

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN COLLEGE ATHLETICS: AN
EXPLORATION OF THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of twelve college student-athletes, from two NCAA Division I institutions, who participated in leadership development programs provided by their athletic department. There is a demonstrated need for this level of exploration as evidenced by the growing trend of college athletic departments providing leadership development programming for their respective student-athlete populations. However, there is not a commensurate level of scholarship related to the effectiveness of these programs, nor is there an understanding of the lived experiences of the student-athlete participants that is grounded in research. Therefore, this qualitative study utilized Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental Phenomenology to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes who participated in leadership development programs provided by their athletic department. This study applied Dweck's (2008) theory of Mindset to distill the role effort, failure, and adversity played in the participants lives, and their leadership development. Textural and structural analysis of the data revealed six themes and the essence of the phenomenon. The themes were: (1) Personal Growth and Development; (2) Skill Development; (3) Engaging Pedagogies; (4) Meaning of Effort; (5) Meaning of Failure; and (6) Problem Solving Mindset. Recommendations for college athletic departments implementing leadership development programs include: Intentionality of design; focus on personal growth and development; provide tangible skill development; and include training on growth mindset.

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Opening Vignette

I develop and deliver leadership development programs in college athletics. Over the past five years, I have observed a dramatic rise in the number of institutions and athletics organizations that are providing a version of leadership development programming for their population. I wonder about the value and quality of these programs and what the student-athletes are taking away from their experience in these programs. As I scan the field, I am aware of scant evaluations of these many programs and even less research into this phenomenon.

After one of the sessions I delivered, one of the student-athletes asked to speak with me. He wanted to know if I talk with their coaches about dynamics within the different teams because he is experiencing many of the issues we address in our leadership development program. He shared how he felt he was more aware of his teammates behavior, body language, and attitudes after learning more skills regarding issues such as emotional intelligence and effective communication through conflict. He thanked me for facilitating this program with him and his peers. After some additional conversation about what he's been learning in the program, I considered the experiences of student-athletes in these programs.

During many programs, I find myself watching the faces of the student-athletes and search for clues as to their take-away from this experience. Somebody needs to ask them and seek to understand their lived experiences in these programs. This type of data could be a service to the field and hopefully inspire further inquiry into this phenomenon. We could learn whether the student-athletes use the information or skills taught in the sessions, what factors might impact their ability to utilize the information, and how they experience their leadership development program.

CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM AND ITS CLARIFYING COMPONENTS

Background

Leadership development programs in college athletics are an emerging phenomenon in higher education, and this phenomenon warrants academic inquiry (“NCAA Leadership Development,” 2017). There is a growing list of college athletics departments offering leadership development programs; at the same time, research into these offerings is not keeping pace (Appendix A). To effectively introduce and address this phenomenon, let’s first take a brief historical look at leadership development in American higher education. Then, we will re-visit the athletics perspective regarding leadership development.

Developing the leadership skills and abilities of students has always been a core function of American higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 2008). For example, Harvard University was founded in 1636 for the purpose of developing young men who would have the skills and knowledge necessary to lead their communities and the nation (Brubacher & Rudy, 2008). Colleges in Colonial America did not offer an explicitly stated leadership development curriculum or degree program; rather, the development of leadership skills was considered an inherent component of their charter. Indeed, American colleges of the colonial period were, in large part, created to develop the leaders of the colonial church and state (Brubacher & Rudy, 2008). Although the curricular focus did not include courses or training on leadership development, the larger mission of these early colleges focused on producing leaders, specifically clergy, lawyers,

and teachers. Historically, this goal of developing leaders has been accomplished informally, through extra-curricular engagement and occasional incorporation into coursework in business colleges (Connaughton, Lawrence, & Rubin, 2003). Leadership development in higher education continued in this manner for more than 100 years by focusing on developing students for leadership roles in their professional lives beyond college (Komives, Duganm Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011).

In the 1970s, student affairs administrators started a quiet revolution in student leadership development by developing and delivering leadership workshops and courses, a manifestation of their personal interest and belief in the topic (Komives et al., 2011). Student affairs organizations such as the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) served as the connection point for student affairs administrators to share ideas and initiatives, and student leadership development became a hot topic in the 1980s and 1990s (Komives et al., 2011). “Over the past 30 years, leadership education has evolved from a fragmented set of atheoretical (even anti-theoretical), uncoordinated activities with little common language or practices to a field with established theoretical frames, conceptual models, standards of practice, and diverse pedagogical strategies” (Komives et al., 2011, p. 2).

Since 2000, leadership education has experienced explosive growth in the US, with several hundred colleges and universities offering curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular opportunities for undergraduate students to build their leadership skills (Greenwald, 2010). Leadership development programming has emerged in a variety of

formats, including curricular offerings for academic credit and degrees as well as co-curricular or extra-curricular offerings such as workshops, lectures, training, and development (Appendix B). Today, several hundred campuses offer co-curricular and extra-curricular leadership programs for students, although these programs are often marginalized by their institutions. Leadership studies represent an emerging field in higher education, and, predictably, they are experiencing growing pains as academics attempt to define terms, create standards, develop learning outcomes, and ensure proper measurement of programs (Greenwald, 2010). In addition to these growing pains, there is a paucity of research regarding demographic differences and leadership development among students, despite a wealth of research on effective student leadership development programs (Aviolo, 2011; Komives et al., 2011; Northouse, 2010).

Two intersecting areas of campus life that have long played prominent roles in the development of American higher education include leadership development and college athletics (Brubacher & Rudy, 2008; Thelin, 2000). The dramatic rise of college athletics has not been driven by a larger vision of American higher education or a desire to enhance campus life (Duderstadt, 2002). Instead, college athletics grew out of the void campuses experienced in the mid-19th century regarding extracurricular activity for students. In contrast to this humble beginning, the current population of college student-athletes qualifies as a unique subset of the undergraduate student population for which little empirical evidence exists to guide leadership educators as to what works with this population. Therefore, my research focus captured the lived experiences and perceptions

of student-athletes who participated in leadership development programs provided through their athletic department.

Statement of the Problem

Combining the historical role of leadership development training and college athletics is a contemporary endeavor. The implementation of leadership development training for student-athletes has increased in number as well as variety (Appendices A and C). While some leadership training models have conducted post-test surveys to assess their effectiveness, there has yet to be a qualitative study that focuses on the experiences and perceptions of student-athlete participants (Appendices A and C). There is a gap in the scholarly literature regarding the lived experiences of student-athletes who participate in leadership development programs. At the same time, there is a need to understand the elements associated with how participants integrate the lessons learned from leadership development programs into other aspects of their lives.

Leadership development programs are an increasingly common offering at US colleges and universities; however, their role is still emerging and often serves as a source of conflict among campus academic and student affairs leadership (Appendix B). For example, one source of conflict includes the lack of clarity regarding respective institutions' intentions regarding leadership education. In his seminal leadership work, *Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns (1978) observed that "leadership is one of the most observed, yet least understood, phenomena on earth" (p. 3). Burns advanced this notion

in the 1970s, and leadership development educators believe statement this still holds true today (Komives et al., 2011; Northouse, 2010).

While individual, professional interest in leadership education has long existed on college and university campuses, the formal organizing and development of these ideas emerged in the early 1970s (Komives et al., 2011). Student affairs professionals who shared an interest in leadership education began connecting with leading student affairs organizations and their members to baseline standards for programs, training, education, development, assessment and shared resources (Roberts & Ullom, 1989). It is its genesis in student affairs associations that fomented academic affairs' resistance to leadership education as lacking credibility as a field of study (Komives et al., 2011). Astin and Astin (2000) see remnants of this conflict in the omission of educational goals for student leadership development at most institutions. Student affairs professionals distinguish clear educational goals from general statements included in mission statements but generally fail to state clear goals and expectations for the development of student leadership (Astin & Astin, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

Leadership training is in high demand in higher education and students are seeking formal leadership opportunities as part of their college experience (Greenwald, 2010). More specifically, leadership training is no longer seen as an ancillary offering; rather, institutions are now embracing the need to provide skill-building leadership training to better prepare students for the 21st century (Aviola & Gardner, 2005;

Greenwald, 2010). College athletics departments have embraced leadership training and represent an area of campus that has engaged in a range of leadership development training activities, including the development of leadership academies for student-athletes and coaches.

Since 2000, leadership development programming for student-athletes has become an essential component of college athletic departments. A review of the athletic department websites of the 347 higher education institutions participating at the Division I level reveals that 304 institutions include information about leadership development programming they are providing for their student-athletes. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) houses a leadership development department charged with providing a range of leadership development training and workshops for college student-athletes, coaches, and administrators (“NCAA Leadership Development,” 2017). With the majority of Division I institutions, and the NCAA, engaging in leadership development, it reinforces the purpose and significance of this study.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it adds the perceptions and lived experiences of college student-athletes in leadership development programs to the existing literature on leadership development. These programs are proliferating in college athletics, and there needs to be a stream of data to understand the experiences of student-athletes in these programs and how they integrate their learning into other aspects of their lives. This study can also inform the future development of additional leadership development

programs by incorporating the lived experiences of the student-athlete participants. More specifically, if administrators and program developers better understand the experiences of their target population, then all aspects of program development and delivery can be improved. Finally, this study provides data concerning what types of programming student-athletes find most valuable and, conversely, which aspects of leadership development programming contribute little to their development as leaders.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Dweck's (2008) concept of mindset. Dweck, a psychologist and faculty member at Stanford University, defines mindset as a means to show the power of people's beliefs, arguing that "the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life" (p. 6). Dweck's focus on mindset began with an early career obsession with understanding how people cope with failure. Similarly interested in the prevailing view of intelligence as nature versus nurture, genes or environment, Dweck (2008) argues that it is not an "or" dynamic; rather it is an "and" dynamic. Genes and environment need each other to work properly.

Dweck (2008) introduces two contrasting mindsets—fixed and growth. Fixed mindset traits involve believing your abilities are fixed/set and cannot be improved. Individuals with a fixed mindset exhibit an unhealthy focus on showing how smart they are, how strong their moral character is, how successful their relationship is, etc., and often feel the need to constantly prove themselves. Growth mindset traits include believing that one's intelligence can be improved through hard work, that effort is needed

to reach potential, and that bravely facing adversity lead to success. These contrasting mindsets effect the accuracy of your ability to self-assess—personal growth lends itself to a more accurate assessment and fixed overwhelmingly represent those who are inaccurate.

Another way Dweck (2008) explains the concept of the two mindsets is by sorting people into two categories: learners and non-learners. Individuals with a fixed mindset believe in fixed traits while those with a growth mindset see opportunities to develop. People with a growth mindset think regarding learning while a fixed mindset limits a person's ability to achieve.

The Meaning of Failure

Dweck (2008) explains that our world has transformed failure “from an action (I failed) to an identity (I am a failure)” (p. 33), and this dynamic has a profound impact on people who exhibit a fixed mindset. People with a fixed mindset see any failure as an unequivocal judgment, eliminating any opportunity to improve. A fixed mindset blames others and makes excuses for failure. For example, Dweck (2007) highlights the career of professional tennis champion John McEnroe, who always seemed to find someone or something else to blame when his performance dipped. McEnroe's public comments reflected the mindset of an individual who blamed outside forces for his failures, not his own behavior or lack of focus. A growth mindset understands failure as a moment in time, a thing that happened but not the end. Failure provides an opportunity to map out a plan to improve and do better next time.

The Meaning of Effort

For people with a fixed mindset, effort is a show of weakness and a hallmark of people who are deficient; they see the need to exert effort as diminishing their status. Effort is terrifying because, according to their mindset, they are not supposed to need effort and if they exert effort it removes their excuses. Individuals with a fixed mindset fear trying and not succeeding and often suffer from low-effort syndrome (Dweck, 2007, 2008). People with a growth mindset believe effort is required to realize their potential; regardless of natural talent, everyone has to work to reach their goals. More specifically, they see effort as the key ingredient to transform skills and talents into accomplishments and to develop who they are as people. People with a growth mindset study to learn, not to pass the test.

Yeager and Dweck (2012) argue that students who possess a mindset that promotes resilience, innately or through coaching, are more likely to be successful in school and life. Yeager and Dweck determined that, if a student/person believes intellectual and social abilities can be developed, this belief will help that person in all facets of their life—including lower aggression and stress levels in challenging social situations (aggression, bullying, teasing, etc.). Hence, their growth mindset can impact their ability to navigate through, and respond to, many types of life's challenges. Yeager and Dweck's research was conducted with students, but their results can be extrapolated to other learning environments.

The Myth of Natural Talent

The myth of natural talent is the enemy of both the fixed and growth mindsets. This myth pervades athletics, as coaches, scouts, and fans believe that some athletes are just naturally gifted and that talent is what wins (Dweck, 2007, 2008). People with a fixed mindset who believe this myth struggle to improve themselves (e.g., at work, in relationships) because they see their success as coming from an endowed natural ability. Individuals with a fixed mindset become hostage to the belief that the need to invest time, energy, and personal resources to succeed in an endeavor is a sign of weakness. This belief is reflected in the meaning they make from failure, effort, and success.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the theoretical framework for this proposed study.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes in Student-Athlete Leadership Development programs?
2. How do college student-athletes construct mindset (the meaning of effort; the meaning of failure; the myth of natural ability)?

Table 1 illustrates the relationship between this study's research questions, interview questions, and theoretical framework.

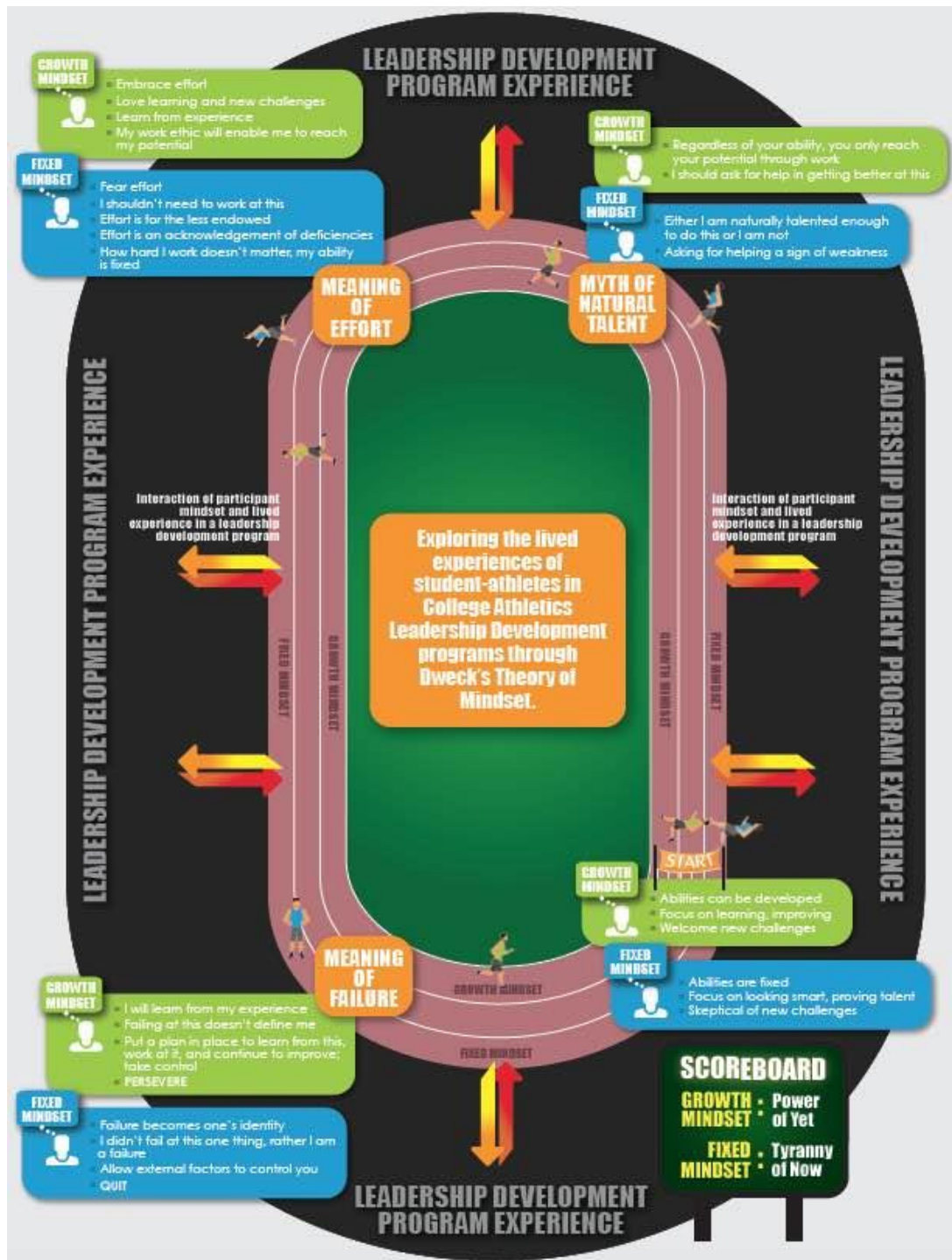


Figure 1. Exploring the lived experiences of students-athletes in college athletics leadership development programs through Dweck's (2008) theory of mindset. Copyright 2018 by Jeffrey O'Brien.

Table 1

Relationship between Research Questions, Interview Questions, and Theoretical Framework

Research Questions (RQ)	Part 2: Interview Questions (IQ)	Theoretical Framework
RQ1: What are the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes in Student-Athlete Leadership Development programs?	Q1: Please describe your experience in your student-athlete leadership program: Q2: Please describe what you felt was the most impactful aspect of your experience in your student-athlete leadership program: Q3: What did you learn about yourself from your experience in your program? What do you feel the goals of the program are? What is it trying to accomplish? Q4: What did you learn about yourself from your experience in your program? Q5: What did you learn from your experience that you have been able to apply to your leadership on campus? Q6: How would you describe your ability as a leader? Q7: What changes would you recommend to the program?	Summation of Scholarship on Leadership in Chapter 2
	Part 3: Interview Questions (IQ)	
RQ2: How do college student-athletes construct mindset (the meaning of effort; the meaning of failure; the myth of natural ability)?	Q1: Can you describe the role “failure” has played in your life? Probe: Can you share an example? Probe: What words would you use to describe how you’ve dealt with failure? Q2: Can you describe the role “effort” has played in your life? Probe: Can you share an example? Probe: Can you describe how it feels to exert effort in addressing a challenge? Q3: How do you approach problem solving in your life? Q4: How do you feel about the notion of “natural talent”? Probe: Q5: Can you describe what have been the keys to your success as a leader? Q6: Can you describe what have been the keys to your failures as a leader?	Q1: Meaning of failure Q2: Meaning of effort Q3: Mindset Q4: Myth of natural ability Q5: Mindset Q6: Mindset

Positionality Statement

My career has been focused on social justice education in professional and college athletics, and the military. I have developed and implemented training programs, all grounded in leadership, that focused on gender violence prevention, diversity and inclusion, and personal branding. Leadership development was always a factor in my approach to facilitating training on these topics and, in 2011, I began to research and develop leadership development programming for student-athletes. By 2012, I was delivering leadership development programming for college athletic departments through a program I developed at my full-time job at a non-profit organization that does social justice work through the power of sport. This organization is housed at a large public university in the southeastern US. I also delivered similar training as an independent consultant working with college athletic departments. A key consulting client of mine was a private university in the northeastern US that hired me to develop and deliver a leadership development program for their student-athletes and coaches. This college athletics leadership development program began its fifth year in the Fall of 2017, and I continue to serve as its consulting director.

In 2012, I began my journey through a doctoral program with the specific goal of learning more about the development of leadership programs in college athletics. I was, and still am, curious about the lived experiences of student-athletes in these leadership development programs across the country. I believe that there is a wide range of programming being offered to student-athletes, under the title of leadership development

or leadership academies, and, as a professional in the field, I have found little empirical data to show the impact of this work.

In 2014, I was hired as a consultant by the most prominent college athletics governing body in the US to develop and deliver its signature leadership event for student-athletes and to develop a new initiative directed at athletics administrators who were interested in developing leadership development programs on their own campuses. This 4-day signature leadership event was designed to offer a select group of 300 student-athletes, along with 50 coaches and staff, a leadership development immersion experience. The athletics administrators' initiative empowers college athletics department administrators to develop, implement, and evaluate a leadership development program for their department. My observations and those of my colleagues gives us the sense that participants have impactful experiences in a variety of ways. For example, some participants expressed how much they had grown personally because of the focus on personal reflection and the sharing of challenging experiences with their peers. For others, they felt validated by completing assessments such as the DiSC profile and the Strengths Finder. Some participants expressed increased confidence derived from learning more about themselves through these personalized reports. Also, observing the emotional goodbyes of participants and their capacity to stay connected after the event indicates they experienced something of value. As a facilitator, this is all rewarding to hear and observe, but it also generates questions.

This background is important as I came to this research as a practitioner who has developed questions about the meaning participants make out of their experiences in

these leadership development programs. I was keenly interested in hearing about the lived experiences of student-athlete participants in leadership development programs.

Definition of Terms

Big Time College Sport: College athletic activities that are revenue-generating and high-profile endeavors on campus.

College Athletics: Athletic activity administered by athletic departments on college and university campuses.

College Student-Athlete: College students who participate in athletic activity administered by the athletic department of their respective campuses.

Fixed Mindset: A view of oneself that defines intelligence and ability as unchangeable. This person also believes that others are similarly limited.

Growth Mindset: A view of oneself that defines intelligence and ability as changeable and subject to cultivation with the correct amount of effort.

Leadership Development Programs: Programs provided by a college or university administration as part of the college student experience. These programs convene regularly and are comprised of a cohort of participants that traverse through the program together.

Mindset: The view that one adopts when approaching any number of life experiences or challenges. It is reflected in how one understands failure, effort, natural talent, and success.

Summary/Organization of the Study

Leadership development programs in college athletics are a significant phenomenon in higher education and require academic study. The lived experiences and perceptions of student-athletes in these programs are important to hear and offer important lessons to those who listen. Conducting a qualitative study with student-athletes who have participated in a leadership development program through their athletic department afforded the opportunity to provide a foundation of qualitative data on this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter 2 comprises a thorough review of the literature regarding student leadership development, college athletics, and the concept of mindset. I have developed this chapter so as to provide the necessary context for understanding each of these areas independently and as an integrated group of phenomena. This first section will serve as an introduction to the topics explored and an outline of this chapter. The second section will provide a history of college athletics in higher education with particular emphasis on the off-the-field development of student-athletes and will provide a historical context of this sub-culture within the academy. This section will also review college athletics' role in leadership development for student-athletes, coaches, and administrators. The third section will explore the history and development of leadership development in higher education. The fourth and final section will provide an introduction to the theoretical framework for this study—mindset. The summary will explore how these concepts will be integrated into this study.

College Athletics and Off-the-Field Development of Student-Athletes

The Controversial Role of College Athletics in Higher Education

Since its origins as a loosely organized form of physical activity, what is now known as college athletics has played a transformative role in American higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 2008; Smith 2011). The role of college athletics in higher

education, its compatibility with the educational mission of the university, has been debated since its inception (Brubacher & Rudy, 2008; Crowley, 2006; Gerdy, 2006; Thelin, 1994). Certainly, corruption, commercialization, and scandal have marked the history of college athletics as well social breakthroughs regarding race and gender inclusion and the recognition of the value of athletics in higher education (Crowley, 2006).

For many institutions, contemporary college athletics provides substantial benefits, including (a) significant revenue; (b) student, faculty, and alumni pride and affinity; (c) branding and marketing opportunities; and (d) co-curricular activity for hundreds of students (Duderstadt, 2002; Gerdy, 2006; Knight Foundation Commission on College Athletics, 2010; Thelin, 1994, 2000). Indeed, at some institutions, athletics drive the culture of the campus, with the psychological outlook of entire communities hinging on the success or failure of the hometown team. There has been a tension in the academy, between those who believe college athletics brings great value and those who believe there is no place for athletics on campus. These critics generally point to the various scandals involving athletics and advocate for reforms as a means to control college sport. Almost from its inception, there have been attempts at reform within college sport, and these demands for reform have intensified as college athletics evolved into big-time sport (Plant, 1961; Smith, 2011; Thelin, 1994; Thompson, 1986). The overriding question regarding college athletics, at the big-time level, has been whether it is compatible with the mission of their institutions. Big-time college sport in this analysis

refers to football, and men's basketball played at the elite Division I level. Table 2 provides examples of college sport reform attempts through the years.

Table 2

College Report Reform Attempts at US Colleges and Universities

Year	Issue	Reform Attempt
1855	Harvard use of an alumnus in a Rowing competition vs. Yale	Establish guidelines for eligibility to ensure equity
1910	Extreme Violence in Football	Created the NCAA as a formal governing body
1929	Disconnect between athletics and the academic mission of the university	Carnegie Foundation Report: American College Athletics
1930s-1950s	Gambling, concerns regarding payment to players, eligibility, recruiting and academic integrity.	American Council on Education formed a committee to revisit the issues of the Carnegie Report
1950s-1980s	NCAA did not have power to be effective	NCAA hired first full director to devote needed time on cleaning up college sport
1993	Institutional control; academic integrity; commercialization; lack of fiscal control	Knight Commission Report: Keeping Faith with the Student-Athlete -- one-plus-three strategy
2001	Significant issues remain involving academic integrity, escalating spending, and commercialization in college sport	Knight Commission Report: A Call to Action: Reconnecting College Sports and Higher Education
2010	Continuing escalation of spending; the conference re-alignment process; and bidding wars for top coaches in football and men's basketball	Knight Commission Report: Restoring the Balance: Dollars, Values, and the Future of College Sport
2015	Payment of student-athletes to cover true cost of attendance	Scholarship student-athletes who come from low-income families do not have money to cover true cost of attendance
2017	Over-training and mandatory practice time of student-athletes	NCAA legislation passed restricting the number of hours student-athletes are allowed to be training or practicing with coaches.

