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Collegiate Team Sport Participation and Adult Leadership Development

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Abstract

Collegiate sport requires significant investments of time and resources from universities, athletes, sponsors, and boosters; however, the leadership and leadership development benefits of collegiate sport remains relatively uncertain (Desrochers, 2013; Hardin, 2015; Wright & Côté, 2003). This study explored the impact of female collegiate team sport participation on self-perceived leadership development and leadership style. Research was conducted using qualitative methods, interviewing 12 former female collegiate rugby athletes, all no more than 3 years removed from their collegiate rugby experience. The aim was to understand how female collegiate athletes experience the process of leadership development, how participation influences an athlete's perceived leadership style, the influence of coaches and team roles on their leadership development, and how former female athletes display transformational leadership as adults, if at all. The results of the study confirmed that collegiate rugby played a role in the formation of adult leadership styles, yet important questions remain regarding the process of leadership development within collegiate sport. The findings contributed to the body of literature relating to collegiate sport research, specifically female athlete literature. The findings of this study may also directly benefit athletes, coaches, and university administration.

Keywords: collegiate sport, female collegiate sport, sport leadership, leadership development

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated in memory of my mother and best friend, Donna Lisa Banks Grai. Thank you for encouraging me to always pursue my dreams. Your sweet words and kind heart will always remain with me. While you are gone from your earthly home, your loving memory continues to inspire me daily.

To my father and coach, you help me in all things great and small. From a young athlete to a doctoral candidate, you have always encouraged me to pursue excellence. Thank you for the love and laughter you provide daily.

To my soon to be husband, thank you for continuing to encourage me to pursue my dreams and finish my dissertation. You came into my life when I needed you the most. I thank God every day for you.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Collegiate sport has long promoted individual player development; however, limited research has been conducted to understand collegiate sport outcomes and in what ways leadership development is promoted by sport participation (Extejt & Smith, 2009; Hardin, 2015; Wright & Côté, 2003). College athletics requires significant investment of time and resources from athletes, colleges, sponsors, and boosters (Desrochers, 2013); however, the outcomes of college athletics beyond individual player development and team competition goals are often unclear (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Watson & Kissinger, 2007; Wolverton, 2008). Throughout the National Collegiate Athletics Associations (NCAA), over 460,000 athletes compete in three divisions within 19,000 teams (NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2014). Of the 460,000 NCAA athletes, approximately 208,000 were women competing in more than 10,000 teams, tripling in total participation and teams over the last 30 years (Irick, 2011). These athletes invest significant time, averaging 30–40 hours a week, to training, practice, and game play (Pope, 2009). The time spent by athletes on their sport is time spent away from other activities, such as educational endeavors or the pursuit of additional hobbies or interests. Additionally, only 2% of collegiate athletics go on to be professional athletes; thus, most athletes will need to gain significant educational and leadership advantages while enrolled in college to be successful in their future careers (NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2014). With such a significant investment of time and resources by collegiate athletes to their sport and the number of female athletes growing immensely, colleges should embrace opportunities for high impact learning and development experiences for their female student-athletes (Galante & Ward, 2017; Huntrods et al., 2017; Irick, 2011; Umbach et al., 2006). The NCAA, along with sport participants and enthusiasts, has commonly promoted that sport participation supports leadership development; however, there is limited research to directly support this claim, or to demonstrate what type of leadership development is facilitated by collegiate sport participation (Loughead, 2017; Mull et al., 2005; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001). With athletics requiring such a large investment, it is critical to clarify the leadership development outcomes of collegiate athletics

through continued research (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Weight et al., 2014; Wolverton, 2008).

Although there is no gold standard of athlete leadership behaviors, athlete leadership theories have emerged from organizational psychology and sport coaching (Loughead, 2017). There are four quantitative self-reporting measurements used to assess athlete behaviors: Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X; Bass & Avolio, 2000), Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory (DTLI; Hardy et al., 2010), Multidimensional Model of Leadership (MML; Chelladurai, 1983), and the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980). The MLQ-5X has been used sparingly to measure athlete leadership behaviors including an athletes' transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 2000). The DTLI represents an integration of four leadership theories, is composed of antecedents, throughputs, and consequences, and is used to measure athlete transformational and transactional behaviors (Hardy et al., 2010). The MML is comprised of four leadership theories, composed of antecedents, throughputs, and consequences (Chelladurai, 1983). The LSS measures athlete leadership behaviors of training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback. While the DTLI and LSS were not created to measure athlete leadership, new athletic leadership specific behaviors have emerged (Loughead, 2017). From self-report questionnaires, athletes most commonly report the idea of team cohesion (Callow et al., 2009; Price & Weiss, 2013; Vincer & Loughead, 2010).

