.

I will be conducting my study at the University of … and possibly on-line, if social distancing conditions warrant. Participants will engage in individual interviews, and will be observed in team practice settings. Team practices will not be recorded and the identity of any coaches or athletes present will not be identified. Team practices will not be disturbed or disrupted in any way by this study.

Identifiable information of participants will not be revealed in any subsequent publications or presentations. In any transcribed, written, or published material based on this research, pseudonyms will be used for each participant as well as the names of any individuals or any businesses, organizations, and institutions mentioned during my interviews and observations.

There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort. Participants are at no point required to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured on my computer in a password protected file and/or locked file cabinets. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

There is no cost for participating and participants will not be compensated for their participation.

Participant decision to be in this research is voluntary. Participants can stop at any time. Participants may be nominated and choose not to participate. Participants do not have to answer
any questions they do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty.

To nominate a student for participation, please email the following to sally.parish@memphis.edu:

Student name:
Student email:
Student phone number:
Sport Played:
Your name/relationship to the student:

Your name and relationship to the student will be disclosed in my initial outreach, but not in any publications or presentations associated with this study.
Appendix F: Nominee Email Script Soliciting Participation
Nominee SCRIPT

My name is Sally Parish and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Memphis.

I am doing a research project to describe the unique leadership identity development experiences of student athletes. Coach _____ has identified you as a leader on the ____ team and has nominated you to participate.

I will be conducting my study at the University… and possibly on-line, if social distancing conditions warrant. Participants will engage in individual interviews, and will be observed in team practice settings. Team practices will not be recorded and the identity of any coaches or athletes present will not be identified. Team practices will not be disturbed or disrupted in any way by this study.

Identifiable information of participants will not be revealed in any subsequent publications or presentations. In any transcribed, written, or published material based on this research, pseudonyms will be used for each participant as well as the names of any individuals or any businesses, organizations, and institutions mentioned during my interviews and observations.

There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort. Participants are at no point required to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable.

Participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured on my computer in a password protected file and/or locked file cabinets. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

There is no cost for participating and participants will not be compensated for their participation.

Participant decision to be in this research is voluntary. Participants can stop at any time. Participants may be nominated and choose not to participate. Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty.

I would very much appreciate your participation in this study which should only take 3 total active hours of your time. If you are interested in participating, please email sally.parish@memphis.edu to schedule your initial interview.