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College athletics is big business, leading some to voice concerns regarding the over-commercialization of college sport at the expense of the academic goals of the institution (Duderstadt, 2002; Gerdy, 2006; Sperber, 2004; Zimbalist, 1999). Also, the substantial revenues generated from the sale of the broadcast rights of top college teams bolster the argument that college sport is big business. For example, in 2010, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) announced a 14-year, \$10.8 billion media rights deal with television (TV) networks CBS and TNT to broadcast the Division I Men's Basketball Championship (Wolverton, 2010). According to "Business of College Sports" (2012), the TV broadcast rights contracts for the big-time athletics conferences range from \$150-\$250 million annually, per conference, and the College Football Playoff (CFP) for big-time football pays out more than \$25 million per institution, per game. With this amount of money at stake, there is the concurrent fear that the commercialization promoted by television and media entities are influencing the campus schedule in an attempt to maximize opportunities for exposure and revenue generation (Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010; Sack, 2001; Smith, 2011). This heightened commercialization undermines the explicit goals of college athletics: to promote positive character development, good sportsmanship, and recreational opportunities for students while forging bonds with the local community through shared competition and the spectator experience (Duderstadt, 2002). Understanding this tension between the academy and the role college athletics provides the context for understanding the lens through which athletics is viewed. Now that we

have an understanding of this dynamic, it is also important to understand the governance structure for college athletics.

Governance of Intercollegiate Athletics

Charged with enhancing the health and vitality of college athletics, the NCAA began as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) in 1906 and adopted its current name in 1910. Membership in the NCAA provides governance, policy development, and rules enforcement for over 1000 member institutions and over 400,000 student-athletes nationally (“What is the NCAA,” 2015); its membership is comprised of full-time staff and rules and policy committees that respond to concerns from members. All NCAA committees are filled with administrators from member institutions and have an NCAA staff liaison. Committees recommend policy changes, which are then voted on by the full membership. The NCAA also oversees all sports championships, with the notable exception of the College Football Championship (CFP).

The NCAA’s role as the dominant national governing body of college athletics is important to understand for the following reason: if this body says an issue is important, then all of college sports pay attention. So, when the NCAA creates a department dedicated to leadership development, the value college athletics places on this phenomenon increases.

The American Uniqueness and Value of College Athletics

While we learned earlier that there has been a historical, consistent refrain for reform, conversely, there have also been arguments extolling the value college athletics brings to higher education. For institutions participating in college athletics at the highest level, sports can provide life-long memories that create emotional bonds for current and former members of the community while also teaching critical life lessons, including the value of facing adversity, teamwork, selflessness, and discipline. Duderstadt (2002) argues that sports teach us about sacrifice and hard work while providing a sense of pride for the entire university community. He believes that lessons of sport are extended to non-athletes as well as to the athletes themselves.

The intertwined nature of athletics and academics is a decidedly American enterprise, with almost 2,000 colleges and universities fielding sports teams across the country (Suggs, 2006). There is no other country in the world that combines sport and the academy at the university level (Thelin, 1994). Sports generate positive associations for alumni, current students, and faculty, provide robust marketing and branding opportunities, and, for the big-time participants, the potential for generating revenue for the university. These positive factors have been present since the early stages of college sports (Brubachaer & Rudy, 2008; Gerdy, 2006; Suggs, 2006). Yet, the presence of sport in higher education continues to be a perplexing phenomenon for educators. Thelin (1994) describes college athletics as "American higher education's peculiar institution" (p. 1) given its dominating presence on campus and its difficulty in meshing with the educational mission of most institutions. Athletic departments' budgets are escalating at

troubling rates and in a direction that is un-democratic and unsustainable (Duderstadt, 2002; Knight Foundation Commission on College Athletics, 2010; Sperber, 2000).

While this historical understanding of the value of college athletics in higher education is salient to my analysis, athletics' connection to leadership development is most critical. Athletics is often seen as the front porch of an institution, providing a public face and entry point for engagement with the community to which it belongs. One of the benefits that college athletics can offer student-athletes, coaches and administrators is leadership development. With that value in mind, we will now review the NCAA's engagement in this activity as a window into the emphasis college athletics is placing on leadership development for student-athletes.

NCAA Connection to Leadership

The NCAA, in addition to its governance function for its member institutions, has had a formal role in leadership development since 1991, with many member institutions independently operating off-the-field student-athlete development programming long before that. Here, the NCAA website proudly announces their role in the total development of student-athletes.

NCAA Life Skills, a well-known collaboration between the national office, the 1,200 member institutions, the affiliate organizations and conference offices, is committed to the total development of student-athletes, preparing them with "life skills" that are useful throughout the college experience and after graduation.

("NCAA Leadership Development Life Skills," 2017)

Initially named CHAMPS/Life Skills, NCAA’s leadership development program was modeled after the Total Person Project established at Georgia Tech by legendary athletic director Dr. Homer Rice (NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills,” 2017). Later, this program was renamed the Student-Athlete Development Program. Georgia Tech’s Total Person Project included the formation of a student-athlete advisory board, career development and placement, and a speaker/workshop series.

Table 3

Core Components of Georgia Tech’s Total Person Project

Student-Athlete Advisory Board	Career Development and Placement	Speaker/Workshop Series.
Representatives from each team	Career Interests	Stress/Time Management
Serve as spokesperson for team	Resume preparation	Financial Planning/Wealth Management
Evaluate programs & provide feedback	Interview preparation	Sexual Assault/Violence Prevention Education
	Marketing oneself	Drug/Alcohol (related to health and performance)
	Internships & FT employment opportunities	Etiquette Training (business, classroom, dining, etc.)
		Sports Nutrition

In developing the Total Person Project, Dr. Rice operationalized his belief that student-athletes have the best chance of reaching their full potential when they have a balanced life that includes a healthy pursuit and understanding of athletic, academic, and personal success. This vision and the Total Person Project template serve as the fundamental ingredients for Life Skills programs at institutions across the nation. And these values—athletic, academic, and personal—guide college athletics administrators in

their regular engagement with student-athletes (“NCAA Leadership Development Life Skills,” 2017).

In 1991, utilizing Georgia Tech’s Total Person Project as a model, the NCAA Foundation led the development of a more comprehensive student-athlete personal development program for member institutions. In a partnership between the NCAA Foundation and the Division 1A Athletic Directors’ Association, an association of college athletic directors from NCAA’s Division 1, the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program was developed over a period of three years. The CHAMPS acronym stood for Challenging Athletes’ Minds for Personal Success; this program has served as the standard for Division I College Athletics departments since that time.

In 1994, the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program was officially launched to the NCAA membership. That summer, 46 NCAA institutions participated in the first orientation for administrators from around the country. Between 1994 and 2015, staff from approximately 40 member institutions have been trained to implement the CHAMPS/Life Skills Program each year.

Starting in 2016, NCAA is partnering with the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics, better known as N4A, for daily oversight and operation of programming for student-athletes and life skills professionals at NCAA member institutions. Over a three-year period, N4A will become the primary provider of development and programming for life skills professionals (“NCAA Leadership Development Life Skills,” 2017).

In addition to the commitment to the overall wellbeing of student-athletes through the life skills, models, and underscoring how important leadership development is to college athletics, the NCAA also operates a leadership development department specifically focused on the growth and development of individuals from member institutions. The NCAA leadership development webpage makes the following statement regarding the Leadership Development department:

[The department] provides 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 Leadership Development,” 2017)

National Collegiate Athletic Association Leadership Development offers a menu of training sessions, with all of these offerings designed to help participants experience personal growth, enhance their leadership skills, and engage in career development activities.

For student-athletes, NCAA Leadership Development offers programs designed to help participants achieve the following: (a) identify their personal core values, (b) understand and build a sense of character and integrity, and (c) learn about the role college athletics plays in higher education. Through these programs, the NCAA intends for student-athlete participants to return to their respective campuses with valuable leadership skills.

Student-athletes participating in NCAA leadership development programs learn about careers in college sports and how to become the next generation of leaders in college athletics. Resources available to these athletes include test preparation materials, financial literacy information, online education, and behavioral assessments. The NCAA Leadership Development student-athlete programs include the Student-Athlete Leadership Forum, the Career in Sports Forum, and National Student-Athlete Day (Table 4).

Table 4

NCAA Leadership Development Training and Programs Offered to Member Institutions

College Student-Athletes	Graduate Assistants & Interns	Coaches	Administrators	Senior Level Administrators
Student-Athlete Leadership Forum	Postgraduate Internship Program	Champion Forum for Football	Leadership Academy Workshop	Pathway Program
Career in Sports Forum	Emerging Leaders Seminar	Champion Forum for Basketball	Effective Facilitation Workshop	Chancellors and Presidents Engagement Program
National Student-Athlete Day	NCAA and Women Leaders in College Sports Women's Leadership Symposium	AFCA/NCAA 35 under 35 Coaches Leadership Institute	Dr. Charles Whitcomb Leadership Institute	
		NCAA & NFL Coaches Academy	Life Skills Symposium	

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Created by the NCAA in 1997, the Student-Athlete Leadership Forum “has been a life-changing experience for more than 5,000 student-athletes, many who have grown personally and professionally, gained a new network of peers and friends, as well as felt

the rewards and importance of community service” (“NCAA Student-Athlete Leadership Forum,” 2015). Student-Athlete Leadership Forum participants—350 individuals who are selected to participate by their institution or athletic conference—are identified by their actions as leaders in some capacity on their teams, athletics department staff, or conference office staff. The NCAA Leadership Development Student-Athlete Leadership Forum is a four-day experience during which participants are assigned to a color team of approximately 35 participants. In these teams, participants explore a range of leadership topics, develop relationships with their peers, and challenge and support one another through the weekend, while learning from one another’s lived experiences, failures, and successes. Also, participants engage in a community service project and learn about the role and structure of the NCAA (“NCAA Leadership Development,” 2017). Participants are encouraged to be vulnerable and share with their peers in order to grow and develop meaningful connections, and to learn about their own leadership strengths and styles. Finally, participants are challenged to utilize their experience at the Leadership Forum to positively impact their respective teams and campuses.

For college athletic department administrators, the NCAA Leadership Development department provides the following programs: (a) the Leadership Academy Workshop, (b) the Effective Facilitation Workshop, (c) the Dr. Charles Whitcomb Leadership Institute, and (d) the Life Skills Symposium (“NCAA Leadership Academy Workshop,” 2017). Each of these programs is designed to provide professional development training for the athletic department administrator while also empowering them to impact their respective campuses.

The NCAA Leadership Academy Workshop prepares college athletic department administrators and coaches to develop, implement, and evaluate a leadership development program for student-athletes, coaches, and staff at their respective institutions. Promoting a cohort model, the Leadership Academy Workshop includes two on-site multiple-day workshops, independent reading sessions, and development work over the course of 6-8 months. Each cohort consists of approximately 30 peers and expert consultants to challenge and support each participant in the development of their leadership development program. Participants in the workshop learn how to build a sustainable leadership development program that is tailored to the needs of their campus and department.

Now that we have reviewed the history of college athletics' role in the off-the-field development of student-athletes, with a specific emphasis on the value the NCAA places on student-athlete leadership development, let's turn to an overview of leadership development programs more broadly in higher education. Since the literature on leadership development in college athletics is limited, this will help ground the work of this study by understanding the broader campus-based leadership development context.

Leadership Development Programs in Higher Education

A review of the literature on leadership development programs in higher education reveals the steady momentum that leadership education has enjoyed since the mid-1990s. This momentum has been generated from an increasing demand from students seeking leadership programs on campus and from leadership educators working

to professionalize this field. The literature also highlights the disparate manner in which institutions of higher education have responded to this increasing demand (Komives et al., 2011).

Defining Leadership

A logical place to start a literature review on the role of leadership education in higher education is to explore how leadership has been defined in this context. Cilente (2009) notes that a common, agreed-upon definition of leadership among student leadership development educators still does not exist. Cilente further explains that the leading researchers in the field of leadership do not agree on a common definition of effective leadership. This ambiguity enables critiques of leadership education who claim that this is not a credible academic discipline.

Rosch and Kusel (2010) argue that leadership is easier to classify than it is to define, especially as it relates to specific actions. They believe that a lack of clear illustrations of leadership practice is preventing leadership studies from advancing. Rosch and Kusel cite a stellar example at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). At UIUC, a campus-wide group established their own leadership center and grounded all of their leadership work in a common philosophy. In this way, UIUC established a campus-wide philosophy of leadership education that includes defining leadership outcomes for student participants. What UIUC has done appears to be an exception to the norm of how most campuses are handling this.

Northouse's (2010) *Leadership: Theory and Practice* is often used in introductory leadership courses and identifies influence as the key ingredient in the definition of leadership. More specifically, Northouse emphasizes the influence an individual can have on a group as they work towards a goal. Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2007) narrowed Northouse's criteria and defined leadership in relation to development outcomes for students participating in a leadership program. Komives et al.'s definition also involves a group process in which people work together to achieve some form of change through a relational and ethical process. This definition is part of their relational model of leadership.

In summarizing the literature on defining leadership, three themes resonate:

- The field of leadership education could benefit from common language and definitions to establish standards for success.
- Individual campuses need to develop leadership initiatives, under the established standards, that are unique to their local needs, institutional missions, and student demographics.
- Some consensus exists among leadership educators utilizing post-industrial approaches that leadership outcomes need to measure a participant's capacity to be self-aware and to work collaboratively with followers.

Building in this review of definitions of leadership, we will now turn to leadership theories in higher education.

Dominant Theoretical Perspectives for Leadership Development Education

It has become increasingly essential for college leadership programs to be grounded in theory. Komives et al. (2011) posit that there are three areas of justification for this imperative. First, leadership development should be a deliberate activity and not simply a by-product of the college experience; not only should institutions of higher education offer stand-alone leadership education, but that the education should have a social responsibility orientation. Second, this deliberate, purposeful education should entail more than individual leadership skill-building. The modern world demands leadership capabilities in a wide range of disciplines that can be brought to bear in the marketplace. Multi-disciplinary approaches are needed to provide students with the wide range of information that they will need. Lastly, grounding leadership programs in theory corresponds closely with positive educational outcomes. In order for the field to continue developing academic credibility, educational outcomes must be understood through a theoretical lens.

The two dominant theoretical perspectives for leadership education are industrial and post-industrial. Industrial theories constitute traditional perspectives that emphasize individual, leader-centric approaches to leadership. Industrial perspectives tend to reinforce traditional notions of power and leadership, illustrated by hierarchy, leadership as an innate characteristic, exclusive membership, and transactional styles (Haber, 2012). Advocates of the industrial approach see leaders as needing to develop individual skills in order to be most effective in a particular position or role. The core industrial theories include the following: (a) great man, (b) trait-based, (c) behavioral, (d) situational, and

(e) influence (Komives et al., 2007; Table 5). The later iterations of industrial theories argue for situational awareness and the power of the leader to influence a group (Northouse, 2010). Great man and trait-based theories see effective leaders as having been born that way; they are naturally gifted. In situational leadership theory, the idea is that different circumstances require different leadership skills and that leaders will adjust their responses according to the situation. The ability to influence others to achieve a goal is another individual skill that requires charisma and presence.

Table 5

Industrial Leadership Theories

Theory	Time Period	Characteristics
Great Man	Mid-1800s to early 1900s	Darwinistic; leaders are naturally gifted and born that way
Trait Based	Early to mid-1900s	Genetic traits enable individuals to be leaders; superior qualities
Behavioral	Mid to late 1900s	Ability to balance awareness of people and results; there is a best way to lead
Situational	Mid 1900s	Environment, context, situation matter; different people may emerge depending on the situation
Influence	1920s-1970s	Charismatic leaders; ability to influence others to follow you determines leaders

Note: Adapted from *Exploring Leadership: for College Students Who Want to Make a Difference* (2nd ed.), by S. R. Komives, N. Lucas, and T. R. McMahon, 2008. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2007 by Jossey-Bass.

Post-industrial theories are more contemporary and have relational, group-focused philosophies; they do seek to develop individual capacity and simultaneously focus on group development. Overall, leadership is a complex dynamic and involves relational ability. James MacGregor Burns is often cited as the leader of the movement

away from individual focus and towards group processes for leadership (Komives et al., 2007). The main theories within the post-industrial perspective include the following: transformational, adaptive/complex, and authentic leadership (Table 6).

Table 6

Post-Industrial Leadership Theories

Theory	Time Period	Characteristics
Transformational	1978-present	Leadership is a reciprocal, mutually beneficial process; leader focused on developing capacity of followers; empowering
Adaptive/Complexity	1990-present	Leadership is complex, multi-layered; requires systems-based approach; aware of organizational culture; responsive
Authentic	Mid to late 1900s	Grounded in positive psychology; multidimensional; leaders and followers develop each other; can be integrated into other styles or stand alone

Note: Adapted from *Exploring Leadership: for College Students Who Want to Make a Difference* (2nd ed.), by S. R. Komives, N. Lucas, and T. R. McMahon, 2008. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2007 by Jossey-Bass.

Burns (1978) initiated the distinction between what he termed transactional and transforming leadership. Transactional leadership is characterized as an exchange between leader and group members, with no attention paid to the development of group members. Transforming leadership is located on the opposite end of a continuum from transactional leadership; it focuses on the developmental needs of followers and challenges leaders to empower group members also to lead. Burns' early work led to the contemporary transformational leadership paradigm.

Adaptive/complex theories are systems-based approaches that emphasize the need for organizations to be flexible enough to respond to leadership challenges as they arise.

Adaptive leadership promotes learning communities so organizations can evolve and innovate as needed. Authentic leadership is the least researched of the post-industrial perspectives and introduces another layer of complexity by having the leader and followers concurrently developing each other's capacities (Aviolo & Gardner, 2005).

This theoretical grounding of industrial and post-industrial approaches to leadership is critical to the qualitative researcher in understanding the lived leadership development program experiences of student-athletes. Understanding these main approaches and the history behind them will allow me to bracket the student-athlete experiences in an informed manner. Building on this understanding, now I will share a selection of the most frequently applied leadership development models in higher education today.

Frequently Utilized Post-Industrial Leadership Development Theories

A key difference between the industrial and post-industrial schools of leadership is that industrial approaches are focused on the leader and post-industrial theories see a complex dynamic in which individual and group development are symbiotic. There is a group of post-industrial leadership theories that are used most frequently in higher education. These theories include the following: (a) servant leadership, (b) leadership challenge, (c) relational leadership model, (d) the social change model, and (e) the leadership identity development model (Komives et al., 2011). Here's a brief review of leadership challenge, the social change model, and the leadership identity development model.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) identify leadership challenge as a starting point for leadership education programs in higher education. Through their research, leadership is constructed as learnable behavior and defined by five practices of effective leaders.

These practices include the following:

- Model the way,
- Inspire a shared vision,
- Challenge the process,
- Enable others to act, and
- Encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

“Model the way” constitutes leading by example and working collaboratively with group members to establish boundaries and protocols for how the group should engage with one another and how things should get done. “Inspire a shared vision” challenges leaders to communicate in such a way that inspires and galvanizes support for future group goals. “Challenge the process” requires a disciplined approach to organizational change. Leaders must embrace necessary change through a commitment to learning. This learning will then inform the change. “Enable others to act” asks leaders to empower group members by sharing responsibility and collaborating equally in the group’s work. “Encourage the heart” is the capacity to understand the importance of, and ensuring that, the group celebrates its successes, whether they are individual or collective.

Leadership challenge (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) follows the theory of transformational leadership and utilizes the Leadership Practices Inventory to assist students in their ability to self-assess and assess peers' leadership behaviors. It can be used to help establish expectations, introduce leadership concepts, and inspire students to want more.

The social change model of leadership is a values-based process that seeks positive social change through collaborative effort. This model was created specifically for college students and rests on two conceptual pillars: (a) the inextricable connection between leadership social responsibility and (b) increasing the self-awareness and collaborative capacity of leaders. These two pillars are reinforced through student development in seven core values. The core values are: (a) consciousness of self, (b) congruence, (c) commitment, (d) collaboration, (e) common purpose, (f) controversy with civility, and (g) citizenship. These seven values are organized in three domains, including individual, group, societal ("National Clearinghouse for Leadership," 2013).

The leadership identity development model represents a different approach than the previous student-focused paradigms in that it focuses on how leadership is developed as opposed to how it is practiced (Komives, Owen, Longersbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). This model is grounded in theory that includes six stages of leadership identity development. The six stages include: (a) awareness, (b) exploration/engagement, (c) leader identified, (d) leadership differentiated, (e) generativity, and (f) integration/synthesis. Students advance through the stages of LID as they become more self-aware and develop their capacity to lead relationally.

As we continue to build this literature review, I find it salient to my research to follow this stream of knowledge regarding the dominant leadership theories (industrial & post-industrial), the most frequently used theory-based programs in higher education. Now, I will review the structure of formal leadership development programs in higher education. The understanding of this structure will be essential to my ability to effectively and accurately understand the lived experiences of the student-athletes in my study. Following this review of the most utilized leadership development theories in higher education, let's now gain an understanding of the formal leadership development models in higher education.

Formal Leadership Development Program Models

An important part of our analysis is understanding the leadership development models and structures that influence the design and implementation of campus leadership programs. Haber (2011) argues for the need to design and implement intentional formal leadership programs that promote integrated learning. The development and coordination of leadership programs are ongoing processes that require educators to understand the target population, content, and setting. It is also imperative to be open to and embrace the idea of uncertainty and to accept that programs may not always go as planned.

More specifically, Haber (2011) identifies three types of leadership programs: (a) formal leadership programs, (b) individual leadership experiences, and (c) leadership activities. A formal leadership program (FLP) is comprised of a variety of individual experiences that include a variety of activities. Each FLP should be intentional in design

and purpose and integrated into the overall experience. An individual leadership experience includes many of the elements of an FLP but can be a stand-alone experience as well. This experience, such as a course or retreat, is intentionally designed to develop leadership capacity. A leadership activity is a specific event or activity that exists within the context of the individual leadership experience. Research indicates that students engaged in even one-time programs report a higher leadership capacity than those who do not engage in any leadership programs (Haber, 2011).

The term “comprehensive leadership development program” is increasingly used to classify leadership programs but means different things to different scholars. An integrative learning experience weaves together many different experiences, areas of content, and opportunities to create a more complete whole that facilitates leadership learning. This term can be used to refer to a 4-year program, a leadership program that is open to all students, and a program that utilizes many different learning strategies. Regardless of the definition, it is clear that providing an integrative learning experience is critical. This goal—to provide an integrative learning experience—involves developing learners’ capacities to connect, reflect, and take considered action.

Program context and setting are also important. Haber (2011) offers a formal leadership program model whose primary goal is to facilitate an integrative learning experience for student participants in leadership programs. The three dimensions of this model include students, structure, and strategies. The students dimension refers to the population to be served by the model. Planning and development should be tailored to the specific group. Structure contains three categories: (a) program foundation, (b) staff

and resources, and (c) program components (Haber, 2011). The structural foundation consists of mission statement, values, evidence-based and theoretically congruent learning outcomes, and assessment. Program components include commitment, requirements for participation, tracks, and phases. It is critical to infuse high-impact learning strategies into leadership development programs in order to achieve desired outcomes. Strategies encompass the specific learning experiences and activities that students engage in as part of the formal leadership program.

An important distinction to make is the difference between leadership training, education, and development, often referred to as the TED model. Leadership training consists of activities designed to enhance skills and improve an individual's performance in a role. Education provides learning outside of a specific role and can include instruction related to leadership theories, approaches, and models that are broadly applicable. Development is designed to help students grow in areas of leadership complexity, integration, and proficiency.

Now, our journey through the leadership literature has provided a foundation targeting the concepts and theories most relevant to my study of the lived experiences of student-athletes in leadership development programs provided through their athletic department. This literature review has started broadly, with an understanding of how leadership has been defined, grounded by the understanding of historical theories of leadership, and narrowed by an overview of the most frequently utilized program models and an understanding of researched formal structures of leadership development programs in higher education. While this literature is comprehensive, this in-depth

review was necessary for me to execute successfully this study. With that in mind, let's review the last area of literature on leadership development—the co-curricular models in higher education.

Co-Curricular Leadership Development Programs Overview

Students' out-of-class experiences should be thought of as part of the educational experience, and the term co-curricular is the preferred term to describe this (Smist, 2011). Co-curricular leadership programs exist in a variety of formats including conferences, workshops, or comprehensive, developmentally sequenced programs that result in some form of leadership certificate or credential. Students are engaged in a range of co-curricular activities, and they almost always provide an opportunity to exercise leadership and to develop leadership skills—even if the activity is not specifically designed as a leadership training (Smist, 2011).

There are many campus student populations that could benefit from leadership education experiences, including student-athletes. And most of the leadership development programs in college athletics are co-curricular in format, increasingly the necessity of understanding this dynamic.