The Social Network Analysis (SNA) is another quantitative measure used for athlete leadership; however, it measures leadership as a whole between team members (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). SNA has only been utilized in a few studies, with results indicating the following: athlete leadership is shared among formal and informal leaders, teammates more connected with high quality athlete leaders, athlete leadership quality related to team cohesion (Cotta et al., 2013; Fransen et al., 2015a, 2015b; Loughead et al., 2016; Passos et al., 2011). The findings of quantitative research have demonstrated that athlete leaders, as dictated by their role of team captain, display the following characteristics and behaviors: high

levels of communication, ability to serve as a liaison between team and coaches, ability to reinforce team norms, ability to serve as a role model, and demonstrated high levels of trust and respect towards coaches and peers (Dupuis et al., 2006; Loughead, 2017; Smith et al., 2013). While the majority of sport leadership research has utilized quantitative research methods, there is tremendous value associated with the use of qualitative research methods, especially when investigating new or relatively new areas such as female collegiate athlete leadership development (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Athlete leadership findings have emerged from limited qualitative studies (Bucci et al., 2012; Loughead, 2017; Wright & Côté, 2003). For example, coaches and teammates have reported that athletes serving as captains should display the following qualities: openness to learn, leadership through example, positive team ambassador behaviors, and collaborative working style (Camire, 2016; Wright & Côté, 2003). Additionally, according to coaches, athletes serving in leadership roles should demonstrate high sport skill and maintain a good rapport with teammates (Kim, 1992; Mosher & Roberts, 1981; Rees, 1982; Weese & Nicholls, 1986; Wright & Côté, 2003). Meanwhile, coaches have noted that effective athlete leaders should model their coaches while demonstrating honesty, generosity, and unselfishness (Bucci et al., 2012). Although limited qualitative research is available, it is centered on athlete leader behaviors and not what type of leadership development, particularly leadership style, is facilitated by collegiate sport participation (Mull et al., 2005).

Athletics offers a practical venue to employ and practice leadership development (Weaver & Simet, 2015). The role of collegiate athletics on the development of adult leadership styles has been poorly understood. In the current study, the researcher further explored the impact of collegiate sport participation on perceived adult leadership styles. The focus was on athlete leadership development, considering the impact of coach influence, team roles, and player demographics. The findings of this study add to the body of collegiate sport research and advance sport leadership literature, specifically female athlete literature. The findings of this study may also directly benefit athletes, coaches, and university administration.

Statement of the Problem

Although athlete leadership research has grown over the past decade, the research topic remains in its infancy (Loughead, 2017). Current research on athlete leadership is centered around coach influence on leadership behaviors, formal team roles and leadership behaviors, and gender differences in leadership behaviors (Brown et al., 2018; Cotterhill, 2013; Cotterhill & Cheetham, 2015; Crozier et al., 2013; Extejt & Smith, 2009; Goldberg & Chandler, 1989; Loughead et al., 2016). With emphasis in these areas, there is a lack of consensus regarding the approaches that should be adopted in developing athlete leaders and their associated leadership types (Cotterhill & Fransen, 2016). As much of the research is centered around coach influence on leadership behaviors, and males typically hold coaching positions, there is limited research on female leaders in sport (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; Burton, 2015). This dearth of research extends to examining leadership development through collegiate sport participation for female athletes (Galante & Ward, 2017). Furthermore, there is limited research on transformational leadership and the possible connection to athlete development (Smith et al., 2013). To the author's knowledge, there is no comprehensive qualitative research that explores the development of leadership styles in female athlete leaders.