The first step in creating a co-curricular leadership program is to form a planning committee comprised of workers and politically necessary representatives (Eich, 2005). Elements to consider when designing a co-curricular leadership program include the following:

- Institutional type,
- Student population,
- Program purpose,
- Learning outcomes,
- Target audience,
- Program content,
- Recruitment and retention,
- Institutional support, and
- Evaluation and assessment (Eich, 2005).

Educators are encouraged to remember that the relative effectiveness of co-curricular leadership programs is determined more by the infusion of high-impact learning strategies than by the specific platform of delivery (retreat, lecture, outdoor adventure, etc.). One-time programs often exist independently of other leadership programs on campus and include conferences, retreats, workshops, and lectures (Smist, 2011). It is best if short-term programs complement a more comprehensive and extensive program (Eich, 2005). Sequential programs span a semester, a year, or multiple years and include workshop and program series, emerging leader programs, co-curricular leadership certificate programs, global leadership programs, and multi-year programs.

Leadership Development Summary

Burns (1978) asserts that “leadership is one of the most observed, yet least understood, phenomena on earth” (p. 3). Building on this notion, many of the researchers

in the field of leadership education and training in the US believe we are experiencing a crisis in leadership that demands the attention of higher education (Burns, 1978; Komives et al., 2011; Northouse, 2010). In turn, hundreds of higher education institutions have developed and implemented leadership education and training programs for students (Appendix B). The rise has been so swift that important questions regarding the efficacy and validity of leadership training are requiring scholarly inquiry.

In spite of the dramatic rise in institutions offering leadership training, there remain important theoretical and practical questions to answer (Rosch & Kusel, 2010). Among these broader theoretical and practical questions are defining leadership in a scholarly manner, understanding the effectiveness of the various leadership education pedagogies, and learning which pedagogies are most effective with the unique population of college student-athletes (Komives et al., 2011, Northouse, 2010, Rosch & Anthony, 2012).

As we discussed previously, there is also considerable research that focuses on theoretical frameworks for leadership training. Northouse (2010) synthesizes what comprises effective leadership training and education. Effective leadership practice needs to encompass a focus on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Komives et al., 2005, Northouse, 2010, Rosch & Kusel, 2010), including a combination of acquired skills and demonstrated behaviors that highlight these three areas (Northouse, 2010). Echoing these sentiments, successful pedagogy should be measured students' ability to apply newly acquired leadership skills in their own life situations (Baxter, Magolda, & King, 2004).

The literature suggests that leadership training is most effective when it is developed and delivered with a student-centered approach aiming to impact the students' lives through a transformational leadership experience (Rosch & Anthony, 2012). Komives et al. (2007) and Kouzes and Posner (2010) posit that leadership educators need to model the leadership styles they are teaching. If they lose credibility through incompatible behavior, the students will not successfully apply effective leadership styles in their own lives.

This concludes our literature review on leadership development in higher education. The foundation this provides will enhance the credibility of my findings as I will rely on this information to understand and interpret the experiences of the participants in my research study. These participants will be student-athletes and, as such, it is important to consider how this research will be relevant to them.

Relevance of Leadership Development to Student-Athletes

Almost 2,000 colleges and universities field sports teams across the country, making this a uniquely American endeavor (Suggs, 2006). College athletics present an enigma for higher education, and its very presence on campus is troubling for many institutions. Thelin (1994) describes college athletics as “American higher education's peculiar institution” since it casts a long shadow of campus life and often finds itself at odds with the educational mission of the institution.

Athletic departments have been developing and implementing leadership training, usually in isolation from larger campus efforts, at the same time as higher education in

general. These athletics-driven programs need to have the same questions answered regarding theoretical foundations and practical application, as the programs operating for the general student population.

The preceding literature and effective program review serves as an essential foundation for understanding the type of leadership education approach that will be most applicable to student-athlete populations. As stated above, leadership education for college student-athletes has followed a similar timeline and trajectory to that of leadership education opportunities for general students. A significant gap in the scholarly literature consists of leadership education for student-athletes. Student-athletes represent a unique sub-section of the undergraduate student population. Hence, higher education institutions would be wise to conduct research specific to this population.

Comeaux, Speer, Taustine, and Harrison (2011) suggest that purposeful engagement with student-athletes during their first year in college is critical to their successful adjustment to college. Comeaux et al. (2011) developed the concept of revenue student-athletes as a sub-group with different needs than non-revenue athletes. An example of this is the imbalance between athletic and academic identities of revenue student-athletes with a tilting towards a strong athletic identity coupled with a weak academic identity. This purposeful engagement extends to the culture of an institution and the opportunities for all students to feel welcome on campus. Chen, Snyder, and Magner (2010) concur and examine the differences between student-athletes' and non-athletes' social and academic experiences. They found that student-athletes often have limited campus experiences outside of their athletic responsibilities and, in many cases,

are discouraged from seeking social experiences outside of athletics. This isolation from the greater campus community serves to decrease their connection to the campus and commitment to completing their degrees.

Even within the student-athlete population, there are dramatic demographic differences. These differences are observed across multiple demographic characteristics and serve to complicate the development and implementation of leadership education of this group. However, the pedagogies described in the post-industrial and student-centered models would translate well to student-athletes. The team dynamics that comprise the student-athletes' athletic endeavors would provide a seamless transition to learning leadership as a collaborative behavior.

The student-athlete population represents a significant sub-population of the undergraduate student population, especially at institutions competing at the NCAA Division I level and understanding the uniqueness of their experience will provide depth and texture to my analysis and enhance the findings of this research. Now that we have a literature-based understanding of the relevant topics for this proposed research, I will provide a review of the theoretical framework that will constitute the foundation of this project.

Theoretical Framework: Mindset

“Students can be taught the science underlying people’s potential to change their academically and socially relevant characteristics, and they can be shown how to apply these insights to their own lives” (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 303).

On the following pages, I will now expand on the opening discussion regarding the theoretical framework that I began in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. I will apply Dweck's (2008) theory of mindset to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of student-athletes who participated in leadership development programs provided by their athletic departments. I will begin by exploring growth and fixed mindsets.

Growth Versus Fixed Mindset

Dweck (2008) advances two contrasting mindsets—growth and fixed—that will serve as the theoretical framework for this study. Fixed mindset traits are associated with believing your abilities are fixed/set and cannot be improved, and individuals with a fixed mindset display an unhealthy focus on showing how smart they are, how strong their moral character is, how successful their relationship is, etc. This fixed mindset leads some to feel the need to constantly prove themselves to others, to demonstrate how smart or skilled they are (Dweck, 2007). Growth mindset traits are associated with the belief that one's abilities can be improved through hard work, that no matter how good you are, effort is needed to reach your potential, and that facing adversity and struggling through it are understood as part of the process. A growth mindset is reflected in someone always striving to improve and developing a plan to make it happen (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Importantly, an individual's mindset effects the accuracy of their self-assessment, with growth mindset lending itself to a more accurate assessment and fixed mindset overwhelmingly representing those who are less accurate in their self-assessment.

Yeager and Dweck (2012) offer implicit theories as a framework for understanding and predicting the events in an individual's world and then assigning meaning to those events. They describe the implicit label as derived from the common-sense everyday person's understanding of life, their circumstances, and the future. The main implicit orientations are entity theory and incremental theory. Entity theory is a fixed trait theory (fixed mindset) of intelligence and personality while incremental theory is a malleable theory (growth mindset) that values learning and development.

Digging deeper into the theoretical foundation of mindset, entity theory (fixed mindset) defines characteristics such as intelligence as fixed traits, leading to the belief that human performance cannot improve. This conviction that human potential is limited compromises resilience and a student's ability to get un-stuck (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Similarly, implicit theories are associated with an adolescent's belief that social dynamics (such as a being bullied) are also permanent and there is nothing they can do to change them. This also has a negative effect on resilience. Importantly, Yeager and Dweck (2012) reveal that a person's mindset can be changed; they can learn a growth mindset, and this will positively impact their resilience.

These implicit theories comprise a student's mindset. Those with an entity mindset believe they are either smart or not, popular or not, and view effort as a weakness. Those with an incremental mindset see intellectual ability as something that needs to be nurtured to grow and develop over time; they believe they can become smarter through strategic focus and effort. Students with an incremental mindset extend their beliefs to other areas of their lives, including their social lives. A twist here is that

these mindsets can exist within the same individual—a student can have an incremental mindset regarding their intellectual goals while exhibiting an entity mindset regarding their social lives. This indicates there can be a variability of mindset for individuals, based on the situation they are addressing. An example Yeager and Dweck (2012) share is an adolescent who feels she can improve academically (growth) but feels her social skills, or personality, cannot be changed.

Gardner's (2006) Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) has a connection here as he argues that humans have multiple intelligences that drive toward problem-solving and the transmission of knowledge. Gardner (2006) posits that human competence is understood through, "a set of abilities, talents, or mental skills" (p.6) that he refers to as intelligences. Individuals who experience variability in their mindset, could be better understood through the lens of multiple intelligence. Without specific training on mindset, individuals will respond to external or internal stimuli based on their lived experiences, and possibly, their innate characteristics from the various multiple intelligences. The interplay of mindset, the type of intelligences they possess, and their perseverance can all be factors for an individual.

Hence, a student's beliefs about effort, how and to what they attribute their setbacks, and the strategies they consider and utilize when dealing with setbacks, all serve as variables to gauge resilience. A key piece of this research focused on teaching students about brain malleability and how neuron connections promote brain growth when we are learning. Our brains get stronger as we engage in learning and, eventually, make us smarter (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Yeager and Dweck (2012) also explored implicit theories of personality, and the reactions peers had to peer exclusion and victimization. They found most adolescents are more concerned about their social standing than their academic performance. When students are challenged by their peers in a social setting, how resilient they are will dictate their response and ability to navigate. Just as with academic and intellectual beliefs, if a student has an entity or incremental theory will play a critical role in their resilience. Yeager and Dweck (2012) found that adolescents are attuned to their social labels and those of their peers and are likely to believe that these labels are fixed. Yeager and Dweck (2012) explored whether implicit theories of personality impact resilience in the face of negative outcomes, such as aggression and exclusion. Those with an incremental theory did not passively accept victimization; rather, they developed strategies and employed positive solutions to peer conflict, even if they were being bullied themselves. Their study showed that students with an entity framework are not stuck there and can learn to adopt an incremental approach to their peers' conflicts. Theories of personality lead to resilience by creating patterns of attributions and emotions for the individual and the aggressor.

Dweck's (2007) self-theories of ability are entity theory and incremental theory. People who hold an entity theory, or fixed mindset, believe their abilities are fixed. A person can learn new things but can't change their ability, and they shouldn't need to work at an ability. In contrast, people who hold an incremental theory, or growth mindset, believe that they can develop their abilities throughout their lives. Mistakes do not serve as a final judgment on their ability; rather, it serves as a checkpoint.

This will make a significant contribution to my analysis of student-athlete lived experiences, particularly how they understand and respond to success or failure in their lives. Applying the impact of mindset on an individual's perceived ability to grow and develop will add another dimension to this proposed research. Now I will share the core tenets of the theoretical foundation, tenets that I will explore in the proposed research study.

The Meaning of Failure

“Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up.

Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it” (Michael Jordan).

Dweck (2008) explains that for those individuals with a fixed mindset, failure transforms “from an action (I failed) to an identity (I am a failure)” (p. 33). People with a fixed mindset view failure as the final result, improvement is not an option. People with a fixed mindset blame others and make excuses for failure. As with the John McEnroe example I shared in Chapter 1, Dweck (2008) offers former Enron CEO Jeffrey Skilling as another example. After Enron collapsed amidst scandal and deception, Skilling blamed his staff, energy regulations, and even the US Department of Justice for the company's demise. His investment in his own talent and reputation as an energy business genius was more important to him than integrity. Skilling had a fixed mindset about natural intelligence and couldn't accept that he was wrong. People with a growth mindset understand failure as a moment in time, a thing that happened, but not the end. Failure provides an opportunity to map out a plan and work to improve. National

Basketball Association Hall of Famer Michael Jordan, considered by many as the greatest basketball player of all time, was notoriously cut from his high school team as a teenager. He used that failure as motivation to understand where he needed to improve and what he needed to do to get better. Jordan embraced failure and grew from it. People with a growth mindset believe in the integrity of the process, and results will be a by-product of good process (Dweck, 2008).

Students who possess, innately or taught, a mindset that promotes resilience are more likely to be successful in school and in life. Yeager and Dweck (2012) demonstrate that, if a student/person believes intellectual and social abilities can be developed, this will benefit them in many ways, including lower aggression and stress in challenging social situations (aggression, bullying, teasing, etc.). Hence, their mindset can impact their ability to navigate through, and respond to, these types of challenges. This research was conducted specifically with adolescents but can be extrapolated to other learning environments.

Yeager and Dweck (2012) posit that resilience reflects “any behavioral, attributional, or emotional response to an academic or social challenge that is positive and beneficial for development.” (p. 303). The authors acknowledge there is a multitude of factors that can impact resilience. Resilience includes a malleable, process approach to academic and social challenges, including the following responses: (a) developing new strategies, (b) recalibrating the amount of effort an issue will require to solve, (c) and prioritizing the de-escalation of conflict. Approaches that do not foster perseverance fall on the opposite end of the spectrum as those just listed that promote resilience.

Dweck (2007) suggests that people with an incremental (growth) framework found it easier to sustain confidence as they are focused on growth and development—viewing mistakes or “failing” as a learning opportunity. In the entity framework, performing poorly feels like a weakness, an inability, and causes people to lose confidence. Just needing to practice and work on skills can negatively impact confidence.

In the context of the entity framework, potential is all about a fixed version of the traits a person has—the talent they have now is projected into the future in way that does not change. However, in the incremental framework, potential is difficult to judge. If you believe in the potential to grow and develop over time, you will focus on the work it takes to reach your potential.

For my research, learning how student-athletes make meaning from failure will be an initial clue to understanding the role mindset has played in their development as people and as leaders. The next tenet I want to explore is the meaning of effort.

The Meaning of Effort

Dweck (2008) argues that, in spite of our national empathy for the underdog, we are culturally socialized to value the seemingly effortless success of our designated heroes. This socially-constructed preference for talent over effort can translate into an either/or mindset. Specifically, people *either* are naturally talented, *or* people have to exert effort and hard work. Dweck (2007, 2008) sees this as faulty logic that belies the research into successful people. Would you rather be the loveable loser or the

exceptionally talented hero? Fables such as the tortoise and hare and the little engine that could reinforce this dichotomy; this dynamic plays itself out in the mindsets as follows: for people with a fixed mindset, needing to expend effort is a show of weakness and effort is reserved for people who are deficient. People with a fixed mindset see needing to exert effort as diminishing to their status; it lowers them. Another insight into fixed mindset and effort is that effort is terrifying to them because, in their mindset, they are not supposed to need it and it removes your excuses (Dweck, 2008). They fear trying and not succeeding, and often suffer from low-effort syndrome. Those with a fixed mindset fear that, if they work really hard at something and are still not successful, then that is an indictment of them as a person. Conversely, for people with growth mindset, they believe effort is required to realize their potential, regardless of natural talent; everyone has to work for their accomplishments (Dweck 2007, 2008). They see effort as the key ingredient to transform their abilities into success in the workplace, in school, in relationships, and in life. These people study to learn, not to pass the test.

One of the components of effort that Duckworth (2016) uncovered was that, for people with grit, they were never satisfied, nothing they did was ever good enough, and they possessed a ferocious determination to succeed. Grit translated into extraordinary effort; people with grit were laser-focused on their goals and did not lose sight of them. Duckworth (2016) cites Charles Darwin as among those who ascribed to the notion that “zeal and hard work” (p. 21) are more important than intellectual ability. Also, Duckworth cites many renowned psychologists, including William James, who similarly argued that there is, and has been, a gap “between potential and its actualization” (p. 22).

Yeager and Dweck (2012) offer a perspective on effort through the lens of implicit self-theories. For people with a fixed mindset (entity theory), the very thought of exerting effort is troubling (Dweck, 2007); they believe you shouldn't need effort if you possess the talent/ability. Growth mindset people see effort as the method for bringing out your ability. Mindset also manifests itself in how individuals cope with adversity. People with an incremental (growth) mindset view adversity as a learning opportunity and gain interest and intensity when experiencing setbacks—they see this a time to re-focus, consider causes of the setback, and plot a course correction. People with an entity (fixed) mindset tend to lose interest and confidence when faced with adversity.

Duckworth (2016) explains how achievement depends on both effort and talent. The key differentiator is that someone with double the talent but who is half as hardworking as another less-talented person will be less successful over time than the person with less innate ability (Duckworth, 2016). Strivers are in a constant state of improvement and driven to succeed—they will ultimately be more accomplished. Duckworth (2016) emphasizes that talent is required, but effort counts twice as much as talent. “Without effort, your talent is nothing more than your unmet potential” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 51).

Mawer (2014) sees student motivation to succeed academically as connected to their mindset. Students who have a learning orientation, and value working hard to achieve goals, are usually easily motivated. Students who feel knowledge is a fixed trait are more likely to lose motivation if they have to exert energy or effort to learn. Mawer argues that most approaches to academic learning and student engagement believe in

some version of the following mantra: “hard work beats talent when talent does not work hard” (p. 50).

The first two core tenets of this theoretical foundation were the meaning of failure and the meaning of effort. Inextricably connected to these first two is the final tenet, the myth of natural talent. Next, I will explore and clarify this myth through the work of Dweck (2008).

The Myth of Natural Talent

“Hard work beats talent when talent does not work hard” (Mawer, 2014, p. 50).

The final core tenet of this proposed research study was the myth of natural talent. This myth conspires to pollute the mind of people who want to improve, grow, and reach their potential. This myth has a negative impact on people with both a fixed or a growth mindset. Dweck (2007) argues that a significant distinguishing feature of great athletes is their mindset, not their talent. Dweck (2007) introduces and explores the concept of self-theories to explain this perspective. A key example of this myth is the story of former Major League Baseball (MLB) player and current MLB General Manager Billy Beane. Beane was an extraordinary athlete who excelled at every level of baseball, youth leagues to high school, college, and the minor leagues. It wasn't until he reached the major leagues that his fixed mindset derailed his career. Beane embraced what everyone around him always told him—that he was a natural talent who didn't need to work on his game to be successful. His career was shortened due to his mindset, specifically because he believed his failures were permanent and he couldn't improve through effort and

adjustments to his approach. Beane's struggles in MLB serve as the highlight for discussion around the meaning of effort and labeling some people as "naturals." What does this labeling do to a person's beliefs about hard work, effort, learning from mistakes, and embracing failure?

The myth of natural talent is especially amplified in athletics, as people learn what an ideal athlete looks like. The John McEnroe, Billy Beane, and Michael Jordan stories serve as anecdotal examples of the danger of applying a natural talent mindset—that talent is all one needs to be successful. A fixed mindset destroyed Beane's career, and a growth mindset propelled Jordan to the highest level of success in professional sports and business. Jordan is often referred to as the hardest working athlete in history, always seeking to improve his game and never believing he had arrived. Dweck (2008) argues that the most accomplished athletes all have a dogged work ethic and are mentally tough—they embrace and learn from failure. These are components of a highly developed character. There is an empirical basis for this phenomenon and Dweck (2007, 2008) offers research findings regarding success in sports:

- Those with a growth mindset found success in doing their best, in learning and improving.
- Those with a growth mindset found setbacks motivating.
- People with a growth mindset took charge of the processes that bring success.

Duckworth (2016) concurs and adds that, as a culture, we have become distracted by talent. Duckworth's (2016) initial insights into grit came during her graduate work on why some West Point cadets successfully completed Beast Barracks and others did not. Talent was only important if the cadets had grit. Without grit, they dropped out. Those who succeeded were driven to improve and responded to failure in a positive way. Duckworth created a grit scale, a test that measures the extent to which respondents approach life with grit. The author went on to use this grit scale with other high-pressure groups, like national spelling bee participants and Ivy League undergraduates. In her Ivy League study, SAT scores and grit were inversely correlated. Having talent is only useful if one also has grit.

Self-theories have contrasting viewpoints on goals, and goal-setting is reflective of views on natural talent (Dweck 2007). Entity theories put a premium on "performance goals" where they can highlight their proficiencies and attempt to hide their deficiencies. Incremental theories are associated with "learning goals" and the idea of acquiring new skills, mastering new tasks, and improving your ability. Dweck (2007) points out that both performance and learning goals are important in a sports context. Important to note here is Dweck's (2008) research that showed students with a fixed mindset were dramatically more likely to cheat or lie in order to cover deficiencies.

Psychologist Chia-Jing Tsay's research is cited as an example of "naturalness bias" in our culture (Duckworth, 2016). This bias is uncovered in the decisions we make about people, often in contradiction to what we say we value. Naturalness bias is a hidden bias against people who have achieved success as a result of hard work in favor of

people who've succeeded as a result of real or perceived natural talent. *The War for Talent*, a document created and distributed by McKinsey, a high-end corporate management consulting firm, reinforces this notion of the best and the brightest as the key to organizational success. Enron is an example of how this approach can corrupt an organizational culture and lead to unethical and deceptive behaviors. Duckworth argues that by over-emphasizing talent, we send the message that the other factors for success, including grit, do not matter as much as they have shown to matter.

Praise

Although praise is not one of the core tenets I will utilize in this study, I wanted to share how this concept is connected to the three core tenets of my theoretical foundation. Dweck (2008) explores the concepts of praise and argues that we should praise effort and process, not ability. If we skip over the work it took to get the desired result, we are socializing people to only value the accomplishment at the expense of the effort and process it took to get there. Praising effort and process also teaches a love of learning and unlocks creative ideas and approaches—because the goal, and the fun, is not the accomplishment but the process.

Mawer (2014) shares how he found positive results in cultivating a growth mindset with his high school students by having them consider the times in their lives when they exhibited a growth mindset. It was mostly for situations outside of school but served as the first traction point for teaching students how to transfer that thinking, and skill, to success at school. The examples were named success skills, and Mawer (2014)

worked to get students to see how they could be transferred. Focusing on these skills for success skills allowed the students to have agency over their own development and success.

Summary of Literature Review

In summary, Chapter 2 comprised a thorough review of the literature regarding the concept of leadership, student leadership development, college athletics, and the theoretical foundation of mindset. I developed it to provide the necessary context for understanding each of these areas independently and as an integrated group of phenomena. Using this literature as a foundation for this study, I will now explain the methodological elements of this study.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes who have participated in leadership development programs provided by their athletic department. There is a demonstrated need for this level of exploration as evidenced by the growing trend of college athletic departments providing leadership development programming for their respective student-athlete populations. However, there is not a commensurate level of scholarship related to the effectiveness of these programs, nor is there an understanding of the lived experiences of the student-athlete participants that is grounded in research. Therefore, this qualitative study sought to understand this phenomenon by exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes who have participated in leadership development programs provided by their athletic department. This chapter presents my research questions, describes my research design, and offers my justification for choosing this design.

Research Questions

Moustakas (1994) argues that a key challenge for any researcher is to distill a topic and develop corresponding research questions that accomplish two goals: (a) research questions should have social meaning and prove worthy of exploration, and (b) research questions should have personal meaning for the researcher. Research questions should elicit excitement and inspire the researcher to dig deep into the phenomenon and

add value to the world from exploring it. Merriam (1998) believes that the qualitative researcher's first task is to discover a question that is not simply answered and that demands exploration as a means of clarifying the phenomenon. Through my professional experiences as a leadership development practitioner, and a thorough literature review on this phenomenon, I will respond to these challenges by probing the following research questions that guide this study.

1. What are the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes in Student-Athlete Leadership Development programs?
2. How do college student-athletes construct mindset (the meaning of effort; the meaning of failure; the myth of natural ability)?

Design and Rationale of the Study

As a researcher, understanding one's own beliefs and orientation about knowledge and how it is generated drives the type of methodology selected (Groenewald, 2004; Merriam, 1998). My orientation aligns with interpretive research approach and incorporates an inductive process for uncovering the lived experiences of individuals or, in this case, of a phenomenon. Creswell (2003) adds that a researcher must consider the following when choosing a research approach:

- What is the nature of the problem or question to be explored?
- How am I, as the researcher, connected to this question or problem?
- Who is the intended audience for this research study?

These philosophical questions led me to select a qualitative research approach for this study, specifically applying Moustakas' (1994) approach to phenomenology. The decision to utilize Moustakas' approach will be explained in the next section of this chapter.

Research problems amenable to a qualitative research design can arise from a variety of factors, including the question of whether a theory can be proven in practice or current social or political issues (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Applying Creswell (1998) and Merriam (1998), I explored the phenomenon of college student-athlete leadership development programming; this phenomenon represents a current social and educational issue that benefits from qualitative inquiry. Currently, there is a paucity of qualitative research that explores this phenomenon even though leadership development programs continue to be utilized. Consequently, in addition to my own philosophical orientation, this study was well-suited for qualitative inquiry. Providing the opportunity for college student-athletes to share their lived experiences and perceptions regarding their participation in leadership development programming through their athletic departments is most effectively understood through qualitative design and, specifically, through phenomenology.

Phenomenology is defined as the study and exploration of the lived experiences of people in a specified setting (Creswell, 2013; Laverly, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). This type of inquiry asks people to share their experiences with a phenomenon in order to derive meaning from them. Participants in a phenomenological study bring clarity to a phenomenon and, in this way, help researchers explore new questions regarding that

phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). This new understanding adds to the rationale for using a qualitative approach as the college athletics world needs to better understand the lived experiences of participants in the many leadership development programs they are offering. As I will share now, the process of bracketing, which Moustakas (1994) labeled as epoche, will be an important component of this study.

Moustakas (1994) referred to epoche as the state of shedding any bias or preconceived notions about the phenomenon under inquiry and, in this way, receive the lived experiences of the participants as new and fresh information. Given my professional work as a practitioner in the athletics leadership development field, achieving the state of epoche was critical in order to clear my mind, bracket my own experiences, and receive the lived experiences of the study participants in their pure form, without any of my own preconceptions. I was mindful of the challenge that epoche presents for the researcher but I was also aware of its benefits— the introspection and self-transparency that enabled me to be in the moment and hear what my study participants have to say with fresh ears and pristine openness (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Population Selection and Recruitment

Participants in this study consisted of female and male NCAA Division I college student-athletes who participated in a leadership development program through their respective athletic departments. The participants were from two institutions; each institution provided leadership development programming through their athletic

departments. One of these institutions is located in the northeastern region and the other institution is located in the southeastern region of the US. Both institutions compete at the NCAA Division I level.

In order to secure the generally accepted number of 6-10 participants for a qualitative inquiry, I worked with administrators at two college athletic departments to identify 20-25 student-athletes who I invited to participate (Creswell, 2013). Twelve participants who are diverse in terms of gender, race, and sport participated in the study. Specifically, purposeful sampling was utilized to identify, recruit, and secure the participants for this study. Purposeful sampling incorporates eligibility criteria to determine a person's suitability for inclusion in a given study (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Senior administrators at each participating institution assisted with the purposeful sampling of participants who participated in the study and were able to share their lived experience in a contextualized manner conducive to the study. The eligibility criteria for prospective participants included:

- Demographic diversity (gender, race, and sport, diversity is important within the pool);
- Student-athlete, or former student-athlete (within last 2 years); and
- Have participated in an athletics department-provided leadership development program (consisting of multiple sessions over the course of an academic year) within the last 2 years.

The participants in the study received information regarding informed consent and the researcher's commitment to ethical research standards (Appendix D). This study followed Bailey's (1996) recommendations and included the following items in the informed consent document:

- An overview about the purpose of the research;
- A clear statement that they acknowledge they are participating in a research study;
- That their participation in the study was voluntary, and they could remove themselves at any time.
- A description of how the research was conducted
- The potential risks and benefits of the study
- An overview of how their confidentiality would be protected and how the data would be protected.

Research Setting

The interviews for this study were conducted on the campuses at each of the participating institutions. On each campus, a private room (e.g., conference room or a small office space generally used for academic tutoring) was utilized for the interviews. After this study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, dates were scheduled with each institution and individual participant (Appendix E). The administrative contacts at each institution collaborated with me on these planning and scheduling logistics.

Data Collection

This study illuminates the lived experiences of college student-athletes in leadership development programs. In order to provide a safe-space for participants to freely and openly share their experiences, data collection strategies must be aligned with the goals of the study (Groenewald, 2004; Merriam, 1998). Semi-structured interviews were utilized for this phenomenological inquiry. In phenomenology, open or semi-structured interviews are the norm as they offer the best opportunity to capture the essence of the phenomenon (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). A semi-structured interview allowed me to ground the discussion with participants in the core tenets of the study and provided a combination of structure and space for detailed descriptions of their experiences. A semi-structured interview also allowed for follow-up questions to ensure that the most representative descriptions of participants' lived experiences were captured. Data collection commenced with field notes prior to the first participant interview and continued throughout the interviewing process.

Since the central focus of a phenomenological interview is to glean the true essence of a phenomenon, follow-up interviews and the collection of additional relevant data from ancillary sources are recommended to ensure accurate understanding and to deepen the researcher's understanding of the participants' true lived experience (H. J. Rubin & I. S. Rubin, 2012; Padilla-Diaz, 2015). I followed this recommendation and included the following data collection sources:

- Semi-structured interviews: 60-minute in-person interviews that include a list of general questions organized under the core tenets of the study. In-the-moment follow-up questions may vary among participants based on the shared experiences of each individual (Appendix F).
- Reflexive journal writing: Serves as an outlet to share researcher values and perspectives regarding the phenomenon and to facilitate transparency for the reader (Ortlipp, 2008). This data collection source is especially useful in attempting to control researcher bias as it provides another layer of objectivity accountability. Reflexive journaling also serves to refocus the researcher on bridging theory to practice as well as connecting with the focus areas of the study. Reflexive journaling will take place following each semi-structured interview (Appendix G).
- Field notes: Field notes provide another source of documentation of the researcher's thinking, observations, and ideas for new questions that arise from engaging in the study. Field notes also help the researcher maintain a balance between reflective and descriptive impressions during a study (Groenewald, 2004). Field notes will be recorded throughout the data collection process, including in my professional work in leadership development (Appendix H).
- Post in-person interview follow-up: Follow-up contact with participants will be included as needed during this study. This contact strategy will be employed to clarify a response or to ask additional questions based on

preliminary emerging themes. I will consult with each participant to determine their preferred method of communication after the initial interview.

Lastly, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality and any identifiable traces back to individual participant responses in the interviews.

Interviews

This study utilized a semi-structured interview approach and interviews were conducted in person on the two participating campuses. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to utilize open-ended questions as well as specific content questions while maintaining an interactive style (Moustakas, 1994). This approach was appropriate for this study as it sought to better understand the experiences of student-athletes in leadership development programs, and offered the structure and flexibility required to fully understand this phenomenon.

In a phenomenological interview, the researcher's initial role is to help the participant relax and feel comfortable enough to provide honest and in-depth perspectives on the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I created a relaxed atmosphere for my participants by engaging in the following preparation activities: (a) arriving early to each interview, (b) confirming that the reserved room is open and available, (c) setting-up and testing the recording equipment, (d) providing bottles of water, and (e) playing music in the background while waiting for the participant to arrive. This careful preparation created a calm and welcoming environment while minimizing distractions. Once each

participant arrived, we engaged in a couple of minutes of social conversation to establish rapport and cultivate a relaxed environment.

Once the actual interviews began, most of the interviews lasted 40-60 minutes. The interviews followed an interview protocol (Appendix F) that included probes. In phenomenological research, interview guides are used to ensure that the participant's lived experience has been sufficiently accessed (Moustakas, 1994). An interview guide is a list of potential questions researcher may ask and range from very general to very specific, based on the goals of the study and the style of interview (Merriam, 1998). As the interviews in this study were semi-structured, there was a selection of opening questions for each area of interest. Then, open-ended questions (probes) followed up with specific participants based on their responses to questions.

The interview questions were based on the core tenets of this study and aligned with the two main research questions. To ensure that every question asked, and every participant response was preserved, interviews were recorded using an audio recording device and saved in a digital file. An extra audio-recording device, extra batteries, and storage devices were on hand in case of an equipment malfunction. Audio tapes were transcribed verbatim following each interview, assigned a pseudonym, and stored for coding and analysis. Following each interview, I engaged in reflexive journal writing and added to my field notes to help contextualize the process and deepen my understanding of the phenomenon.

Data Analysis

A phenomenological analysis intends to explicate the essence of a phenomenon from the words of people who have experienced it (Merriam, 1998). Padilla-Diaz (2015) notes that Moustakas includes the following procedures as constituting phenomenological data analysis: (a) epoche (bracketing), (b) common meanings and essences, (c) horizontalization, and (d) textual and structural analysis. In following Moustakas' (1994) model, the researcher must complete the epoche process and capture their own experience with the phenomenon. Then the inquirer ensures horizontalization by assigning all comments equal value and begins to cluster statements into units that share common meaning. These units will be formed into overarching themes that then need to be integrated with the textual and structural descriptions of the participants. The aim is then to discover the essence of the experience for the participants.

For this study, I utilized Moustakas' (1994) approach to phenomenological analysis that includes four steps and five sub-steps (Table 7).

Table 7

Steps Associated with Moustakas' (1994) Phenomenological Analysis

Step	Sub-Step
1. Epoche	1a. Researcher bracketing
2. Phenomenological reduction	2a. Topic bracketing 2b. Horizontalization
3. Imaginative Variation	3a. Clustering and Coding 3b. Textual and Structural descriptions
4. Essence of the phenomenon	

Epoche

There are two forms of bracketing that I utilized in this study: epoche and phenomenological reduction. Moustakas (1994) referred to the first form of bracketing as the need for qualitative researchers to understand and shed their own biases, preconceived notions, and prior understanding about a phenomenon. The researcher's bracketing of personal beliefs is called the epoche (Moustakas, 1994) and enables the researcher to hear from participants in pure form, without the clutter of researcher bias. I shedded my preconceived beliefs about leadership development in order to get to the essence of the student-athletes experience.

Phenomenological Reduction

The second form of bracketing involved the process of phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction instructs the researcher to stay focused on only the specific phenomenon that is the object of study. This form of bracketing involves the data collection and data analysis of this research study. To fulfill the process of phenomenological reduction, I reviewed the audio recordings and transcripts from each interview to identify key terms and similar understandings; I then began to bracket the phenomenon.

This analysis continued with phenomenological reduction and involved the horizontalization of the data. Creswell (2013) observes that this is where researchers take the bracketed statements and ascribed them equal value with other statements from the group of interviewees. In my analysis, I listed these significant interviewee quotes and valued them equally in this process. These quotes were organized into broader descriptions in order to prepare them for clustering. This phenomenological reduction required me to listen closely to the words of the interviewees and consider the frequency as well as the frequency in which they were mentioned (Groenewald, 2004; Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Importantly, I eliminated the redundancy of responses by bracketing them and creating lists of equal meaning.

Imaginative Variation

After I completed the epoche and phenomenological reductions stages of data analysis, I then engaged in imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative

variation includes clustering the data into themes and creating textual and structural descriptions of the themes. Furthermore, imaginative variation is the process of identifying themes in the data and considering the themes from a variety of perspectives. It was critical for me to bracket my own experiences as I scrutinized the data and searched for key themes. Here I engaged in imaginative variation with the horizontalized lists of significant quotes and categorized these statements according to the prominent themes that emerged from this process. An extension of this activity was the beginning stage of the process of coding the data. I transcribed and coded the audio-recordings to deepen my awareness and recollection of the lived experiences of the student-athlete participants. After this categorization was complete, I captured the textual and structural descriptions of this phenomenon. For the textual description, I included verbatim quotes from the participants to ensure their voices were illuminated while sharing what they expressed as the most relevant topics within this phenomenon. Sharing what they have experienced and why they are saying these specific experiences was imperative here. For the structural description, I augmented what the participants experienced by sharing how they experienced the leadership development program. Was the experience life changing? Was the experience challenging? Was the experience boring? Answering these questions was be key to delivering a representative structural description (Moustakas, 1994). These structural themes were derived from the textual description. Additionally, I also incorporated how I experienced this phenomenon.

The Essence of the Phenomenon

The last step in my analysis was to synthesize the various meanings and themes to discover the essence of the phenomenon. This task was accomplished by combining the textual and structural descriptions and identifying the essence of the phenomenon for the participants. This process culminated with a synergizing statement that accounted of the participants' lived experiences, and an accurate expression of the nature of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Validity and Reliability of the Study

The issues of trustworthiness and reliability are critical in quantitative and qualitative research. The first step in conducting a reliable, valid qualitative research is for the researcher to operate in an ethical fashion (Merriam, 1998). Related to the ethical behavior of the researcher is the researcher's adherence to the procedures and processes associated with the design selected for their study. Qualitative researchers need to be conscious of their own biases in conducting their research, and one way to do that is to ensure that researchers follow the design and protocol described in their proposal (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2014) offers a range of instruments aimed at qualitative researchers who want to ensure the validity of their studies. Ultimately, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure the trustworthiness of the study results. In this study, I followed Creswell (2013) and applied the following four strategies to ensure the validity of my results:

- Triangulation: Triangulation is useful in collecting data from a variety of perspectives, rather than data collection is from multiple theories, multiple sources of data collection, or multiple investigators analyzing the data (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation can help bolster confidence in the study results; data that comes from more than one place requires the researcher to consider all of these pieces of data (i.e., triangulation; Creswell & Miller, 2000). This study utilized triangulation because data emerged from multiple sources. These sources include: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) reflexive journal writing, (c) field notes; and (d) post in-person interview follow up.
- Thick, Rich Description: Thick, rich description refers to describing the participants in the study, setting of the study, and the key themes in thick, rich detail (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I provided depth in the detail and the description of the setting and participants that added to the credibility of the results. Rich detail enables readers to have faith in the results and to determine if these results could be applicable to their setting.
- Member Checking: Member checking allows the study participants to review and provide feedback on whether the researcher understood the participants' experiences accurately. This process confirms the credibility of the results and enables more than just the researcher to participate in the validating of the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For this study, I communicated with each participant, through the medium of their choosing, the transcription of their

interviews and asked for confirmation that their experiences and words were captured accurately.

- Clarifying researcher bias: My positionality statement in Chapter 1 of this dissertation clearly establishes my background in leadership development in college athletics. I included a vignette describing my position and personal interest in this topic. I also engaged in the epoche process and bracketed my biases and preconceived notions about this topic.

Originality Score

This manuscript will be submitted to the originality service iThenticate for analysis. The chair of my committee will review this report and share it with my committee.

Summary

The larger purpose of this study, aside from the micro specifics described here, was to contribute to the understanding of the student-athlete experience in the context of a college athletics leadership development program. There exists a dearth of research addressing student-athlete experiences and perceptions of these programs, and my hope is that this study will serve as one of the foundational pieces of research that help close the gap for athletics administrators implementing leadership development models. This is a phenomenon that requires attention, especially through a qualitative lens.

CHAPTER 4 PRESENTING THE OWNERS OF THE VOICES

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the voices and lived experiences of the student-athlete participants in this research study. While leadership development programs offered through college athletic departments are increasing in number, there is a paucity of research exploring the student-athlete experience of these programs. The lived experiences of student-athletes, and an understanding of their mindset throughout their experience of leadership development programming, represent significant gaps in the literature. This research study focused on the student-athletes and their experiences in their leadership development programs—in their own words. This study also sought to provide depth to their stories and experiences by hearing how *they* have made meaning out of phenomena such as effort and failure.

Finally, this chapter provides an overview of each of the two participating institutions and their athletic departments, a demographic overview of the participants, individual profiles of each of the student-athlete participants in this study, and a summary of the voices of this study's participants.

University Settings

Two NCAA Division I university athletic departments participated in this study. The following pseudonyms have been assigned to each institution, and they are as follows. Northeast College (NC) is the pseudonym for this study's participating

institution based in the Northeastern US (Massachusetts). Northeast College is a private institution and its student body represents all 50 states and 139 countries. Total enrollment at NC is 21,257, with 16,385 undergraduates and 4,872 graduate students. Twenty-nine percent of NC students are people of color, 19% are international, and 51% are female. Northeast College is consistently ranked in the top 50 by *US News & World Report*.

Southeast University (SU) is the pseudonym for this study's participating institution based in the Southeastern US (Florida). Southeast University is a public institution with more than 66,000 students enrolled, including 56,972 undergraduates, 8,726 graduate students, and 485 medical students. Southeast University confers over 15,000 degrees annually. At SU, 45.8% percent of students are minorities and 24.9% percent are Hispanic. The average freshman SAT score in 2017 was 1316.

The choice of these two institutions was strategic, as their student-athlete populations live and experience leadership in contrasting cultures; they differ in type (private versus public) and geographic location (Massachusetts and Florida). This diversity added to the richness of the data collected during my interviews with the participants.

Demographic Overview

The final group of participants for this research study consisted of 12 student-athletes from two NCAA Division I institutions who participated in a leadership development program offered through their athletic department within the last two years.

Given the diversity of student-athlete populations, I included demographic diversity as the first participant eligibility criterion. This study needed to be representative of the diversity that is found in most Division I athletic departments: diversity in sport, gender, race, and nationality. Working with campus partners at both institutions, and utilizing purposeful sampling, this study's participant population consisted of the following categories of student-athletes:

- 58% were student-athletes of color (7 total),
- 42% were White (5 total), and
- 25% were international students (3 total; Table 8).

There were six student-athletes who identified as women and six student-athletes who identified as men, representing a 50% gender split. Regarding sport diversity, student-athletes representing eight sports participated in the study. They are: Women's Basketball (WBB), Women's Rowing (WROW), Women's Track & Field (WTF), Men's Soccer (MSOC), Baseball (BASE), Football (FB), Men's Ice Hockey (MIH), and Men's Track & Field (MTF). Pseudonyms have been assigned to each participant to ensure confidentiality.

Table 8

Research Study Student-Athlete Participant Demographic Breakdown

Pseudonym	Institution	Sport	Race	Gender
Amy	NC	WBB	White	Female
Jacob	NC	MSOC	White/Norway	Male
LaTonya	NC	WBB	Black	Female
Tim	NC	BASE	White	Male
Micah	NC	MTF	Bi-Racial (Black/White)	Male
Ethan	NC	MIH	White	Male
Ashanti	NC	WTF	Black	Female
Candice	NC	WTF	Black	Female
Veronica	SU	WROW	Hispanic/Peru	Female
Brooke	SU	WROW	White/Canada	Female
Samuel	SU	FB	Bi-Racial (Black/Italian)	Male
Malcolm	SU	FB	Black	Male

Northeast College (NC)

I knew all of the Northeast College student-athlete participants for this study because of my role as the leadership development consultant for the program they experienced through their athletic department. Each of these student-athletes participated in the NC program last year. Participants' familiarity with me helped them to relax during our interviews, and facilitated our having a guided conversation about their lived experiences in the program, and with effort and failure.

Amy

Amy arrived right on time for our interview and didn't have any trouble finding the coach's office that served as our interview space. She was wearing athletic gear and explained that she just came from a three-mile run this morning, even though it was their off-day as a team. This explains a lot about Amy's tenacious spirit. Amy identifies as

White, and hails from California. She gave me a warm greeting and wanted to catch up before we got started. Amy and one her teammates would regularly stay after our leadership meetings last year and engage me with questions about the topics we addressed as well as my work nationally.

Amy is a junior on the women's basketball team at NC; she wears her sandy hair in a ponytail and grew up on basketball. She always put it first. At the time of our interview, Amy was a psychology major and enjoyed the mental aspect of leadership, personal growth, and development. She demonstrated self-awareness and was reflective. Amy enjoyed the way the leadership meetings challenged her and her peers to think about real-life applications of the various leadership topics we discussed. She also made a priority of maintaining a balance between her two identifies: her athlete-self and her regular-self.

I could be the greatest at throwing a ball into a hoop, but in real life that doesn't mean anything unless you learn all of those other lessons from it. So, I think that, not like forces you to learn the lessons, but makes you think about it more and apply it in real life so you can take your athletics and use it to make you a better person. (Amy, pp. 2-3, lines 80-84)

Amy believes that emotional intelligence is critical to being a good leader, by having the awareness and skill to understand the varying needs of individuals and adjusting your approach to match your groups' needs.

Part of leadership is understanding different people . . . like you can't be like 'well I'm this way' and then communicate the same way to everyone the same way . . . it's like this one teammate needs this, this teammate needs that, and you do what's best for each person. (Amy, p. 4, lines 128-133)

Her emotional intelligence has been put to the test as she has not been able to get the playing time she would like since being at NC. She has worked hard to channel her frustration into being the best teammate she can be and support her teammates who are getting more playing time. She works to maintain her positive mindset in the face of limited time spent on the court during games. This has been extremely challenging as she grew up with a “basketball is life” philosophy.

Like right now, with basketball, I’m not playing as much as I would like to obviously, but you can either like, sit on the bench and just sit there and cry about it or be the best bench person you can be. Be locked in, be cheering people on. If someone has a question that doesn’t know what’s going on, like be focused enough to get them to be doing what they are supposed to be doing. (Amy, p. 6, lines 212-217)

Dedicated effort has been a constant in Amy’s development as an athlete and person, while dealing with failure in basketball has been a new experience since arriving at NC. Through this failure, Amy has recognized a strong work ethic and personal effort as core principles in her life.

Giving extra effort becomes a habit because I think if you kind of make it a principal for yourself, than, at least that’s what I do, I make it a principal for myself, and then I just do it . . . Or like at practice, we run sprints for losing. I always run the sprints, win or lose. No matter if we just did the most dying drill. Cause in my mind, I always like, even though they lost by one point, they just did the same thing that I was doing. They just ran the same drill, so how am I going to not run the sprint just cause I won. It’s not like a punishment, it’s like uh, you get more, you get better at running, you get more fit, and you like push yourself more. I think things like that just become more of a habit. (Amy, p. 8, lines 303-313)

Jacob

“So, I think if someone puts the challenge in front of me where effort is the main driver which will make me succeed, I think it’s just an advantage for me” (Jacob, p. 6, lines 218-219). This quote epitomizes Jacob’s mindset and the parts of his life story that he shared with me. Jacob was friendly, quick with a smile, and a senior on the NC men’s soccer team. He usually spoke only when called upon while a part of the NC leadership group, but he was eagerly talkative during our interview. He is tall, appearing to be about 6’ 4” in height, with brown hair. Jacob identifies as White, and he is an international student from Norway. Soccer was his path to an athletic scholarship at a US institution. One the day of our interview, he was congested from a cold but, nonetheless, enthusiastically participated in our interview.

Jacob found his leadership development program “enlightening,” and finds himself reflecting on the lessons of those sessions while trying to apply them in his team leadership role. He explained that he is more aware of the impact of his decisions on others and, therefore, more intentional in selecting the approaches he takes to dealing with situations that arise on his team.

When you start reflecting on your choices, the way you think and maybe also the way your teammates are thinking, and are approaching the way you approach them, you start to feel—you get like a different point of view of how to lead, so I really thought it was really enlightening like the way we analyzed it. (Jacob, p. 1, lines 24-27)

Jacob considers effort his advantage when facing competition or challenges. He shared that he responds well to adversity and that he works to be confident and determined in everything that he does. In Europe, his youth experience in soccer served

as a testament to his perseverance and effort as he dealt with many doubters before arriving at NC.

I think effort is my number one thing that got me anywhere, to be honest, I do pretty well in school and I've been doing pretty well in soccer so far and I like to believe it's not just because of intelligence or talent. I mean I guess for some, I have some kind of talent but I've never been strong I've never been fast even though I'm like a tall guy but I've always worked hard which has been my number one thing and so I think like effort has like got me to where I am. (Jacob, p. 5, lines 178-183)

He noted that his failures have taught him to have perspective on any given situation and to not over-analyze mistakes or lost opportunities. Thinking and reflecting are important to Jacob. He's finding the line between healthy reflection and obsessing on mistakes; Jacob doesn't over think situations and allows himself to relax and enjoy his success. An example of this was when he asked his former coach in Norway if he could work out with the team.

And at that point I was in a place where all I cared about was preparing for my trip to the US, preparing for getting fit, preparing to play soccer, just to improve. My mentality was not, I have to get back on this team, I have to be on the field. And those five, six months are again probably the steepest curve of improvement I've had. (Jacob, p. 12, lines 446-449)

LaTonya

"I don't like to be in the limelight, I don't like to be ostracized either" (LaTonya, p. 11, line 493). I called LaTonya a few minutes after our scheduled start time to be sure she was going to make it, and she indicated she was on her way and arrived a few minutes later. She greeted me with a warm smile and apologized for being late. She was dressed fashionably, and her clothing gave no indication that she is a student-athlete.

LaTonya identifies as Black and is a junior on the NC women's basketball team. She is from Atlanta, Georgia and has enjoyed adjusting to her new home in Massachusetts.

Her mom, who doesn't have a high school diploma, raised LaTonya and her five siblings by herself, and her fortitude to make it happen for her children has stuck with LaTonya. It is these childhood experiences that have forged LaTonya's indomitable spirit and appreciation for hard work and effort.

Effort is close to everything, so a little background, my mom was like I am 21, my mom is 41 so there's the math, and I have an older brother and I have five siblings. My mom had three kids by the time she was 22, 23, she was single and very young obviously, so my mom didn't graduate and go to college, she didn't graduate high school, she had a GED and she supported four kids by herself. And watching that and like knowing that was a thing, I have pretty much accepted nothing less than 100%. (LaTonya, p. 5, lines 200-207)

She described herself as an introvert who has always been a woman of few words. Her mom told her she hardly spoke at all until she was five years old and her teachers were always encouraging her to share her voice more. She feels she is developing as a leader and learning to value her own style of leadership as an "introvert leader." Her experience in the leadership development program was a validating experience for her.

So, being in that situation being around so many people who do like classify themselves as leaders and like TJ who is the leader of the basketball team and Zoe who is very like outspoken and like confident and things like that, to being in the same room and listening to the same things they are saying and having kind of the same views is like maybe, maybe I am a leader maybe my way of leadership is just a lot different than quote unquote like typical leaders ya know. (LaTonya, p. 2, lines 61-66)

Tim

“So, your work ethic, and the pride you take, and the amount of effort you exert is everything” (Tim, p. 4, lines 142-143). Tim arrived on time and displayed a serious demeanor: friendly, a personality that tells you he is focused. He’s a senior on the baseball team at NC and is at the top of the rotation starter. He is tall, approximately 6’ 3,” with reddish blonde, close-cropped hair and an athletic build. Tim identifies as White and is from metro Boston, Massachusetts. The NC baseball team won their conference championship last season and is entering this season with high expectations. Tim’s emergence as a star pitcher is one of the main reasons for that optimism. He was elected captain by his teammates and he takes this honor seriously.