There are large financial and time investments involved in college athletics with Division I colleges spending over $10 million on athletics on an annual basis and athletes dedicating 30–40 hours a week on their sport (Desrochers, 2013; Pope, 2009). Meanwhile, colleges represented in the Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) spend an average of $45 million on athletics on an annual basis (Desrochers, 2013). With only 2% of college athletes transitioning to professional sport (NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2014), it is critical that students receive a quality education and tangible leadership skills during their college sport participation journey. The graduation rates of student-athletes are on the rise, which signals great educational progress. Division I student-athletes are graduating at a rate of 90%, while Division II student-athletes graduate at a rate of 74% and Division III student-athletes graduate at a rate of 87%. In all NCAA divisions, student-athletes are matching or outperforming their nonathlete peers in graduation rates (NCAA,

2020a). Even with success in the classroom, the leadership development outcomes of college athletics remain in question (Hall, 2015; Hardin, 2015; Nesbitt & Grant, 2015; Scott, 1999; Weaver & Simet, 2015). Few colleges implement structured leadership development programs for their student athletes (NCAA, n.d.; Duke University, 2014; Washington and Lee University, 2014). Barriers to implementing high-quality, intentional leadership development programs include the following: insufficient research and questionable leadership development outcomes, a lack of time available by the student-athlete, insufficient knowledge of leadership development by the coaches and athletic departments, and overall little focus from college administration (McFadden & Carr, 2015; Weaver & Simet, 2015). Existing research has not provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate the influence of the coach, team dynamics, and gender differences on athlete leadership development. As a starting point to overcoming these barriers and ensuring leadership development within collegiate student-athletes, it is vital to understand the influence of team sport participation on adult leadership styles.

Coach Influence on Leader Development

Of the research available for athletics and leadership style, most have focused on how coach leadership influences athlete immediate outcomes (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999; Goldberg & Chandler, 1989; Huntrods et al., 2017; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992; Sullivan & Kent, 2003). The results of a study conducted by Moran and Weiss (2006) found greater levels of ability/competence, peer acceptance, and expressiveness were associated with athletes as identified by their coaches and peers. Extejt and Smith (2009) found that sport participants exhibited greater levels of teamwork compared to their nonathlete peers. Supportive environments, often established by the head coach, are believed to encourage leadership development (Evans et al., 2010). Horn et al. (2011) emphasized the influence of the coach on adult development: "The types of behaviors and/or leadership styles exhibited by coaches can either facilitate or undermine the psychological growth and development of their athletes" (p. 191). The most effective coaches embrace leadership development and encourage athletes to develop critical skills (Voight, 2012). According to the Multidimensional Model of

Leadership (Chelladurai, 1978, 2001, 2007), an athlete's preference for type of coaching behavior and/or leadership style varies based on the athlete and situation. An athlete's preference for type of coaching behavior and/or leadership style is influenced by the athlete's sport experience, competitive level, gender, psychological characteristics, and motivational orientation (Beam et al., 2004; Chelladurai & Carron, 1981, 1983; Riemer & Toon, 2001; Sherman et al., 2000; Terry, 1984; Terry & Howe, 1984). Although previous researchers have focused on the influence of coach leadership on immediate athlete outcomes, further research is needed to understand how coach leadership influences on an athlete's overall leadership development.

Team Roles

Collegiate sports can be separated by recreational athletics, individual varsity sports, and team varsity sports. Previous scholars have sought to understand the differences in team sport participation versus individual sport participation, also referred to as coactive sport and interactive sport (Carron et al., 2002; Extejt & Smith, 2009; Munroe et al., 1999). Interactive sports, such as baseball, football, and soccer, require task interactions for group success. Coactive sports, such as golf, tennis, and swimming, do not require task interaction among individual team members (Extejt & Smith, 2009). Team sports are less dependent on the performance of a single individual, and instead are more focused on individuals serving in their specific team roles to find team success (Huntrods et al., 2017). The structure, operations, and dynamics of teams and team roles is a focus of organizational research; however, team roles are not as well researched within sport research (Fisher et al., 2000; Fransen et al., 2014; Voelker et al., 2011). For a non-sport-specific team to be successful, there needs to be a spread of naturally occurring roles across the team (Belbin, 1981; Fisher et al., 2000). Belbin (1981) identified eight naturally occurring roles on team to include: the plant, the resource investigator, the coordinator, the shaper, monitor-evaluator, team worker, implementer, and completer. Team captain roles are the most researched concept relating to team roles within sport research. Team captains are responsible for improving overall team climate, establishing and reinforcing group norms, and

motivating their peers (Dupuis et al., 2006). Team captains are often chosen based on experience and/or skill alone, assuming that the oldest and/or most talented players are capable of leading (Weaver & Simet, 2015). Additionally, team captains influence leadership, team unity, and integrity (Brgoch et al., 2018). In research with former university sport team captains, team captains developed strong interpersonal characteristics, verbal interactions, and task behaviors, all elements of leadership (Dupuis et al., 2006). The majority of team captain research has self-assessed individual experiences and leadership, leaving a gap in the literature with captains being externally evaluated by head coaches and/or peers (Brgoch et al., 2018). Leaders exist on collegiate sport teams at all levels, not just as team captains (Fransen et al., 2014). Further research is needed to understand how other team roles influence athlete leadership development.