Tim enjoyed the interactive nature of his leadership development program and felt the manner in which it was administered created an environment that allowed everyone to freely exchange ideas and learn from each other’s experience. Tim indicated it was a unique opportunity to learn and grow as a leader.

The program itself did a great job of taking people’s thoughts in the room and . . . it’s like a collaboration, it’s a conversation, I felt like, I didn’t think you were up there lecturing. I think that you did a great job, and the program did a great job, of taking information and taking people’s feelings about certain things and giving them the platform and the ability to express those certain feelings, or what they know, or what they’ve learned, or you know what works for their team, and I thought it was a great conversation amongst so many different sports and so many different levels of leadership within the room. (Tim, pp. 1- 2, lines 36-43)

Tim described the exertion of effort to overcome a challenge as a thrill that gets his competitive juices going. He feels effort is really an intangible skill that is a difference-maker.

For me it's a thrill, and it's a challenge just to show, um, how strong your work ethic is, and how competitive you are, and how bad you want to win. 'Cause, if you don't want to win the race, you know, then how bad do you want to win the game? For me it's all the same. (Tim, p. 4, lines 156-159)

Tim experienced a lot of athletic failure in his first two years at NC, but his mind stayed focused on the process that would lead him to success. He also shared that he leaned on his support system heavily during this time and focused on staying positive and confident in himself. His experience of failure was especially challenging because he was always the best player on every team he joined before coming to NC. Then, his baseball experience at NC was full of failure. His growth mindset allowed him to keep working and persevering.

Just not being scared to fail anymore, because you've done it so many times, so for me it was just like, alright, I have been workin' my butt off for 2 years, and this is my third year now, speaking about last year, and I haven't had a ton of success but I know I am working really hard, um, I've failed many, many times, so, I'm gonna keep going out and putting my best effort on the mound, and leave it all on the field every time I have the opportunity to get out there and pitch. (Tim, p. 5, lines 193-196)

Micah

"I learned that I have been spending most of my life with a fixed mindset" (Micah, p. 2, lines 76). This self-reflective lens provides a good introduction into what centers Micah as a person and as an athlete. He arrived to our interview on time, was very friendly, although he seemed a bit fidgety and perhaps a little nervous. Micah is a senior on the men's track and field team at NC. He identifies as bi-racial (Black/White), has wavy long black hair that he runs his fingers through during our interview, and he has an athletic build stretching above six feet tall. Micah has a speech impediment which

causes him to stop talking and frequently take deep breaths. I think he perceives his speech impediment as more distracting than it feels to other people.

Micah's experience in his leadership development program taught him how important effective communication and individualized approaches are to being a successful leader. He observed that he was introduced to different leadership styles and perspectives that opened up his mindset and allowed him to assess his own strengths and weaknesses more objectively. Honest self-assessment is a characteristic of a developing emotionally intelligent leader.

Micah described a few situations in his life that underscore how significant effort has been in his development. Micah shared a story about how he kept working to improve his running speed in high school to obtain a race time that qualified him for the NC track team. He lifted weights, practiced his technique, and finally scored the qualifying time—in his last high school race.

Micah proclaimed that he “loves failure” and believes that he has failed at many things in his life. He has a healthy perspective on this, however, and applies his work ethic and effort to address his setbacks. Most importantly, Micah views failure as an opportunity to learn and grow.

Every time I have failed I have learned something from that failure that I can apply to my future situation. Ummm, ‘cause I feel like if you don’t learn from a failure that’s its own kind of failure. ‘Cause then you just failed for nothing, and what’s the point of that? (Micah, p. 6, lines 263-266)

He feels his ability to empathize is an asset to his leadership style as he understands the impact a leader can have on those they are leading. His empathy informs his communication strategy with his teammates.

Ummm, because I don't remember where I heard this, but it's like once you say something it is no longer what you said because once it comes out of your mouth, someone hears it, and its cut with all of their life experiences, and like everything that they have gone through. (Micah, p. 9, lines 411-413)

Ethan

Ethan walked in straight from two other interviews with sports reporters of local news outlets. Ethan is a junior on the men's ice hockey team at NC, and one of the best players in his conference, and the entire NCAA Division I hockey. He identifies as White and is from metro-Boston, Massachusetts. He fits the profile of a hockey player as he is tall, slim with an athletic build, and has a blue-collar sensibility. He has a quiet confidence and eased into our conversation without hesitation.

Ethan acknowledged that his leadership development experience allowed him to learn more about himself as a leader. Because he was one of the younger guys on his team, he sometimes felt unsure and didn't know if it was his place to say anything to teammates. He has gained confidence since then and the respect of his teammates as he leads in a manner true to his personality.

I think I've definitely, ya know, gotten stronger with communication with my teammates and talking to younger guys and letting them know, you should do this and not that, but not being a jerk to them about it, just help 'em out more. So I think I have definitely gotten better at that, even saying things to the whole team as one in between periods or something, choosing the right thing to say at the right time and not over doing it. (Ethan, p. 3, lines 116-123)

He talked about the sacrifices his parents made for him and his brothers; his dad is a firefighter and a plumber, and his mom is a teacher. Ethan appreciates this and uses this as a source of energy to confront any challenges he may face. His blue-collar mentality informs his work ethic and effort.

Effort is a huge part of my personality and the way I play on the ice and the way I prepare for uh ya know games and stuff like I that. I think, ummm that's one of my biggest characteristics that everybody is talking about me hockey wise, is my effort, second effort, and third effort. Ya know just being relentless. (Ethan, p. 4, lines 176-180)

This approach to effort extends to the way Ethan thinks about facing tough obstacles. He has a history of hockey coaches telling him he wasn't ready for the next level, only to prove each of them wrong. Challenges energize him and focus him.

I kind of feed off of. Throughout the season just facing adversities and challenges that's something that I like to, I feel satisfied and better about myself knowing there was a challenge in front of me and I overcame it. So, I kind of feed off of that and it gives me excitement, ya know, and sort of energy. (Ethan, p. 5, lines 220-223)

Ethan credits his maturity for helping identify and utilize the resources around him in the NC athletic department, resources that he acknowledges he didn't utilize or value highly when he was younger. Ethan is passing on this new perspective to his younger teammates so they can take advantage of these resources earlier in their careers.

Ashanti

Because I didn't really think much of myself until after hearing from others, and then comparing that with what my actual values were, that like I'm actually capable of doing things and I'm here for a reason, I was put in this program for a reason (Ashanti, p. 2, lines 74-76).

This comment from Ashanti captures the dance that occurs in her head that sometimes tells her that she is a leader but at other times tells her that she is not. Aspirations and doubt.

Ashanti walked in bundled up against the weather outside, complete with down jacket, scarf wrapped around her neck, hat, and gloves. She had a smile on her face as she walked in and took a seat across the table from me. Ashanti identifies as African-American and is a junior on the women's track and field team at NC. Her family lives close by in metro-Boston.

Ashanti's leadership development program was transformational for her because it raised her self-awareness, encouraged her to reflect on her strengths and weaknesses and inspired her to act with intention as a leader on her team. "I thought it was really interesting because they pulled, basically pulled information out of me that either I didn't know was there or I never really embraced until the program" (Ashanti, p. 1, lines 21-22).

Ashanti shared that she "grew up in the projects" and that her parents still live there. Her life has been difficult, driving her high achievements in high school to achieve so she could advance socially and live a different life as an adult. This reality shaped her effort in high school, as she was desperate to get out of her neighborhood, but she revealed that she has struggled to maintain the same focus and effort since she has been at NC. In high school, her effort was driven by fear, but it has not effectively translated to her work in college. When discussing how she handles challenges, she acknowledged that she gets emotional to the point of crying and was stressed in unhealthy ways.

Ashanti's experiences with failure mirrors this as she explains that she can emotionally "shut down" and not be able to work effectively for several days at a time.

I shut down. That's what I do in every situation where I fail- academically, athletically, like I cry, I mope around, I don't really take what was given to me like, hey you didn't do so well, and just go do better, like for a good point, like for a good amount of time I kind of shut down and you can't talk to me about something because I'm not going to care. (Ashanti, p. 8, lines 313-316)

She also talked about how her fear of failure has led her to settle, and she believes her settling is leading to more failure. This fear is preventing her from living the life she wants to live, and she is struggling to emotionally free herself.

Candice

"I think I've just started to like actually care about my teammates emotions more, because I've started to care about my emotions more" (Candice, p. 3., lines 85-86).

Learning about emotional intelligence was transformational for Candice and her approach to her leadership. She has gone from a self-described cold leader to someone who takes time to get to know teammates before rushing to judgement.

Candice has a smile and personality that fill up a room and she energetically entered the room for our interview. She was the first person to respond to my email invitation to participate in this study. She hails from New Jersey, identifies as Black, and is a thrower for the women's track and field team at NC. She was dressed in her athletic gear and a LA Dodgers baseball hat—she informed me the hat is just for fashion.

Candice was particularly impacted by two aspects of her leadership development program experience: effective communication and the self-reflection activities. Her

program's emphasis on listening to understand resonated with her as she was experiencing conflict with her roommates/teammates, and she became aware that she was only listening to respond. Once she realized this, she stopped talking, starting listening more intently, and asked questions to seek clarification. The self-reflection activities enabled her to realize she wasn't very emotionally intelligent as a leader.

I realized that in the program that I was not what I thought I wanted to be in terms of being a leader because I was really- I wasn't really like in tune with other people's emotions like I always tried to block out emotions from leadership and make it more of a straightforward, cold type of relationship but I realized through the Leadership Academy that like you need to appeal to people in different ways (Candice, p. 2, lines 63-66)

Candice has experienced positive results from putting in the effort and sacrificing short-term pleasures for long-term goal attainment. She's also experienced failures from losing sight of this.

Yeah, I found out the hard way so and then I just took that and I channeled it and I put effort into the things so in terms of my sleeping schedule and the work I was doing and reading ahead of class and just making sacrifices for the things that I knew that I wanted. (Candice, p. 4., lines 142-144)

Southeast University (SU)

Veronica

Veronica was the first student-athlete I interviewed at Southeast University, and she is a senior on the women's rowing team. Her team is competing for their fourth straight conference championship and she was excited and anxious about the season ahead. This dichotomy of excitement and anxiety proved to be a theme for Veronica.

She identifies as a Hispanic female from Peru, making her one of the three international students in the study. She lived in Peru her whole life until she came to SU for college. Veronica is quick to smile, friendly and outgoing, and likes to talk. She arrived for our interview right on time and seemed interested in the study and offered that she was happy to participate.

During our conversation, the importance of Veronica's relationship with her father was apparent. She shared that she talks to her father every day, and he has played an integral role in her development as an athlete and a leader.

Veronica indicated that she never has felt homesick, and she was excited to come to the US and SU; however, cultural transition issues have arisen. "The food is different, everything is different, the people are different. Like I can speak English pretty well, but, still, sometimes I want to have someone to speak Spanish with" (Veronica, p. 7, lines 319-321).

Veronica identified the challenges associated with being a female rower in Peru. The sport is not very popular there, and she knew she would have to earn a scholarship if she wanted to continue rowing. An exceptional level of commitment and effort would be critical factors in her success. She faced multiple challenges related to coming to the US to study and complete in her sport, including family finances, language barriers, college prep, and access to facilities and equipment for training.

So I always knew I had to keep putting effort into what I was doing because I was at a disadvantage. My first language is Spanish. I didn't take the SATs and all that in school. That's something I had to do on my own time. I took a year off after graduating, so I could train as hard as I could and as much as I could. So I could have a good time, like, have enough things to show to my coaches so I would be able to come here. So I had to make sure to do all those things, but to have that

special thing that they are looking for someone because I knew I couldn't afford a college in the States. So I had to get a scholarship. (Veronica, p. 5, lines 188-195)

Through her athletic department's leadership development program, Veronica learned tangible skills, and, importantly for her, she also learned how to be an inclusive leader. She emphasized that the leadership program has helped her to be more open to other styles of communication and conflict resolution. She learned to be a more relaxed, team-oriented leader, even going so far as to step back so her teammates have opportunities to lead as well.

She described failure in her life as, "horrible, terrible, and fatal" and felt challenged to handle failure; she has been trying to heed her father's advice and experience failure as an opportunity to learn. Her fear of disappointing her father and her teammates drives this reaction to failure, and my conversation with her made me think she was trying to retrain her mindset from fixed-orientation around failure to more of a growth-orientation. She's fighting the competing voices in her head and is thankful for the support she has always had from family, teammates, coaches, and leadership development staff.

Brooke

Brooke is a second-year master's student who completed her bachelor's degree in three years. She was a member of the SU Women's Rowing team and was named to the coaching staff this year. She identifies as White and as an international student from Ontario, Canada. She lived in a small Canadian town and went to private religious

schools until she graduated from high school. She arrived on time, appearing serious in stature, and had a few questions about what this study is about.

Brooke was interested in becoming more culturally competent and in developing relationships with people of color, and, from her descriptions of various encounters, she has struggled with this.

I think the biggest thing that I learned through the leadership stuff that I did would be . . . just how inclusive you have to be, and how understanding, and how sometimes you just have to sit back and take a breath to understand someone else's perspective, which was hard for me when I first came here because I came from a super-small town, and the first time I ever went to class with an African American was at UCF. So, this was a whole other world for me so I had to learn to be a leader in a group I wouldn't particularly be that comfortable in because when I leader in high school and in grade school it was all private-Christian White people" (Brooke, pp. 1-2, lines 38-46)

Brooke puts a lot of pressure on herself to be perfect, to appear perfect in the eyes of those around her. She indicated that she "hates failure" if it is public mainly due to the impact it will have on her brand and how people view her. She's OK with failure as long as no one has to know. The same mindset is evident in how she views effort. She's big on effort, but just doesn't want anyone to see her struggles.

Yeah..I hate failure...I can accept if I fail, but I don't want anyone else to know that I failed. That's one thing I'm working on this year is, like, I know it's okay to fail, but I feel that if people were to see me failing then my credibility would start to go down. But I need to get out of that mindset because that's not always true. (Brooke, p. 6, lines 231-234, p.6)

Brooke described how she will take shortcuts or act in manipulative ways to ensure success and, importantly, to avoid looking like she is failing. In one example she shared her approach to graduate school. She wanted the "quickest and easiest way to get

in,” so she looked for SU programs that didn’t require the GRE and applied to those programs. In another example Brooke explained that she will often tell people her goals are less ambitious than her real goals so she will always look good. She understands the toll this has taken on her.

I’m the rock of my team, I’m the team mom. I’m all these things, but I hurt sometimes on the inside because I like ‘I kind of want to do this, but...’ if I don’t think I have all my ducks in a row I’m not going to do it because I don’t want to fail. I don’t want people to see that I’m failing. (Brooke, p. 7, lines 277-279)

Brooke is a high-achiever who is aware of, and working to improve, her mindset to become happier and more fulfilled. She shared that mental health is a topic she’d like athletic departments to address more effectively and feels her own mental health struggles have gone untreated because of the stigma attached to this issue.

I feel like with college athletics or even just professional sports or any sort of sports you have such a platform to stand on when it comes to mental illnesses because people don’t want to talk about it. They don’t want to be seen as weak. Do I think that I probably suffered from depression for a while, would I ever admit that? No. Would I take medicine for that? Probably not. Is that going to affect me when I’m 35-years-old? Probably. (Brooke, p. 11, lines 422-427)

She yearns for meaningful connections with peers and opportunities to have deeper conversations. “Authentic conversations where you have to dig deep and be really uncomfortable, cause I feel like when you grow you are uncomfortable” (Brooke, p. 12, lines 454-455).

Samuel

Samuel arrived early for our interview; he seemed very friendly and I could tell he was used to being noticed when he enters a room. He seemed quite comfortable in his own skin as he introduced himself and asked where I'd like him to sit. Samuel is a senior on the football team and identifies as bi-racial (Black/Italian). He is tall with dark curly hair and was thoughtful about his comments during our interview. Samuel's football team recently completed an undefeated season, winning their conference championship and a major bowl game.

Samuel feels that the relationships he's developed through his participation in SU's leadership programs have been most valuable for him, as he sees the staff members as people who are invested in student-athlete growth and development.

They're very intentional on getting to know the people. Getting to know the students, um, and not just using them to fill in seats for their program. So, once you are done doing this or that they still want to talk to you, still want to see how you are doing, still want to help you grow and progress and involve you in more things. So, it's not just like I need 30 guys for this program so let's just, uh, you guys come in here. Like, they build relationships and they grow with you.
(Samuel, p. 2, lines 49-54)

Effort, sacrifice, and responding to failure have served as the foundations of his life thus far. Samuel explained that he grew up in a single-parent household in Orlando where nothing was easy for his family. He turned down athletic scholarship offers from other institutions because they were too far from his family and he felt he needed to be close to home to support his mother and siblings.

Um, yeah, uh, that's how I grew up. A single mother household, like, nothing was that easy. We had to work for everything we got. And you know I had opportunities to play at other schools on scholarship. I came here as a walk on. So, lack of effort was not an option. You know it was instilled for me from a young age but it carried me into college. You had to work for everything. Without effort, like, you won't have anything. So, um I just learned that young and kept it going here. (Samuel, p. 4, lines 143-147)

Samuel feels his participation in SU's leadership development program has helped him mature and to have more focus on his life and influence. He cautions teammates and younger student-athletes at SU to maintain balance in their lives and to remember that they are more than just athletes. He expressed his belief that failure pushed him to be better, to face adversity by adjusting whatever was not working for him. Samuel learned that he doesn't have to be a star player on his team to have influence as a leader.

I don't play a whole lot so my influence leadership comes more so off the field. So that's cool to know. It's taught me that I don't need to be the best player or the fastest or whatever to be able to have a voice on my team to be able to make a difference because that is not what it's about. (Samuel, p. 3, lines 99-102)

Samuel also noted that his journey as a man is allowing him to shed traditional notions of masculinity that he felt were preventing him from growing as a person. He explained that, when he failed as a younger student-athlete, he wouldn't ask for help because he felt he would look weak or incompetent. He has re-framed this idea, defining a request for help as a sign of strength and health. He is learning to have a growth mindset in dealing with challenges and has a new confidence when faced with adversity.

Um, a big thing for me was asking for help. So when I first saw my, um, I would be very stubborn, so whenever I would fail at something or not do it right I wouldn't ask anyone for help I didn't want to look like I couldn't do it. I didn't want to be incompetent to my peers. I didn't wanna look stupid to my teachers or my parents or coaches, whatever. So I like I wouldn't ask for help. (Samuel, p. 6, lines 219-222)

Malcolm

I met Malcolm several months ago as he approached me after a sexual assault awareness and education session my colleagues and I facilitated for his football team. After the session, he approached me about some youth mentoring ideas he had, and we have kept in touch since then. I was pleasantly surprised when his name was on the list of participants from SU. An Orlando area native, Malcolm identifies as Black and recently completed his senior season as a running back on the SU football team. A serious leg injury suffered during spring practice prevented him from playing at all during his final campaign, which was undefeated, and included a conference and major bowl game championship. Malcolm was dressed sharply, with business slacks, shoes, shirt tucked in. Clearly, a professional appearance is important to him. He is serious and focused, while also thoughtful and passionate. Malcolm has a tailback's build, just shy of six feet tall, with powerful legs and athletic.

Malcolm explained that he's learned to open up and that he has something of value to add to his team as a leader. He's still more comfortable leading by example but has gained the confidence to step out of his comfort zone in order to help teammates who are struggling or making bad decisions. This has been a big leap for him as I can feel his

reserved nature as we engage. He's pushing himself to create a different narrative for his life.

What I learned about myself is that I can actually talk to people. I used to have the biggest fear of talking to people, selling myself. I always knew I was good at certain things, but I could never sell myself because I was always afraid I'd mess up and say the wrong thing. But the leadership program has told me to take a chance; taught me that the worst that can happen is the person don't like you. (Malcolm, p. 2, lines 43-46)

Malcolm believes challenges bring out the best in him, especially since his experience in his leadership development program reminded him of who he is and how he's always operated. He went through a period at SU when he was not getting the playing time on the football field that he felt he deserved, and the result was he wasn't putting forth his trademark extra effort.

I'm an effort guy, I'm an effort person. I was a walk-on, I got my scholarship through effort. Effort is pretty much my identity. Everything I do is 100% effort now. So I think that leadership part helped me remember who I am as a person. (Malcolm, p. 3, lines 96-99)

This recalibration of his mindset also extends to his response to failure in his life. He gets excited for challenges and believes his will and perseverance can get him through any problem.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to present the voices of the NCAA Division I student-athlete participants in this study. Their respective personal journeys, and the role effort and failure have played in their lives, is their own, as individuals. This chapter

honors these individual life histories by amplifying their voices as they shared their perspective on the topics I put before them. The link that connects them, and centers their stories, is their participation in a leadership development program offered through their athletic departments. Their experiences in the leadership development program, and the role effort and failure have played in their lives, will provide the foundation for identifying and developing themes of their lived experiences. The proceeding chapter will provide insight into the data analysis process of this study and the subsequent themes that arose from the participants' responses.

CHAPTER 5 DISTILLING THE STUDENT-ATHLETE VOICES: DATA REDUCTION AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, I share my experience applying Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology to organize and examine the data in this study. This chapter is organized to explain how I followed Moustakas (1994) and applied theory to practice in uncovering the essence of the phenomenon in this study. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology served as the perfect guide for me to conduct this study. I will share these experiences, in a step-by-step manner, in the forthcoming pages. The description of my process begins with an introduction of the natural environment for the study and concludes with the findings of this research.

The Natural Environment of the Study

All of the interviews that I conducted during the course of this study took place in an environment that was familiar to the student-athlete participants. In both institutions, the athletic department contact reserved a private space for our use, a space that the students visited on a regular, if not daily, basis. These familiar spaces allowed the student-athletes to be in their natural campus environments, have no difficulty finding the interview rooms, and feel comfortable. In sports terminology, they were playing a home game. Even the rhythm and sounds of the building were familiar to them, such as loud music starting at NC during one interview and reminding the participant with me that a team was going through their pre-practice warm up routine. At NC, we utilized two

spaces: a conference room next door to the student-athlete lounge and an out-of-town coach's office. At SU, we met in the Student-Athlete Development suite and used the director's office and the suite conference room. In each instance, the student-athlete's natural environment was prioritized to maximize participation and comfort in the interview process.

Transcendental Phenomenology

Transcendental phenomenology, as developed by Moustakas (1994), utilizes the lived experiences of a group of people to reveal the essence of a phenomenon they have in common. Moustakas's transcendental phenomenology was an appropriate choice for this study for many reasons, and one of them is my professional role as a leadership development educator in college athletics. The initial process of the epoche, as advanced by Moustakas, challenged me to bracket my pre-conceived notions about student-athlete experiences in leadership development programs, and to experience this phenomenon as fresh information. The ongoing structural steps of transcendental phenomenology provided a framework to keep my personal opinions bracketed throughout the data analysis. For this study, I utilized Moustakas' (1994) approach to phenomenological analysis that included the following steps:

1. Epoche
 - a) Researcher Bracketing
2. Phenomenological Reduction
 - a) Horizontalization

3. Imaginative Variation
 - a) Clustering and Coding
 - b) Developing Themes
 - c) Textual and structural descriptions
4. Essence of the phenomenon

Epoche: Researcher Bracketing

According to Moustakas (1994), the first step in transcendental phenomenology is what the author calls the epoche; this is the process of researcher bracketing in which the qualitative researcher identifies and brackets their personal feelings, beliefs, and biases about the phenomenon they are studying. I performed bracketing throughout this study using two primary methods. The first method—a process of mental focus—involved clearing my mind of any clutter regarding the college athletics leadership development experiences. I completed this process before each interview and during the data analysis process. I reminded myself of my role as a researcher in this context and to focus on intangible and tangible aspects of the research process. The tangible aspects were collected through the audio-recordings of the actual interviews. The intangible aspects included making note of the atmosphere in each room and observing the participants throughout our interviews.

The second primary method I utilized for researcher bracketing was reflexive journal writing. I planned to utilize reflexive journal writing during the proposal process for this study, but I was surprised by how useful it was for bracketing my assumptions

about this phenomenon. Reflexive journaling gave me an outlet to write about my perspectives on the topics compared to the lived experience of each participant. I completed reflexive journal entries before and after each interview as a way to capture questions that I had not previously identified. Examples of this questions include:

- Bridging my study's theoretical foundation with practice,
- The variability between the meanings student-athletes made from their leadership development program experience, and
- The profound nature of some of the participants' perspectives were regarding effort and failure in their lives.

Bracketing my own perceptions about this phenomenon enabled me to be receptive to the participants' experiences in their authentic form. This was a challenging and rewarding process as a researcher. A writing sample from my reflexive journal appears in Appendix G.

While researcher bracketing occurs most prominently for Moustakas (1994) at the start of a phenomenological inquiry, I found epoche bracketing to be something that remained relevant throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Field Notes

I also utilized field notes throughout the study, and I found them to be a gathering place for a range of ideas, questions, and observations. I would take field notes to consider possible probing questions to ask during interviews or to remind myself about a thought regarding an emerging dynamic in the data collection process. Field notes

differed from my reflexive journals in that they provided me with another source of documentation about my thinking and observations before, during, and after engagement on each campus. A sample of my field notes appears in Appendix H.

Transcription Process

Following the bracketing process of the epoche and completion of the in-person interviews at each campus, I saved the audio-recordings to a secured electronic storage device and organized them in folders named after their respective campus' pseudonym. The next step was the verbatim transcription of the interviews.

My intention for the transcription process was to complete the transcription myself as I believed this would add another layer of depth to my understanding of the participants and assist with distilling the many pages of interview data. I quickly discovered that, because I do not have typing skills, each interview could take 4-7 hours to transcribe. After transcribing the first interview, I decided to enlist some help with this process in a way that would enable me to benefit from personally transcribing some of the interviews while also staying on track with an aggressive study completion timeline. I transcribed three of the interviews myself and hired transcription assistance for the remaining nine interviews.

The transcription process took three weeks to complete, and, as each individual transcription was completed, I was able to review each interview. I made two copies of the transcribed interviews, delivering one to my committee chair and keeping one for myself. This process served as an audit of sorts, as I was able to confirm with my

chairperson that the themes I was finding in the data were consistent with what she was finding.

Each interview was initially marked with an institutional identifier (NC01, NC02 and SU01, SU02) to help me track the interviews in the early stages. Once all interviews were transcribed, official pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their confidentiality. The next step in a qualitative phenomenological analysis is to reduce the data. Moustakas (1994) refers to this as phenomenological reduction, and what follows is how I applied this theory in practice.

Phenomenological Reduction

Now that the interviews were transcribed and each participant was given a pseudonym, I read through each verbatim transcript in order to transport myself back to the interview room with each student-athlete and heard their voices through their words on the page. I made sure to assign equal value to each participant's thoughts and experiences. My analysis continued with the horizontalization of the data. Creswell (2013) observes that horizontalization involves researchers taking bracketed statements and ascribing them equal value with other statements from the group of interviews. I began the horizontalization process by re-reading each transcript and highlighting significant statements, while also making identifying notes in the margins. These notes in the margins were keywords that could become the codes that would eventually develop into themes. I identified participant statements as significant if they added to the meaning-making participants had regarding the phenomenon. I then organized these

significant quotes into broader descriptions in order to prepare them for clustering. By organizing the data this way, I was able to consider the frequency in which each sentiment was mentioned and to eliminate the redundancy of responses. I have included a sample of my horizontalization of data in Appendix I.

Imaginative Variation

After completing the epoche and phenomenological reduction steps of Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology, I then moved my data analysis into what Moustakas (1994) refers to as imaginative variation. Imaginative variation is the process of identifying themes in the data and considering these themes from a range of perspectives. In moving this theory into practice, I first clustered the data marked as significant during phenomenological reduction of statements into themes.

In order to have all of these significant statements organized in one place, I took all of the highlighted offerings from participant interviews and created one document so I could see the comments side by side. Because I conducted semi-structured interviews, I was able to organize participant responses around topic areas we explored during the interview. Now, with all of the significant responses organized within interview topic areas, I identified and eliminated redundancy and created draft themes in the data. I then created tables corresponding to each of my study's research questions, displaying each of the themes and whether each participant discussed that theme (Appendix J).

Given the nature of my research questions, I decided to create themes for each research question separately, then synthesize them into a single analysis. I discovered

that my research questions were synthesized in my vision for this study but could be experienced as singular phenomena for the student-athlete participants. My role as the researcher was to identify any synthesis by analyzing the data. For Research Question 1 (RQ1), I identified 10 preliminary themes and for Research Question 2 (RQ2), I identified seven preliminary themes. I then placed these preliminary themes in a table so the participants' comment could be categorized, and the process of narrowing these themes down to final themes could commence (Appendix J). Some of the preliminary themes overlapped in ways that allowed me to collapse them into three final themes for RQ1 (Leadership Development Program Experience; Table 9) and three final themes for RQ2 (How Student-Athletes Construct Mindset; Table 10).

Table 9

Research Question 1: Themes

Research Question 1: Themes
Personal growth and development
Skill development
Engaging pedagogies

Table 10

Research Question 2: Themes

Research Question 2: Themes
Meaning of effort
Meaning of failure
Problem-solving mindset

Textural and Structural Descriptions

Importantly, I captured the textural and structural aspects of this phenomenon to derive an accurate description of each theme. For the textural descriptions, I have included verbatim quotes from the student-athlete participants to ensure their voices are heard while deriving the most significant meaning from their contributions to this study. I was particularly focused on sharing what they experienced along with their interpretations. For the structural descriptions, I incorporated what constituted their experiences of the phenomenon and how they experienced it. In the following section, I continue with the imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994) by examining each theme through a textural and structural lens. This analysis is organized by research question and the corresponding themes from that question. Then, the descriptions are synthesized to reveal the essence of the phenomenon. The final themes for RQ1 include: (a) personal growth and development; (b) skill development; and (c) engaging pedagogies. The final themes for RQ2 include: (a) meaning of effort; (b) meaning of failure; and (c) problem solving mindset.

Themes for Research Question 1

What are the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes in student-athlete leadership development programs?

Theme 1: Personal Growth and Development

Textural Description

When I asked the student-athletes in this study to share their experiences of their leadership development programs, 11 out of 12 students talked about the personal growth and development they experienced through their programs. Within their descriptions of their experiences, the student-athletes shared that they learned things about themselves of which they were previously unaware: the impact of their behaviors on others; their core values and how to live them, the value of maintaining healthy relationships with peers, and the type of leader that they want to be. What they experienced allowed them to be vulnerable in the presence of their peers in a way that pleasantly surprised them.

Ashanti was surprised that she was selected to be a part of her athletic department's leadership development program and struggles with maintaining confidence in herself. She learned things about herself through her program of which she was not conscious. Her personal growth included feeling validated as a leader and this feeling reinforced her core values. These two comments support this description:

I thought it was really interesting because they pulled, basically pulled information out of me that either I didn't know was there or I never really embraced until the program, (Ashanti, lines 21-22).

I think we did our top three values and I've done many things, like community service programs before where we have to figure out what my values were, but I never really ranked them and having been in college now and then redoing my values really made me think, like, maybe the things I value, I shouldn't value this much. Or, I should really be focusing on this because this is what matters the most and not only did we figure out ourselves what our values were but we had people talk about our values and what our other teammates who were there thought our values were or what our quality traits were and I feel like that was super helpful

because up until then I felt, I always felt I knew a lot, I could do a lot, I could survive any field but I really felt like when I was a second year student that I was kind of alone, and I didn't really feel like I had enough support but when everyone else started talking about what they thought my values were or what they thought my characteristics were, it made me feel good, like maybe I'm not actually alone, maybe my values actually are what I believe they are, maybe I should actually embrace them and then not kind of, not just sit back and let things happen, let things come to me. Because I didn't really think much of myself until after hearing from others and then comparing that with what my actual values were, that like I'm actually capable of doing things and I'm here for a reason, I was put in this program for a reason, so. (Ashanti, lines 59-76)

Jacob felt that his experience was “enlightening” and explained that, being challenged to reflect on his choices and the manner in which he had been leading, was a particular source of growth for him. Not only did he re-consider his behavior, he began to see how his choices impact his teammates. He grew up in Norway and explained that many of his models of team leadership in soccer were tough on their teammates.

I would describe it as enlightening, I would guess because I've throughout my time as a soccer player from back home and even here have seen myself, and others have seen myself, as a leader, and I've even been a captain a few times for my former teams, where I've been able to express my leadership. But when I came into this program, we met four times a semester I believe, something like that, and when you start reflecting on your choices, the way you think and maybe also the way your teammates are thinking, and are approaching the way you approach them, you start to feel- you get like a different point of view of how to lead, so I really thought it was really enlightening like the way we analyzed it. (Jacob, lines 20-27).

Candice initially approached the leadership program as something she didn't feel she needed. She explained that she learned quickly that she was not as complete of a leader as she believed and felt her overconfidence in her leadership style hampered her relationships with her teammates. She had a blind spot for caring about her peers' emotions and learned the human element of leadership is critical.

I remember thinking that like ‘oh I must be a good leader because I’ve been put into leadership positions all my life like in terms of captain or director or whatever’... so I was like I don’t really need it, they’re just putting me in here because they wanted me in here but then I realized that in the program that I was not what I thought I wanted to be in terms of being a leader because I was really- I wasn’t really like in tune with other people’s emotions, like I always tried to block out emotions from leadership and make it more of a straightforward, cold type of relationship but I realized through the NC Leadership Academy that, like, you need to appeal to people in different ways so, like, motivation for one person on your team might not be the same motivation for other people, like, creating a relationship with the different people I think that’s something I learned so I just go about speaking to your whole team as like, as if they’re the same person and they have the same needs so. (Candice, lines 59-70)

Malcolm felt his personal growth was stalled by his reluctance to speak up and share his perspective on important matters. He always led by example and felt it was not his place to speak up when he saw teammates transgressing against team values or just acting in ways that were harmful to themselves. The designated team leaders are themselves members of the football team, are often loud and demonstrative, and are comfortable talking to the whole team. Malcolm acknowledged that he learned that he has a voice and should step up when the situation demands.

It’s been nothing but great, it’s taught me lessons about how to open up and be a leader because, at first, I always stayed back in the crowd. I knew things were wrong, I knew I should speak up sometimes, but I just felt like it wasn’t my place, but the leadership programs here taught me how to open up, taught me that it’s not wrong to take that step even if you’re younger. If you know the right thing to do, and you have the right mindset, you can always speak up. And the leadership program opened me up as a person and made me the better man I am today... What I learned about myself is that I can actually talk to people. I used to have the biggest fear of talking to people, selling myself. (Malcolm, lines 18-24 & 43-44)

As a sophomore in his leadership development program, Ethan felt he had a lot to learn about off-the-ice leadership, and being a younger guy on his team, he wanted to be

a sponge and learn from others. He felt he need to learn, and grow into, a leadership style that would work for him. His program came at the right time for him and allowed him to reflect on all of these areas, and what was most important to him.

It kind of made me find out some stuff about myself that I didn't really know. What kind of leader I am, ya know, I was younger last year than I am this year, so it helped me for this year because I got, I knew what I needed to work on. And the things I was good at and the things I needed to keep doing, to focus on. (Ethan, lines 22-26).

Structural Description

The student-athlete participants used words like “eye-opening,” “enlightening,” “inspiring,” and “amazing opportunity” to describe their lived experiences in their leadership development programs. Personal growth and development is the first theme in RQ1 because this is the area that resonated so strongly with the research participants. Student-athletes who are identified as leaders at the NCAA Division I level are under extra levels of pressure and rarely are equipped with the perspective or skills to handle this degree of responsibility.

Coaches often lean on student-athlete leaders to serve as guardians of team culture, which translates into these students having to resolve conflicts between teammates, friends, and roommates. The skills required to manage these situations are generally developed over time, with consistent doses of training and practical experience. Participants shared their trepidation about assuming these roles without proper preparation. They shared openly about their personal growth and development; student-athletes don't often have support in their social and emotional development attended as part of their athletic experience. The developmental focus is disproportionately centered

on athletic skill development and physical development through weight, speed, and agility training.

The student-athletes who participated in this study experienced their leadership development programs in a manner that allowed them to be vulnerable with their peer and share their respective views on leadership, communication, living one's values, and challenging leadership roles, among many other topics. How they experienced this is important because their takeaway—that they learned a lot about themselves—represents an area that they were desperate to develop, even if they were not aware of that before entering the program. For example, if I asked a group of student-athletes who had not participated in a leadership development program about their top needs from a leadership development program, personal growth and development would not likely be in the top five needs. Student-athletes are taught to be tough, to show resilience; these are both areas of value. However, this can corrupt other areas of their life and be interpreted to mean they should not ask for help, they should be independent, and they should not utilize campus resources.

Lastly, while we live in a fast-paced, information-based and immediate-access era, student-athletes still benefit from quiet time to reflect on their lives, their purpose, and their relationships. What I heard from these participants was that their programs' focus on personal growth and development was a breath of fresh air for them and also provided a foundation for their personal leadership philosophy moving forward.

Theme 2: Skill Development

Textural Description

All of the student-athlete participants in this study shared the benefits they derived from learning tangible skills they could apply in challenging sport-related or social situations involving teammates and coaches. Having a safe space to attend to their personal growth, as discussed earlier, established their foundation as leaders, and they all shared how valuable it was to have leadership skill development layered on top of this foundation.

Micah talked about two important skill development areas that helped him develop as an effective communicator and to identify and adapt to a wide range of people and communication preferences. Prior to his experience in his leadership development program, these were concepts that he had never considered. The following two comments from Micah illustrate this new awareness:

Before getting into it, I had always just thought that leading by example was like the best thing and I hated the whole do as I say not as I do attitude towards leadership. And then like through being in the program I started to understand that different leadership methods reach people in different, uhhh different people need different leadership styles. (Micah, lines 26-30).

In this next quote, Micah refers to a team challenge activity called the Traffic Jam. In this activity, participants in the leadership development program gather in teams of 8-10 and have to work together to solve a problem. This activity presents a range of challenges and is intended to highlight effective communication.

Yeah, traffic jam. Like, that was the first time that I kinda seen in, in a controlled situation the whole concept of what you say isn't what someone hears. ... So like, somebody would say their plan and you'd have like three or four people like not, like hear a different way. And then we like put into practice, like thought, we think on the same page and get into practice and no one thought it was that and it was same thing. (Micah, lines 49-55).

Candice offered that her leadership development program was eye-opening for her, as it uncovered holes in her leadership approach. Once she identified these deficiencies, her program provided the structure for her to develop strategies for more effectively addressing similar situations in the future.

I thought it was very eye-opening program, it made us think about things that we wouldn't necessarily think about and I think it affected me in the way that I could conduct myself afterwards so I'd remember things I'd learned in the leadership program and try to apply it to my real life whether it became like my personal relationships, or professional relationships and so I tried to use that as a guide towards effective leadership and active leading. (Candice, lines 20-24).

Samuel noted that he learned several valuable life skills through his participation in his leadership development program, and they have changed the trajectory of his life. Two areas he addresses in the following quote are learning what his strengths are and how to apply them, and the influence he has on his teammates and campus.

Yeah so um you know with things they're teaching how to lead what we are good at doing when you can, uh, cause at first I kinda had an idea of what I was good at, but it was very um shallow. I'm good at football that's why I'm here, right, um but, I'm good at personal skills, I'm good at communicating, I'm good at this, because they taught me that. Like I found out what actually I was good at this, and now I'm able to better use my strengths in the classroom, or like on campus. (Samuel, lines 88-93).

Brooke explained that she has always been an achiever, someone who gets things done, and had a leadership style that was linear and fast-paced. Her leadership development program taught her about emotional intelligence and how to be an emotionally intelligent leader. One component of emotional intelligence is awareness of self, and this is a skill set Brooke is working hard to develop. Here's what she had to say:

Listening would be a big thing. I became a very good listener because before I used to be a do'er. I would only half-listen, and especially only being a captain I caught myself being like 'okay, yeah' because there was so much going on. Or I would try to pick out the super-important things or what I thought was important, and missing what was actually truly important from the other side. So listening. Listening is a big one. (Brooke, lines 110-114).

Ethan felt he was just starting to develop his off-the-ice leadership style and appreciated that his program empowered him to identify his leadership strengths, consider carefully the leadership approaches that feel most authentic to him, and be intentional with his approach. Ethan expressed that his leadership development program provided a framework for him to figure out what was going to work best for him. There is no one way to lead.

I think it's to figure out what type of leader you are and which way you best lead, cause I mean, I don't think it's teaching you how to be a leader, I think it's helping you figure out how you lead the best, because like we talked about, everybody has their different way of leading. Not everybody is gonna be talking, not everybody is gonna be, ya know, leading by example, all the time. Most guys are vocal and most guys aren't gonna be saying anything in the locker room. But, out on the ice or the field they are leading by their actions, so I think it really helps you figure out which, which type of way you need to lead, and what you need to focus on, ya know. Become more of a type of all-around leader so you can put on things, like figuring out what type of things to say and when to say it. I know that sometimes last year when I was a younger guy, a sophomore, so I didn't really know when to say something or what to say, and now this year it has come a lot easier to me. So, I think that's really what helped me this year. (Ethan, lines 62-72).

Structural Description

The student-athlete participants shared some of the specific skills they developed through their leadership development program experience and, taken as a whole, these skills fit into the realm of emotional intelligence. Learning the skills of emotionally intelligent leadership are critical tools for leadership in the 21st century. Goleman (1998) defines emotional intelligence as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (p. 317). When the student-athletes discussed learning new skills—effective communication, learning to adapt their personal style to fit the needs of others, identifying their own strengths so they can apply them to help others, developing a leadership philosophy that best fits them, conflict management tools—they were, in essence, talking about the components of emotional intelligence. Shankman and Allen (2008) provide three core facets of emotional intelligence: (a) conscious of self, (b) consciousness of others, and (c) consciousness of context. Learning about emotional intelligence, directly as a topic area in their programs or indirectly through the other topics mentioned above, had a profound impact on the participants.

How the participants experienced the development of these skills was salient to their ability to apply them in real-life situations with their teammates and friends. The participants shared how their experiences gave them space to understand new concepts and included practice in learning how to use these skills. This practice served to concretize the concepts and build confidence through experience.

Leadership development programs should take note that how student-athletes experience their programs is more important than what they are learning. Most athletic department administrators are providing these programs to help develop leaders who, in turn, can help the department and individual team cultures.

Theme 3: Engaging Pedagogies

Textural Description

To be sure, none of the participants used the term “engaging pedagogies” when sharing their leadership development program experience; rather, all of them used specific examples that affirmed how important it was for them to be actively engaged in teaching and learning. What follows are some of their voices regarding this theme.

Tim indicated that his leadership development program felt like a collaboration among the participants and the facilitators, a forum to exchange ideas and feelings about the topics. He felt that the emphasis on conversation and engagement in a variety of styles creating a dynamic environment.

The program itself did a great job of taking peoples thoughts in the room and, ... it's like a collaboration, it's a conversation, I felt like, I didn't think you were up there lecturing. I think that you did a great job, and the program did a great job, of taking information and taking people's feelings about certain things and giving them the platform and the ability to express those certain feelings, or what they know, or what they've learned, or you know what works for their team, and I thought it was a great conversation amongst so many different sports and so many different levels of leadership within the room, whether you're a freshman, sophomore, junior, senior – I thought there was a great mix. And people are just bouncing ideas off of each other the whole time, and I thought the structure was great to allow us to talk about so many important topics, and for me, yeah, the collaboration was probably the biggest piece, just hearing from everybody else, because that's probably the best way to learn. (Tim, lines 36-47).

LaTonya stated that she is an introvert and has frustrated teachers and coaches throughout her life because she hasn't talked as much as they wanted. As an introvert leader, she talked about how much she benefitted from being continually challenged to get up and partner with a peer who she didn't know that well. LaTonya's experience is an example of building programming that understands the various personality types and learning style preferences in the room.

It was very interactive as opposed to being in lectures all day, the interactive kind of course and I felt like I learned just as much as I would as being in a regular classes. If not more because it was so interactive and it got me into talk to people and I don't do that in my regular life. (LaTonya, lines 22-27)

Malcolm observed that, for him, being in a more intimate setting, with peers with whom he's developing relationships, added to his comfort in sharing. He also felt that small groups and pairs activities helped build cohesion in the group and allowed everyone space to share.

It's a very intimate setting where it gives you a chance to actually open up, and listen to others – what they're really going through. So I think listening to other people's hardships and all that, and to see that I'm not alone in all this, and we can all come out and be leaders in our own right. (Malcolm, lines 28-31)

Amy was intrigued by having the opportunity to continually hear the perspectives of her peers and was struck by the variety of beliefs and strategies shared for each topic area. She met student-athletes from other teams that she feels she wouldn't have ever met if not for the learning dynamic in her leadership development program. "You meet people from all these teams, and how we'd always have to talk to someone we've never

talked to before...so you're running around the room meeting people and teams I've never talked to before" (Amy, lines 102-104).

Structural Description

I labeled this theme Engaging Pedagogies because all the participants all described the learning environment as an important factor for them. Their leadership development program exposed them to teaching strategies that are learner-centered, and their programs were created with a student-athlete audience in mind. Kuh (2008) advanced engaging pedagogies as an approach to teaching and learning by arguing that educators should be focused on the optimal conditions for student learning, not on the instructor's preferred teaching style. The consistency of the participants' comments about this informs me that their programs were the products of intentional design.

As the participants described the active learning they experienced in their leadership development programs, I was struck by the stark contrast to what they likely experience in educational settings. They are accustomed to instructor-centered, lecture style formats. Leadership development instructors need to be intentional and understand the students with whom they are working; they should not use a one-size-fits-all approach. How and why leadership development instructors develop the curricula and pedagogy they do should be informed by an intentional focus on the participants (Rosch & Anthony, 2012).

The participants described how effective active learning strategies were for their experience, and how the active learning activities were core elements of the program. Active learning activities foster listening, writing, reflecting, and talking. The student-

athletes described think, pair, share activities that included the active learning components listed above in addition to others.

Integrative learning experiences are a critical component of effective leadership training pedagogy; they provide opportunities for participants to develop the capacity to connect, reflect, and take considered action. Integrative learning experiences weave together experience, new knowledge, and opportunities to hone new skills. Instructors should include high-impact learning strategies when developing their programs. High-impact learning strategies engage participants in a manner that allows them to take ownership of the material that translates into practiced skills in their lives. The leadership development pedagogies that are most effective with student-athletes are student-centered, include active learning strategies, are intentional, and have high impact on the participants.

Themes for Research Question 2

How do student-athletes construct mindset?

Theme 1: Meaning of Effort

Textural Description

When I asked the participants what role effort played in their lives, a common response involved their eyes lighting up along with an immediate positive response. More than any other topic of discussion during our interviews, student-athletes had a strong reaction to this subject and all enthusiastically talked about how important effort is

in their life's story. I could feel their sense of pride in their stories of effort and overcoming adversity. Their responses here had a growth mindset theme as they seemed to understand that hard work is the key ingredient to their success.

Amy confirmed that effort has always been important for her but feels even more strongly about it as a Division I student-athlete, where athletic competition is fierce and talent is abundant. She sees effort as a significant factor in her confidence and success—in her overall mindset.

I feel like, it's like the biggest difference maker for everything. Like today is our off day, got up early and ran three miles before this interview, you know what I mean? Stuff like that. It doesn't tire me out, it makes me feel better like more ready for everything. That's the same as basketball, like, when I put in extra effort, even outside of practice or at practice, that makes me feel so much more better playing. I think that goes for everything: school, through extra effort, like, get stuff done. It goes more smoothly and it's easier. But there's times where I'm in a slump or tired or whatever and I don't do those things, or like don't give extra effort. It's like, when everything goes downhill, you know what I mean? I think it's one of the biggest differences. (Amy, lines 282-289).

Malcolm claimed that effort is his brand, his identity. He feels strongly that effort is what he is known for and what has been a big part of his mindset since he was a child. Here, though, Malcolm shares an example of how fluid a person's mindset can be, fluctuating between a growth and a fixed mindset. Having a leadership development experience enabled Malcolm to remember his core values, and how he wanted to live them.

Effort has always been the biggest role in my life since I was a kid. My parents always told me as much as you put in is as much effort as you'll get out. Going through college, I started not putting as much effort because I didn't get what I wanted basically, so the leadership program and all that stuff, helped me get my effort back in the way of a person who I am. I'm an effort guy, I'm an effort person. I was a walk-on, I got my scholarship through effort. Effort is pretty

much my identity. Everything I do is 100% effort now. So I think that leadership part helped me remember who I am as a person. (Malcolm, lines 93-99)

Veronica shared a story that illustrated the role effort has played in her life. As an international student from Peru, as a rower she was at a disadvantage in her pursuit to get into a college in the U.S. Her barriers included: (a) family finances (b) access to rowing equipment and facilities, (c) Spanish as her first language, and (d) lack of access to SAT prep course. She needed to earn an athletic scholarship to get to a U.S. institution and feels her effort and resilience are what propelled her to achieve this goal.

So I always knew I had to keep putting effort into what I was doing because I was at a disadvantage. My first language is Spanish. I didn't take the SATs and all that in school. That's something I had to do on my own time. I took a year off after graduating, so I could train as hard as I could and as much as I could. So I could have a good time, like, have enough things to show to my coaches so I would be able to come here. So I had to make sure to do all those things, but to have that special thing that they are looking for someone because I knew I couldn't afford a college in the States. So I had to get a scholarship. (Veronica, lines 188-195)

When I asked the participants to share what it feels like when they know they will have to exert effort to overcome an obstacle, I began to identify some differences in mindset. While all the participants talked adamantly about effort as a positive factor in their lives, a handful of participants shared negative emotions connected to addressing an obstacle. Hence, I started to identify how participants could have a growth mindset in some areas, and a fixed mindset in other areas. Participants with a strong growth mindset orientation revealed in a tough challenge, while participants who have a variable mindset shared their mental struggles with challenges. The concept of a continuum of mindset appeared again.

Jacob explained that he feels inspired by challenges that will require effort, believing that, if effort will be a factor in success or failure, he will always have an advantage. He's expressing a growth mindset as he sees effort-based challenges as benefitting him because of his mindset.

In regards to effort? I think it's just a drive for me, if someone tells me I cannot do it, it just like drives me a lot more. And I think if there's something that depends on effort, I'm happy to do it because I know I'll be in the front, like in the lead. If some things just depended on like some kind of talent or, I don't know, some kind of test that requires you to be good right there and then, like I don't know if I would stand out as much. (Jacob, lines 207-211)

While describing how much effort has helped her accomplish her goal of earning an athletic scholarship, Veronica acknowledged that she puts a lot of pressure on herself to be perfect, and this leads to unhealthy levels of anxiety and nervousness. Facing challenges elicit a negative reaction for her, one that even interrupts her sleep. Her responses here are another illustration of the variability of mindset depending on the type of task facing participants. One can see the apparent contradictions in her mindset. This seems to be a continuum of mindset in which an individual can exhibit a growth mindset orientation in some areas and more of a fixed mindset in other areas. Dweck and Yeager (2012) discuss this idea and offer mindset as a developmental process, one that can be variable in different people based on the whole of their life experiences.

I get nervous about things a lot. For example, we have won our conference three years in a row... We're trying to go for the four-peat, you know? I want to graduate with four rings in my hand. It is awesome, but it's also very scary. And last year we swept conference, so we won every single event... Now going towards this conference the other teams have nothing to lose because they've always... but we just swept conference so we have a lot to lose. Even if we still win, but we didn't win everything it's like 'what did we do wrong?' So, for me,

facing this is a mixture of excitement because I am excited, and pride because I am part of the best university in the country, but then because I know I have that responsibility, and there's so much on my shoulders and all my teammates shoulders as well, then I tend to get nervous and a little anxious... Because sometimes it starts to go towards being scared and I wake up three times in the night when I know I have a big workout the next day. (Veronica, lines 231-241)

Ethan explained that he feeds off of challenges and gets excited when he's faced with an obstacle. He shared a history he has had with coaches doubting his ability to advance to the next level of hockey competition, and he has enjoyed the challenge of proving them wrong in each instance. His feeling of excitement, matched with what he describes as relentless effort towards his goals, are hallmarks of a growth mindset.

I get excited to be honest. Ummm, we talked about something like this. Pressure, earlier, but I've always been somebody who likes the challenge so, after definitely my junior year in high school to go to the USHO. My high school coach didn't think I was ready and I saw the challenge and I wanted to take that challenge and I exceeded expectations, and next year I came a year early to NC, I was supposed to play another year of juniors, and my juniors coach felt the same thing as my high school coach, that I wasn't ready and I proved him wrong. And he admitted he was wrong and it was a challenge to move up to the next level and ummm, I think I respond really well to challenges. So, I kind of feed off of. Throughout the season just facing adversities and challenges that's something that I like to, I feel satisfied and better about myself knowing there was a challenge in front of me and I overcame it. So, I kind of feed off of that and it gives me excitement, ya know, and sort of energy to push through. (Ethan, lines 213-225)

Candice acknowledged feeling scared about a big challenge, but this is tempered by a level of excitement that her fear generates. She described an energy she feels about not knowing the outcome of a challenge that she finds motivating. This energy is a growth mindset, one that pushes through natural feelings of doubt when considering a significant challenge. Her example also speaks to a continuum of mindset, more than an either/or proposition.

It's scary but I think I recently read that for a lot of people, and it clicked for me that it like motivates you, like you're motivated by the challenge and you're motivated by the uncertainty in it because even going on co-op, I was scared. I was like what if I don't know what I'm doing. I know I was going to have to learn, like I was going into International Tax which I know I don't know anything about, and so I was like I know nothing about this, I'm scared but also there was, like, a bit of excitement in being scared because I was, like, okay I can just dive right into this, and change my viewpoints, and learn something completely new. So, I think going and putting effort into a new challenge, I think it helps like being scared to do something it makes you put more effort in. (Candice, lines 171-179)

Structural Description

For a student-athlete, describing the role effort has played in their life is something of a trick question. Coaches are constantly reminding their athletes that intangible characteristics like resilience, hard work, and tenacity are keys to success. This is part of the student-athlete's socialization into competitive sports. In many regards, student-athletes have been trained to know the answer to this question. I attribute some of their overwhelming responses to my question about effort to this conditioning. This context is important to my analysis.

However, there are other variables at play here as well. Based on the stories they shared, many of these participants have experienced progress through their efforts. Whether it was overcoming social, academic, athletic, financial, or family adversity, many of these participants shared compelling accounts regarding the role effort played in their lives.

Of particular interest to me, as a researcher, is the variability in their mindsets associated with the prompt I gave the participants. Explaining how they feel when facing a significant challenge, one that will require considerable effort, revealed a more

complicated relationship with effort for some of the participants and reinforced the strong correlation with a growth mindset for the others. As mentioned above, there appears to be a continuum regarding participants' mindset orientation; they are neither completely fixed nor completely growth in their orientation. And, as Dweck and Yeager (2012) have indicated, it is common for individuals to have a strong growth mindset orientation in some areas and a more fixed mindset orientation in other areas. This raises the question of whether the participants would benefit from training on mindset, to mediate the variability in their mental approach to challenges.

As we continue this analysis, I will continue to focus on examples of this continuum and share points of contradiction to reveal the essence of the phenomenon in this study.

Theme 2: Meaning of Failure

Textural Description

When my interviews with the student-athlete participants turned to the role that failure has played in their lives, I experienced another fault line in the cohesion of their responses. This is another area where distinctions between growth mindset and fixed mindset became apparent. How these participants have experienced failure and their mindsets about this phenomenon were enlightening. Examples of the contrasting perspectives on the meaning of failure in their lives appear in the following paragraphs.

Brooke articulated that she sees the value in failure and can accept failing, as long as no one else is aware of it. Her fear of public shame is so strong she will not share her

real goals with her peers or coaches; instead, she only shares more modest goals so she always appears successful. She is working hard to grow and even shares that she's aware of the negative impact this mindset is having on her current and long-term health and welfare.

Yeah..I hate failure...I can accept if I fail, but I don't want anyone else to know that I failed. That's one thing I'm working on this year is, like, I know it's okay to fail, but I feel that if people were to see me failing then my credibility would start to go down. But I need to get out of that mindset because that's not always true. (Brooke, lines 231-234)

Ashanti is aware that she does not handle failure well and acknowledges that her first reaction to failure is to emotionally "shut down" and retreat within herself for a period of time before she can re-emerge and live productively again. Her fixed mindset serves as a figurative weight around her shoulders that is holding her back from achieving the life goals she has for herself. I feel for her as she is aware of this and how her mindset is a barrier to a fulfilling experience at NC.

I have, for track, I feel like a failure...it's my fault for not pushing myself as hard for not believing that I could be somewhere else, kind of just settling. And settling is what makes me fail like at track meets where I jump what I normally jump because I'm used to it, I'm settling for where I am, I'm not pushing to do better... I shut down. That's what I do in every situation where I fail- academically, athletically, like I cry, I mope around. (Ashanti, lines 286 & 307-310 & 313-314)

Conversely, some of the participants indicated that failure had played the role of a teacher in their lives and that learning from failure made them better athletes going forward. This mindset is reflective of a growth mindset. There is no fear of failure, rather failure is understood as a learning opportunity.

Tim shares his experiences with failure over the course of his first two seasons of college baseball. The level of failure he experienced could break a lot of athletes, especially with his history of being the best player on all of his teams as a child. His ability to persevere through these setbacks is remarkable. Tim's mindset kept him focused and, when he needed help, he reached out for help and trusted the process. This is a growth mindset.

Um, I thought, growing up, I was always, you know, nobody was even close. Talent wise, growing up, I was always the best player on my team... So, I got here and I got punched in the face right away, the sport kicked my butt... And I was experiencing a ton of failure. Um, I wasn't throwin' a lot of strikes, I wasn't getting guys out. I wasn't getting' on the mound much cause I wasn't doing well. So, for two years, freshman and sophomore years I experienced a ton of failure... And, what you gotta learn from those experiences is a lot of mental toughness, and rely on your teammates to pick you up. Rely on your coaches who have faith in you to get out of your funk, and believe in yourself is probably the biggest thing. 'Cause, especially in baseball, you're gonna have so many ups and downs, but you gotta try and not have much of a roller coaster, you gotta find a level ground that you can stay at, and continue to raise that bar. (Tim, lines 166-180)

Candice shared a story of an early high school failure to exemplify how she's experienced it in her life. She displays a growth mindset; she believes that if she gives her best effort and fails, that is fine. Candice believes that failure may open the door to another opportunity to excel. She uses failure as fuel for growth.

I think every failure I've ever had, I've just used it and channeled it to make me better, so, my first failure was my sophomore year of high school, I got rejected from the basketball team, and that's what made me go out for winter track and that's when I won my first state title and stuff so I used that to like motivate me, well if they don't want me then someone's going to want me in a sport so and yeah just taking the pieces of why I failed and even if you, sometimes you do put effort into things and you still fail which is completely fine to me because as long as I know I gave it my all, maybe this is not what I was meant to be doing and maybe I need to move on to something else, but I've never taken failure as, alright just give up and not keep going, just like build from the failure. (Candice, lines 184-192)

And finally, a few participants described a relationship with failure that is not as closely associated with a growth or a fixed mindset. Samuel shared the waves of adversity he faced growing up and how it was a process for him to start embracing and learning from his failures.

It's been a pretty significant role, not like I'm a failure or anything but, I was faced with a lot of adversity and at first I didn't respond to it correctly, so I had to readjust myself and overcome it. I mean without my failures in the past I wouldn't be here right now talking to you... Not getting this offer at a high school or not being good enough for this team back in elementary or middle school not being smart enough to get into this program it made better, it made me work harder to ultimately be here... It was not easy, by any means. There were all these things going outside of school. Like paying for school, not really doing anything on the field because I'm a walk on and stuff. Back home my family is struggling. I was failing. I wasn't doing well. (Samuel, lines 174-177, 188-190)

Structural Description

How the student-athlete participants have experienced failure in their lives, and the meaning they've derived from them, offers insight into their mindset. The strategies that participants shared, their mental approach to failure, is a testament to their desire to experience personal growth.

Dweck (2008) posits that the meaning individuals make out of failure dictates their mindset, and by extension their ability to effectively respond to failure. For individuals with a fixed mindset, a failure feels like a permanent state, a result that is fatal, and an indictment on the individual who failed. Dweck (2008) explains that, in their minds, failure transforms “from an action (I failed) to an identity (I am a failure)” (p.33). Furthermore, public failure for someone with a fixed mindset feels like a permanent stain on their ability, a stain with fatal qualities.

The student-athlete participants who described a fixed mindset orientation shared these concerns and fears as they discussed the role that failure has played in their lives. The words they used to describe their response to failure included “I shut down,” “horrible,” “fatal,” “terrible,” “I settle,” and “holding myself back on certain opportunities because I am afraid to fail.” I sensed that they regretted letting their failures have such a negative impact on their lives. The participants who expressed a fixed mindset regarding failure understood how unhealthy this was for them, but they felt powerless to make significant changes in this area.

Conversely, students who possess, innately or taught, a mindset that promotes resilience are more likely to be successful in school and in life. Yeager and Dweck (2012) demonstrate that, if a student/person believes intellectual and social abilities can be developed, they will benefit in many ways, including lower aggression and stress in challenging social situations (e.g., aggression, bullying, teasing, etc.). Hence, their mindset can impact their ability to navigate through, and respond to, these types of challenges.

When I asked the student-athlete participants about the role failure had played in their lives, those with a growth mindset orientation described it as a learning process where they became better through experiencing failure. They described failure as a motivator that pushed them to work harder; they felt failure was an opportunity to learn and a test of their tenacity. Their mindset was to gather themselves, consider what led to their failure, develop a plan of action, and get back to work. It is not that they were not disappointed, or angry, or experiencing self-doubt. Rather, they persisted in spite of those feelings as their overriding mindset was to learn from the failure and work to succeed.

In a compelling TedTalk, Dweck (2014) advances the Power of Yet as a systemic mindset that socializes students to reframe failure as a short-term occurrence, not a final outcome. Dweck (2014) explains that there is a mindset battle in our society, and it is called the Power of Yet vs. the Tyranny of Now. This is the mindset struggle between approaching failure, effort and talent from a growth or a fixed orientation. The Power of Yet informs us that we may not be proficient in a particular subject or skill yet, but we realize that this state is only a reality for today. We are not proficient yet, but we can be. The Tyranny of Now takes the opposite approach and believes that either you are talented enough to be proficient, or you are not. The Tyranny of Now believes failure today is the final outcome, and there is no value in exerting energy in trying to improve in this area.

As we discussed the nuances of their experiences with failure, I was again struck by the apparent fluctuation in the mindset of the participants. This idea of a mindset continuum, where individuals can have different mindset when dealing with different

challenges in their lives, resonates with me as a clear element of the participants' life experiences. Yeager and Dweck (2012) addressed this topic which I will revisit when discussing the essence of the phenomenon.

Theme 3: Problem Solving Mindset

Textural Description

I tried to understand the student-athlete participants' mindsets regarding problem-solving by simply asking them how they approach problem-solving in their lives. I clarified that this could be in any aspect of their lives. I also asked them to share what the voices in their head were saying to them when confronting a problem that required solving. Their problem-solving strategies and mindsets help explain what they've experienced and why they're expressing their experiences a particular way.

LaTonya, an introvert and an engineering major, believes personal characteristics inform her problem-solving strategies. She feels problems should be addressed as soon as they are known and corrected through a methodical approach. For LaTonya, there is not one singular approach; she has different approaches to different types of problems.

Piggy backing off of failure right, so anytime things fail for me, I am really good about re-evaluating right. I am really good about looking at myself in the mirror and seeing what was I doing to lead to this, and what do I need to change... This is what I am doing, I know, like, okay I am an engineer, so my brain likes number, ha, my brain has a lot of numbers. It is very methodical... So I guess like, I don't know, my thought processes are really methodical in pretty much every situation and I am pretty much cognitive in everything I do. So, I guess like, I don't know, my thought processes are really methodical in pretty much every situation and I am pretty much cognitive in everything I do... Very conscious in how I move in space and how I speak which is why I am quiet, ha. I am always thinking about

what is the next kind of thing, so when a problem occurs, it's a very kind of list like thought process. (LaTonya, lines 331-336, 346-349)

Tim tries to keep a big-picture perspective on problems that arise in his life. He uses his personal core values, and the goals he's set for himself, as guideposts when dealing with problems. These serve as grounding mechanisms that remind him of what is important in his life, how he wants to respond to adversity, and the role model he wants to be for his younger teammates.

Well, I think it is always important in life to have goals, and when there's something in the way of that goal, I think it's important to figure out what's in the way... The biggest thing is being as positive as I can possibly be. I'm always super positive, like I don't let myself get down. There's things that happen in my life that are not great, but there's also so much that I am blessed, you know, just to be here at this university, playing baseball still. Just, putting things in perspective taking a step back and understanding that there are so many things in life that you should be so grateful for. So, I think for me, positivity, and just being grateful. Just taking a step back sometimes and getting perspective is huge in terms of getting over and finding a way to navigate little issues that come up here and there. And I think in leadership, it is important to share that information and knowledge and my approach to problem solving with my younger teammates who I know haven't gotten there yet. (Tim, lines 207-218)

Micah shares his learning curve regarding the need to assess and plan before jumping in and trying to solve a problem. By moving too fast, he learned that he missed important aspects of problems and then did not truly resolve the issue.

I guess in my early life, I would just dive into things and figure it out later, ummm, cause I hated the planning of things, I just wanted to do the things... but since I've come here and I guess, part of my training in my major engineering, ummm like the problems are, just like the nature of those problems if you just don't plan for them, you're, it's not gonna end well for anybody involved, so ummm I guess that's what taught me the importance of planning... if I know it's gonna be really difficult to solve, the voice in my head tells me, is like at worst this is over in a couple hours. At the very worst, so we are just gonna figure this

out right now, and then it jumps into like what do we know about whatever this is...methodical. (Micah, lines 315-317, 322-324, 353-356)

Veronica shares the contrast in her experience between rowing in Peru and rowing in the US. Her experience in Peru was an ongoing exercise in adapting and overcoming whatever problems she and her team faced. These problems included showing up at a race without a boat, not having the proper nutrition or sleep to perform, and transportation challenges.

Rowing in Peru is not the smoothest path you're ever going to take. There is always, always, problems. Like we go to races and we didn't have enough money, so there's a problem, we have to figure out what we're going to eat. So, eating pizza is not ideal before a race, right, but it's the cheapest thing so that's a problem. Or we're staying at this creepy place where the beds are not the best and I wake up and my back hurts that's a problem...but then you're expected to perform because that's your situation. And, yes, there are people who have more, but this is you, this is where you are, this is the problem that you have and you have to figure out how to fix it. I really like people who know how to adapt to a situation and adapting and figuring out the best way to get out of that situation. I think that takes a lot of problem solving. So sometimes I be, like, a little too dramatic about any problem that I'm having, but I think that I am very smart, and um, mature when it comes to solving problems that are coming my way. (Veronica, lines 349-363)

Brooke approaches problem-solving with a speed-oriented mindset. She wants to solve problems quickly, sometimes so quickly that she only achieves a quick-fix instead of a true resolution to the problem. She longs for substance in her personal relationships and identifies living by a checklist as counter to those goals.

Um, problem solving in my own life would be, I write a lot of pro's and con's lists I try to weigh out the two. I'm a very quick problem solver. I like to think quickly on maybe smaller problems. I'll be like, 'yeah, okay, quick, this.' I'd say sometimes I solve problems quickly and it might be a quick fix instead of a permanent fix. So how I like...[pause] Yeah, like, 'okay, perfect, that's done.' A lot of my life is a checklist. (Brooke, lines 294-300)

Structural Description

As I expected, the student-athlete participants had a range of approaches to problem-solving. My interest here was not in developing a theme around a specific answer; ultimately, I wanted to learn more about their mindsets related to problem-solving. The participants spoke earnestly about their respective processes, and the voices inside their heads when solving problems. Hearing how they've experienced the process of problem-solving constituted another layer of data that is related to their mindsets.

The participants shared how they construct mindsets related to problem-solving, and I pushed them to provide examples to illustrate how this process has worked in their lives. In Chapter 2, I referenced Dweck (2008), Yeager and Dweck (2012), Gardner (2006), and Duckworth (2016) as scholars who have interconnected positions on problem-solving. Their individual work of the researchers above intersects importantly as I work to make meaning out of the student-athlete participants' respective problem-solving process.

Essence of the Phenomenon

Developing themes out of the data and discussing the contextual and structural descriptions for each of those themes are the final steps of imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). I have shared those descriptions by analyzing the data through the amplification of the voices of the student-athlete participants. I organized the themes according to the research question with which they aligned and then analyzed each of them individually. As I continued to follow the steps of Moustakas' (1994) transcendent

phenomenological analysis, the final step in this process is to discover the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. To complete this step, I will synthesize the meanings of the textual and structural descriptions and “develop a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

Since I organized my themes around the two research questions for this study, I will first share the synthesis of the themes for Research Question 1 (RQ1). Research Question 1 was: What are the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes in student-athlete leadership development programs? The three themes for this research question included: (a) personal growth and development, (b) skill development, and (c) engaging pedagogies. Synthesizing the student-athlete participants’ lived experiences and perceptions is an intuitive process in which the essence of this phenomenon reveals itself. The phenomenon is leadership development program experiences in college athletics. The voices of the student-athletes culminate with a statement about their leadership development experience.

The essence of this experience is a unified statement, and plea, from student-athletes saying:

Student-athlete leadership development programs are most impactful when they utilize engaging pedagogies to provide transformational life experiences for participants.

The student-athlete participants generously shared their lived experiences and perceptions about their leadership development programs and I witnessed a clear synthesis emerge. Any one of these three themes alone would not have accounted for the types of experiences these participants described. But having an integrated focus on

personal reflection, growth, and development allowed the student-athletes to be thoughtful about their values, their strengths, their leadership styles; then, they were able to discuss tangible skill development that focused on conflict management, effective communication, emotional intelligence, and other key peer-peer impact tools. This approach was particularly impactful because the two leadership development programs included in this study infused active learning strategies into the sessions. Engaging pedagogies, with additional attention to a range of learning styles, energized these sessions to be transformational experiences for the student-athletes participants.

I will now share the synthesis of the themes for Research Question 2 (RQ2). Research Question 2 was: How do student-athletes construct mindset? The three themes for this research question were: (a) meaning of effort; (b) meaning of failure; and (c) problem-solving mindset. Synthesizing the student-athlete participant experiences into these themes (effort, failure, and problem-solving) was a challenging task as these experiences are much more individualized and lacked the shared experience of an activity or program. The phenomenon in this question is mindset, mindset expressed in this study through the role effort and failure have played in the participants' lives as well as how they mentally approach adversity. My questions probed a number of topic areas designed to ascertain the mindset of the participants. I discovered what Dweck (2008) and Yeager and Dweck (2012) have explored this topic in their research, concluding that mindset is not a fixed state. An individual can have variations in their mindset—their mindset moves along a continuum with “growth” on one end and “fixed” on the other. For example, an individual can have a fixed mindset towards academic achievement and

The participants expressed pride and zeal for the role effort played in their lives, and some then carried that on to their feelings about needing to exert effort, although some did not. The participants that did not were expressing positive, growth associations with effort in the past tense, but when queried on emerging challenges that will require effort, expressed a fixed mindset towards that challenge.

Importantly, two-thirds of student-athlete participants, 8 out of 12, shared a growth mindset orientation as revealed by the mindset interview probing questions. Their stories demonstrated a consistent growth mindset as they faced adversity. And the connection I found in their stories was that they were also more likely to share specific examples of the impact their leadership development programs had on them and how they have applied what they learned in their real lives. The participants with a growth mindset felt effort was a strength for them, appreciated the learning and growth that came from failure, and understood the need to be good people who treat others with respect.

The essence of the experience of mindset is expressed in the following unified statement:

Mindset is experienced on a continuum and plays a critical role in the success of student-athlete leaders.

What I shared above are the essences of the leadership development program lived experiences and the essence of how the participants construct and experience mindset. The last analysis I would like to share is a unifying statement that captures the essence of these two phenomena in one synthesized statement. This statement is:

Mindset is a game-changer for student-athletes and understanding how student-athletes experience mindset on a continuum is critical to their ability to apply leadership development training in their real lives.

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a step-by-step narrative description of how I took Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology methodology and applied it in practice. These steps included sharing how I reduced the data in my sample and the process by which I developed and organized the themes that emerged from the data. I wanted this chapter to amplify the voices of the student-athlete participants in this study while adding my researcher analysis. My analysis was based on following Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology, my experience with the literature in this field, and my understanding of college athletics. I provided textual and structural descriptions of each theme as a method of transparency and to ensure my synthesis of the themes. The expression of the essence of these phenomena were accurate representations of the lived experiences of these student-athlete participants.

Next, I will present a final chapter discussing the findings of this study, the limitations, the implications, and my recommendations for further study in this area.

CHAPTER 6 MAJOR FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 6 will serve as the thread that ties this study together. This chapter includes the relevant literature, the theoretical framework, the methodology, data reduction and analysis, and the essence of the phenomenon in this study. In the spirit of transcendental phenomenology, I will utilize this chapter to synthesize the core aspects of this study. To do this effectively, I will share the background, purpose, major findings, limitations, commentary on the theoretical framework, and implications of this study. Additionally, I will share recommendations for future study and recommendations for athletic administrators who are implementing leadership development programs. Lastly, I will offer my reflections as the researcher on this study.

Background of the Study

Athletics is often seen as the front porch of an institution, providing a public face and entry point for engagement with the community to which it belongs. Given its prominent role, and in alignment with the larger goals of the institution, athletics works to develop the students involved in sport. One of the benefits that college athletics can offer student-athletes, coaches, and administrators is leadership development. To be sure, leadership development programs in college athletics are an emerging phenomenon in higher education. Highlighting the energy around leadership development in college athletics, the NCAA, in addition to its governance function for its member institutions,

has had a formal role in leadership development since 1991, with many member institutions independently operating off-the-field student-athlete development programming long before that. Underscoring how important leadership development is to college athletics, the NCAA also operates a leadership development department specifically focused on the growth and development of individuals from member institutions. There is a growing list of college athletics departments offering leadership development programs; at the same time, research into these offerings is not keeping pace (Appendix A). This study sought to provide a foundational layer of qualitative data to this phenomenon.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes who participated in leadership development programs provided by their athletic departments. There is a demonstrated need for this level of exploration as evidenced by the growing trend of college athletic departments providing leadership development programming for their respective student-athlete populations. However, there is not a commensurate level of scholarship related to the effectiveness of these programs, nor is there an understanding of the lived experiences of the student-athlete participants that is grounded in research. Therefore, this qualitative study sought to understand this phenomenon by exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of college student-athletes who participated in leadership development programs provided by their athletic departments.

Major Findings

“Through phenomenology a significant methodology is developed for investigating human experience and for deriving knowledge from a state of pure consciousness. One learns to see naively and freshly again, to value conscious experience, to respect the evidence of one’s sense, and to move toward and intersubjective knowing of things, people, and everyday experiences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 101). Conducting a qualitative analysis utilizing Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental phenomenology required me to bracket my experience as a leadership development practitioner to experience the student-athlete voices in their pure form, not through my filter. As a practitioner, and as a national leadership development consultant for college and professional athletics organizations, I was interested in the lived experiences and perceptions of student-athletes who participate in leadership development programs. The student-athlete voices have been a significant, yet missing data set as college athletics leadership development programs proliferate nationally.

The findings of this research study were revealed in thick, rich description throughout the data reduction and analysis process I shared in Chapter 5. I identified three themes for each of the research questions in this study. For the first research question (RQ1), I wanted to learn about the lived experiences and perceptions of student-athletes who participated in athletic department-sponsored leadership development programs. The RQ1 themes were: (1) personal growth and development; (2) skill development; and (3) engaging pedagogies. The essence that was synthesized from these three themes is as follows:

Student-athlete leadership development programs are most impactful when they utilize engaging pedagogies to provide transformational life experiences for participants.

The student-athlete participants overwhelmingly shared their lived experiences and perceptions about their leadership development programs and I saw a clear synthesis emerge. It was the integration of these three themes that created the type of experience these participants described. They described an impactful personal transformation, and they experienced them in a symbiotic manner.

For the second research question (RQ2), I wanted to learn how the participants construct mindset in their lives. The RQ2 themes were: (1) meaning of effort; (2) meaning of failure; and (3) problem solving mindset. Synthesizing the student-athlete participant experiences with effort, failure, and problem-solving was a challenging task as these experiences were much more individualized and lacked the shared experience of an activity or program. The essence that was synthesized from these three themes is as follows:

Mindset is experienced on a continuum and plays a critical role in the success of student-athlete leaders.

The notion of mindset as experienced on a continuum is generating interest among practitioners attempting to implement the principles of mindset in training programs and employee professional development (Anderson, 2018). This study is among the first to provide evidence-based qualitative findings regarding the presence of a mindset continuum. It is important to include some perspective regarding the participants' variability of mindset. While two-thirds of student-athlete participants

shared a growth mindset orientation in response to their mindset interview probing questions, and described a consistency of mindset throughout the interviews, the variability, and articulated struggle, of the remaining one-third of the participants is compelling. I was struck by the self-awareness these participants candidly demonstrated. They were aware of how counter-productive and unhealthy their mindset was when dealing with adversity, but they didn't feel they currently have the capacity to change this behavior.

Of particular interest to me as a researcher is the variability in their mindset. Explaining how they feel when facing a significant challenge, one that will require strong effort, revealed a more complicated relationship with effort for some of the participants and reinforced the strong correlation with a growth mindset for the others. As mentioned previously, there is a mindset continuum operating for some of the participants, whereby they experience a different mindset, or a stronger or weaker orientation with growth or fixed, based on the particular circumstance. They are not either completely fixed or completely growth in their orientation (Dweck, 2008).

When these two phenomena were synthesized into one statement, the data revealed the following as the essence of the student-athlete participants' experience with their leadership development programs and mindset:

Mindset is a game-changer for student-athletes and understanding how student-athletes experience mindset on a continuum is critical to their ability to apply leadership development training in their real lives.

Two-thirds of student-athlete participants, 8 out of 12, shared a growth mindset orientation during the mindset interview probing questions. Their stories were

characteristic of a growth mindset as they faced adversity. And the connection I found in their stories was that they were also more likely to share specific examples of the impact their leadership development programs had on them and how they've applied what they learned in their real lives. The participants with a strong growth mindset orientation felt effort was a strength for them, appreciated the learning and growth that came from failure, and understood the need to be good people who treat others with respect. Hence, having a growth mindset is a game-changer for student-athletes, enhancing their ability to apply leadership development training in their real lives.

Limitations

As the lone researcher on a study with many components, I became intimately aware of the limitations of this study. At many stages of this research, I found myself capturing notes and ideas for furthering this research and expanding its scope. What follows is a review of the limitations of this study. The first limitation is a common limitation of qualitative studies: it is limited to the lived experiences of the 12 participants in the study. The 12 participants shared their experiences and, while there were several clear themes and points of synthesis, the findings of this study are based on a small sample size.

The second limitation is the lack of representation of student-athletes from the Power 5 college athletic conferences. The Power 5 conferences are: The Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference (B10), Big 12 Conference, Southeastern Conference (SEC), Pacific Twelve Conference (Pac-12). Both of the institutions in this

study are NCAA Division I institutions; however, neither of them belongs to one of the Power 5 Conferences. Athletic administrators regularly consider programming and data based on whether they feel it is relevant to their student-athlete population. Those institutions may question whether the results of this study would translate to their specific campus population.

The third limitation is that the participants in this study were from two different institutions and experienced the single program offered through their athletic department. There are dozens of college athletic departments operating leadership development programs across the country, and this study analyzed data from two institutions.

The fourth limitation is that this study included one institution from Florida and one institution from Massachusetts. Similar to the third limitation, the results of this study inform the student-athlete experience in only two geographic areas of the United States.

Commentary on the Theoretical Framework

Utilizing Dweck's (2008) theory of mindset was a fascinating experience as a researcher. Applying the core tenets of effort, failure, and natural talent with student-athlete participants allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of mindset and to engage with the complexities of it all. After analyzing the qualitative data through the lens of mindset, I realized that I had initially simplified the concept. Re-reading Dweck's research made it clear that mindset is a journey, not a destination. However, I was approaching this study thinking I would find participants who had either a growth

mindset or a fixed mindset and that designation would likely impact their decisions and their lived experiences with the phenomenon.

So, I had to change my thinking regarding how to analyze the lived experiences of the student-athlete participants via mindset. This was not a difficult task as the voices of the participants were telling a clear story; they described mindset as a continuum, not a fixed state. Some of the participants experienced variability in their mindsets based on the challenge or type of circumstance. While Dweck (2008) doesn't use the term continuum; she describes the variability of an individual's mindset as unique to each person. Yaeger and Dweck (2012) found that students demonstrated clear differences in their mindsets when the students considered intelligence or personality. Also, individuals demonstrated varying levels of competence related to their mindset – strong growth mindset, moderate growth mindset, etc. They were essentially talking about a continuum, and my research identified this theme as well.

After my discovery of a continuum of mindset, I researched this concept and found some practitioners exploring this idea, as I mentioned in the Major Findings section of this chapter. While I could not find any scholarly articles on the continuum, this study is likely among the first to explore the continuum of mindset experiences through an original data set. This is consistent with Dweck's (2008) research and writing on mindset. Dweck proposes that our brains get stronger as we engage in learning, and this aligns with my recommendation that athletic departments provide mindset training as part of their leadership development programs. The belief that we get stronger, better, and smarter foments the understanding that where we are today regarding mindset can be

vastly different than where we can be in the future, based on our determination to improve.

During the proposal stage of this study, I offered a visual representation of the theoretical framework for this study (Figure 1). This illustration focuses on the interaction between the student-athlete participants' mindsets and their lived experiences regarding their leadership development program. A figurative scoreboard shows the Power of Yet and the Tyranny of Now, while the graphic indicates an infinite number of opportunities during which participants can experience, and make meaning from, the core tenets of effort, failure, and the notion of natural talent. This actually fits the idea of a mindset continuum fairly well, as participants can continue to experience each of these core tenets as they complete another lap around the illustrated track. The laps around the track symbolize life experiences, experiences that provide individuals the opportunity to learn, grow, and develop.

Lastly, the application of Dweck's (2008) theory of mindset has tremendous potential in college athletics. The majority of research on this theory has been conducted in elementary and high school settings, with a focus on academic improvement. I am hopeful that this study will prove useful to athletic administrators and other researchers seeking to apply the lessons of mindset in additional contexts.

Implications for Practice

Leadership development programs in college athletics are an emerging phenomenon in higher education, and the number of institutions developing and

implementing programs will likely continue to rise. Many of the institutions that are seeking to implement leadership development programs for their student-athletes are starting with the end in mind, meaning they know they want a leadership development program but do not have much of an idea on how to develop, implement, and sustain a program. These institutions have questions regarding what constitutes best practices in this area. Naturally, these questions include the following:

- Is there curriculum available for purchase?
- How do we evaluate our program for effectiveness?
- What leadership model should we use?
- Where can I find resources?
- Who will deliver our programming?
- What student-athletes should participate and how do we select them?

In the midst of a field that is expanding rapidly, institutions will find a wide range of responses to these questions. And, currently, most of the responses will be based on the personal accounts of colleagues at institutions that are familiar with each other. A gap in this field consists of research-based results and information for institutions to review. One of my main motivations for undertaking this study was to add to a very small amount of data that provide best practices-related information to athletic departments interested in building leadership development programs.

Lastly, this study illuminates the lived experiences and perceptions of student-athletes, a population of keen interest on NCAA Division I campuses. Through this study, there is now a qualitative analysis expressing what student-athletes experienced as

most impactful for them regarding personal growth and the developed of leadership skills. This analysis can be an asset for college athletic departments and leadership educators broadly.

Recommendations for Athletic Administrators Implementing Leadership Development Programs

As college athletic departments consider developing and implementing a leadership development program for their student-athletes, the major findings from this study offer some clear recommendations. Recommendations based on the major findings from this study include the following:

- Intentionality: Athletic administrators should be intentional with their student-athlete programming; they should approach leadership development programs by focusing on the goals they have for the participants. Understanding their goals will provide a guidepost to make decisions.
- Personal Growth and Development: It would be unusual for student-athletes to immediately understand that the most impactful aspect of their leadership development program will be personal growth and development. This is why research-based evidence is a useful tool when building a leadership development model. The student-athlete participants needed more time to focus on themselves to prepare them for a leadership role. The student-athletes found value in reflection activities and assessments that empowered them with information about

their personality style and strengths; they used these insights to develop a leadership philosophy.

- Skill Development: Once the student-athletes developed a strong foundation of personal growth and development, they needed skills to be able to navigate difficult social situations involving their teammates. They described real value in learning about effective communication, emotional intelligence, and conflict management. These skills gave them a confidence boost in handling conflict with their teammates.
- Engaging Pedagogies: The teaching and learning strategies of any educational endeavor constitute the pedagogy of the course. Leadership development programming for student-athletes needs to be infused with active learning strategies. Active learning components include listening, writing, reflecting, and talking. Active learning is a foundational element of an engaging pedagogy. Engaging pedagogies include a learner-centered approach to programming sessions. Having a speaker address a large audience of student-athletes is not active learning.
- Growth Mindset Training: “Students can be taught the science underlying people’s potential to change their academically and socially relevant characteristics, and they can be shown how to apply these insights to their own lives” (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 303). Having a growth mindset was a game-changer for the student-athletes in this study. Dweck (2008) has provided mindset training for students and educators. The inclusion of formal training to

teach student-athletes a growth mindset would be the first option but, at the very least, administrators should include a segment on growth mindset for participants in leadership development programs.

Recommendations for Further Research

My hope is that this study will open the door to a flood of research in the area of college athletics leadership development. Here is a sample of recommendations for future research:

- Continuum of Mindset: As organizations attempt to apply Dweck's (2008) theory of mindset in practice, the understanding of mindset as experienced on a continuum is gaining traction. Practitioners are noting that mindset is not a dichotomy; rather, it is a more complex continuum that has some volatility. Conducting research that explores this continuum would be a meaningful addition to the study of the application of mindset.
- Replication with a Wider Sample: As I mentioned earlier, including student-athletes from Power 5 conference institutions would add another layer of credibility to these findings.
- Sport Specific Studies: Student-athlete populations are incredibly diverse, and this diversity is often experienced across teams. For example, the demographics of a football team vs. a rowing team. A study could collect and cut the data to reflect these differences as well.

- High Profile Team Studies: Conduct team-specific leadership development training and collect pre and post data throughout the treatment period.
- Mixed Methods Studies: Collecting quantitative and qualitative data would allow for a bigger sample set and data analysis that could have broader extrapolation.

Researcher's Reflection

Conducting this research challenged me to have a growth mindset in working through that various stages of the study. It was fitting that I was asking the participants in this study about how they deal with adversity, how they feel when faced with a significant challenge that will require effort, what the voice in their head is telling them when addressing a problem, and how they respond to failure, among other items. It was fitting because I was experiencing all of these dynamics while trying to complete this study.

There were periods when I experienced self-doubt about whether I could complete this study. It often felt like a mountain that was too big for me to climb. There were plenty of justifications for me to succumb to my doubts and my fatigue. My intensive work travel and desire to be more present in my family's life could have justified my giving up on my research study. But my own work ethic, pride, and mindset—yes, my own growth mindset orientation—would not let me quit. So, as I was designing this study and getting deep in the literature regarding mindset, I began to see a reflection of myself in this study. I was a parallel participant of sorts, one who had his own lived experience to share regarding effort and failure and persevering through it all.

The stories of the student-athletes in this study are compelling, and I hope they have been sufficiently amplified to help the scores of additional student-athletes who will be participating in leadership development programs. The pride in the voices of the participants who understood their ability to navigate through life's adversities and experience healthy, fulfilling college experiences was wonderful. Too, it was heartbreaking to see the pain and struggle on the faces of the participants who realized their fixed mindset orientation is having a negative impact on their college experience, their relationships, and their general happiness. They long for a different reality and I am hopeful that more college athletic departments will begin to train their student-athletes and coaches on growth mindset.

CLOSING VIGNETTE

Malcolm and Samuel are teammates on the football team at an NCAA Division I institution, and also participants in their athletic department's leadership development program. They walk back to their dormitory together after completing their last leadership program session of the year. The focus of this last session was leadership challenges and included a range of active learning activities and reflection opportunities for the student-athletes.

As they walk, Malcolm and Samuel talk about how much they learned about themselves and each other through discussions like the one they had tonight, and they wished more of their teammates could participate in this group. They have felt personal growth and development, and they are grateful they were chosen for this experience. But they also lamented that their teammates did not get to experience this program. Malcolm asked Samuel about something he shared during the leadership session, as he did not know Samuel sometimes felt hesitant to speak up when teammates were acting out of step with their team's values. They talk about ways they can impact their teammates through what they have learned in the program.

Beyond their teammates, they consider how they can take these lessons to high school student-athletes. Malcolm and Samuel agree that high school students need to be engaged in these type of programs, and they brainstorm how they can create a program for teens in their hometown. They have had transformational life experiences in their program and they want to share the magical feeling they have.

APPENDIX A
SELECT COLLEGE ATHLETICS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

- University of Alabama: <http://www.rolltide.com/sports/2016/11/26/d-r-i-v-e-for-success-career-leadership.aspx>
- University of Arkansas: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- Boston University: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- Canisius College: <http://gogriffs.com>
- University of Central Florida: <http://www.ucfknight.com/sports/2016/9/23/leadership-development.aspx>
- Colgate University: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- Fordham University: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- Georgetown University: <https://sites.google.com/a/georgetown.edu/calp/about>
- George Washington University: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- University of Illinois: <http://fightingillini.com/sports/2015/6/14/leadershipacademy.aspx>
- Lehigh University: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- Loyola University: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- University of Miami: <http://www.hurricanesports.com/signingday/saac/saac/2/>
- University of Michigan: <http://www.mgoblue.com/sports/2017/6/16/asp-leadership-academy-html.aspx?id=1305>
- University of Minnesota: <http://www.gophersports.com/sports/student-affairs/minn-student-affairs-body.html>
- UNC-Charlotte: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- Northeastern University: <http://www.gonu.com/#>
- Ohio State University: <http://www.ohiostatebuckeyes.com/sports/sasso/spec-rel/about.html>
- Old Dominion University: http://www.odusports.com/SportSelect.dbml?DB_OEM_ID=31100&SPID=187818&SPSID=1165810&DB_OEM_ID=31100
- University of Southern California: <http://saas.usc.edu/personal-development/leadership/>

- Stetson University: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- University of South Carolina: <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com/programs/college-leadership-academies/>
- University of Washington: <http://sites.education.washington.edu/uwcla/research/working-paper>

APPENDIX B
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs (NCLP)

- List of Co-Curricular Programs
- https://nclp.umd.edu/resources/co-curricular_programs
- List of Associations and Organizations in Higher Education
- https://nclp.umd.edu/resources/associations_and_organizations

APPENDIX C
SELECT COLLEGE ATHLETICS LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
VENDORS

- National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Leadership Development
 - <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/leadership-development>
- Women Leaders in College Sport
 - <https://www.womenleadersincollegesports.org>
- Janssen Sports Leadership Center
 - <http://www.janssensportsleadership.com>
- National Consortium for Academics and Sports (NCAS) – Athletic Leadership in the 21st Century
 - <https://www.ncasports.org/programs/athletic-leadership-21st-century/>
- Growing Leaders
 - <https://growingleaders.com/athletics/>
- The Jon Gordon Companies
 - <http://jongordon.com/consulting/>

APPENDIX D
EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH



EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: Leadership Development Programs in College Athletics: An Exploration of the Student-Athlete Experience."

Principal Investigator: Mr. Jeffrey O'Brien

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Rosa Cintrón

Study Information & Procedures:

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Your participation is voluntary.

- The purpose of this research is to study the lived experiences and perceptions of student-athletes in Leadership Development programs offered through their athletic department.
- The research will be carried out at your campus in a conference room or private meeting space designated by administrators in your athletic department.
- You will be asked questions about your experiences in your leadership development program and about your role as a leader on campus. This interview will be recorded on audiotape and notes will be taken on a laptop or note paper.
- You will participate in one interview that is expected to last 60-75 minutes. Mr. O'Brien may send a follow up email to you to clarify some aspects of your interview.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, you can contact Mr. Jeffrey O'Brien, Principal Investigator, Department of Educational and Human Sciences, College of Education at (617) 283-6733 or Dr. Rosa Cintrón, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Educational and Human Sciences, College of Education at (407) 823-1248 or by email at Rosa.cintrondelgado@ucf.edu

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX E
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Determination of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Jeffrey Obrien

Date: January 16, 2018

Dear Researcher:

On 01/16/2018, the IRB reviewed the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination
Project Title: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN
COLLEGE ATHLETICS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE
STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE
Investigator: Jeffrey Obrien
IRB Number: SBE-18-13713
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

This letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gillian Morien".

Signature applied by Gillian Morien on 01/16/2018 08:23:19 PM EST

Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Part I: Demographics & Background

Q1: How many years were involved in your athletic department's leadership development program for student-athletes?

Q2: What college athletic team are you a member of?

Q3: What level of NCAA competition does your team compete?

Q4: What class year are you at your institution?

Q5: What do you identify as your racial background?

Q6: What do you identify as your gender identity?

Part 2: Leadership Development Program Experience

Q1: Please describe your experience in your student-athlete leadership program:

Q2: Please describe what you felt was the most impactful aspect of your experience in your student-athlete leadership program:

Q3: What did you learn about yourself from your experience in your program?

What do you feel the goals of the program are? What is it trying to accomplish?

Q4: What did you learn about yourself from your experience in your program?

Q5: What did you learn from your experience that you have been able to apply to your leadership on campus?

Q6: How would you describe your ability as a leader?

Q7: What changes would you recommend to the program?

Part 3: Mindset

Q1: Can you describe the role “failure” has played in your life?

Probe: Can you share an example?

Probe: What words would you use to describe how you’ve dealt with failure?

Q2: Can you describe the role “effort” has played in your life?

Probe: Can you share an example?

Probe: Can you describe how it feels to exert effort in addressing a challenge?

Q3: How do you approach problem solving in your life?

Q4: How do you feel about the notion of “natural talent”?

Probe:

Q5: Can you describe what have been the keys to your success as a leader?

Q6: Can you describe what have been the keys to your failures as a leader?

APPENDIX G
SAMPLE REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

JOB'S Reflexive Journal

DAY I:

As I enter these first three interviews, remember my role as a qualitative researcher here.

- Bracket, Bracket, Bracket!!

- Don't worry about taking notes and remember the recorder is capturing the interaction

- keep mental notes on things the recorder won't pick up - body language, perceived contact level or unease.

- let their voices lead the way

POST-DAY I:

- That was intense! These first three S-A's were extremely open to →

APPENDIX H
SAMPLE FIELD NOTES

JOB's Field Notes

- First Day of interviews are in a coaches office who is out of town — it is hot in the room (office), and I am hoping it doesn't have a negative effect
- Checked the recorder several times to be sure it's working, nervous b/c I've never used it before.
- Remembers to give everyone a copy of the research agreement sheet
- push for examples of Effort & Failure →
- OFFICE space worked well — tomorrow we move to the conference room next to the S-A lounge

APPENDIX I
SAMPLE OF HORIZONTALIZATION PROCESS

231 **UCF01:** And last year we swept conference, so we won every single event. It's six events
 232 because every boat has points and the crew that has more points wins. Now going towards this
 233 conference the other teams have nothing to lose because they've always...not always, but for the
 234 last four years have lost, but we just swept conference so we have a lot to lose. Even if we still
 235 win, but we didn't win everything it's like 'what did we do wrong?' So, for me, facing this is a
 236 mixture of excitement because I am excited, and pride because I am part of the best university in
 237 the country, but then because I know I have that responsibility, and there's so much on my
 238 shoulders and all my teammates shoulders as well, then I tend to get nervous and a little anxious.
 239 But I think that nerves are a part of your life and it's okay to be nervous. But definitely keeping
 240 those nerves as nerves and not fear. Because sometimes it starts to go towards being scared and I
 241 wake up three times in the night when I know I have a big workout the next day and I'm like 'oh
 242 my God, I'm about to, like almost puke tomorrow in the morning' because I know what's
 243 coming.

244 **Interviewer:** Yeah, so using it as fuel, right, like in some ways that anxiety and fear to fuel your
 245 competitive edge.

246 **UCF01:** Yeah.

247 **Interviewer:** So connected to that, so part of this anxiety and fear..it seems like it's angled
 248 toward a potential of failure...

249 **UCF01:** Yeah...

250 **Interviewer:** ...could you talk about, could you describe the role failure has played in your life?
 251 Like how you make meaning out of failure?

252 **UCF01:** As I told you, I wanted to study in the States and stuff like that, I knew even that, if I
 253 failed, okay, my parents are very supportive. Like everything I want accomplished, they are apart
 254 of it, each of them in their own way. Like my mom is kind of behind the scenes. The way she
 255 supports me is by giving me space. Like my dad, like I talk to my dad every day. When I was
 256 back home in Peru and we talked about having this goal, he would like, oh my gosh, if you look
 257 up Paula Parks in YouTube you'll find videos of me rowing. It's, yeah, and he tells everybody...

258 **Interviewer:** Proud papa, right?

259 **UCF01:** Totally, totally. So we both worked on this goal that I had. So I knew failure meant that
 260 all that effort was going to be wasted, but for him it was like it's not going to be wasted because
 261 we did it, we grew up from that, um, we got closer. And if it doesn't happen it doesn't happen he
 262 would always ask me..this sticks with me and it will always stick with me...he was like 'Paula,
 263 what is the worst thing that can happen to you if you send...'...because we were sending emails
 264 to colleges... 'if no one replies? What is the worst thing that can happen to you?' I was
 265 like...'well, the worst thing that can happen is I don't go anywhere, I stay here.' He said..'well,
 266 what is the worst thing that can happen if you stay here?' And I was like...'well, I like, failed. I
 267 didn't do it.' And he was like..'And what is the worst thing that can happen?' And he would like
 268 keep going. I was like 'where are you trying to get?' And he was like..'well, nothing really bad is
 269 going to happen to you if you can't do it. Like you're not going to die, you're going to get sick,
 270 I'm not going to get mad, your mom's not going to get mad. You just didn't do it.'

271 **Interviewer:** Yeah.

272 **UCF01:** 'We just pick another way. So, like, for me, failure is this thing you just recover from.
 273 If it didn't work, you just choose something else. As long as you try. 'As long as you try your
 274 hardest it's okay.' But me being the obsessively competitive person that I am. Failure for me
 275 meant like disappointing my dad, even though I knew he wasn't going to be disappointed. It
 276 meant I was going to be disappointed as well, and then I had all these people that had told me

*Concern
about
being
perfect

Parents
role

Dad's
advice
? perspective

Is she
trying to
convince
herself of
this?

APPENDIX J
SAMPLE OF THEME REDUCTION PROCESS

Research Question 1: Lived experiences and perceptions of student-athletes

Preliminary Theme	Amy	Jacob	LaTonya	Tim	Micah	Ethan	Ashanti	Candice	Veronica	Brooke	Samuel	Malcolm
Effective Communicaton	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Skill Development	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
Personal growth/Self Learning /Transformational		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Conflict management	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X
Pedagogy: Active Learning, Interactive	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ability to adapt to different people/styles	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Reflection	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Awareness of impact on others	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Emotional Intelligence	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
Develop Relationships			X	X			X		X		X	X

Research Question 2: How do student-athletes construct mindset

Preliminary Theme	Amy	Jacob	LaTonya	Tim	Micah	Ethan	Ashanti	Candice	Veronica	Brooke	Samuel	Malcolm
Meaning of Effort (+)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
(+) Feelings when effort is involved	X	X	+/-	X	+/-	X		X	+/-	X	X	X
Meaning of Failure (learning)	X	X	+/-	X	X	X		X	+/-		X	X
Problem Solving Mindset Growth	X	X	+/-	X	+/-	X	+/-	X	X		+/-	X
Effort > Natural Talent	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	+/-	X

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