Gender in Leadership Development

Collegiate sport serves as a common denominator, bringing people together of different genders, races, ethnicities, religions, and socioeconomical statuses (Cunningham, 2007). Supportive team environments, created by coaches, can build student-athlete leadership capacities by implementing a leadership development program (Weaver & Simet, 2015). Coaches that promote diversity within their teams also create an environment for leadership development through sociocultural conversations (Weaver & Simet, 2015). Dugan et al. (2013) detailed the importance of socio-cultural conversations, stating, "Socio-cultural conversations with peers are the single strongest predictor of socially responsible leadership capacity for student across demographic groups" (p. 9). Although student-athletes may consider themselves "first and foremost as athletes," further research is needed to understand how gender and demographics influence leadership development learned from sport (Brown et al., 2018, p. 165; Extejt & Smith, 2009). When examining a specific demographic group, there is significant research relating to women in sport; however, fewer researchers have focused on leadership development in female collegiate sport (Fuller et al., 2018; Galante & Ward, 2017; A. B. Smith et al., 2016). This is an important research priority as women in leadership often cite sport participation as a critical factor to their success (Ernst & Young, 2013). The

researcher of the current study specifically sought to better understand how female athletes experience leadership development.

Purpose of the Research

Most sport research has utilized quantitative research methods and centered around the influence of coach leadership on immediate athlete outcomes and the role of team captains as leaders (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999; Fisher et al., 2000; Fransen et al., 2014; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992; Voelker et al., 2011). Limited qualitative research has been conducted in sport leadership (Bucci et al., 2012; Loughead, 2017). Additionally, there are significant gaps in the research regarding the following: the influence of coach leadership on an athlete's overall leadership development, how other team roles influence athlete leadership development, and how female college athletes experience leadership development through sport participation. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how collegiate sport participation influences female athlete leadership development. The researcher examined the sport participation history of college athletes, the influence of coaches on their leadership development andtheir current career path, and how participation in team sport influenced their current leadership style.

Research Questions

Universities invest hundreds of millions of dollars of student fees to fund their athletic programs (Huntrods et al., 2017). Substantial funding in addition to strategic marketing efforts of collegiate sport may lead the public to assume there are strong leadership outcomes associated with college sport participation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Additional research was needed to further understand how and what leadership development occurs as a result of collegiate sport participation. Through this study, the researcher sought to answer the following research questions, according to the perceptions of female who previously participated in collegiate sport:

1. How do female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through sport participation?

2. What is the role of collegiate sport participation in the development of adult leadership styles?

3. How does the role of the coach influence the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style?

4. How do team roles, both informal and formal, influence the female collegiate experience and their leadership development?

5. In what ways, if at all, do female college athletes demonstrate transformational leadership as adults?

Significance of the Research

A study of the perceived influence of collegiate athletes on adult leadership development is important for several reasons. Previous researchers have indicated the influence of sport participation on individual characteristics and leadership skills (Chu et al., 1985; Extejt & Smith, 2009; Weaver & Simet, 2015); however, little research exists to understand the postcollegiate leadership style effects of student-athletes (Hardin, 2015; Weaver & Simet, 2015). There is a gap in the literature regarding the specific leadership style collegiate athletes are more likely to develop as a result of their sport participation. Additionally, researchers have yet to sufficiently define how leadership styles may differ based on perceived coach leadership style and/or gender of the athlete.

There are multiple practical applications for this research as well. First, sufficient research can help to confirm or question the investment of collegiate sport as indicated by leadership development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Weight et al., 2014). Leadership development facilitated through sport will help to validate the investment of time and money spent on sport participation from the collegiate level and as well by the student-athletes themselves (Huntrods et al., 2017). The results of this study may encourage college administrators, coaches, and other support staff to implement intentional leadership development skills and/or programs into the collegiate experience. Practitioners may utilize the research to design and/or refine leadership development curriculum for student-athletes. Last, as organizations make significant financial investments in training and

development, collegiate sport leadership development research may inform how universities hire, train, and develop coaches (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

Leadership theory has continued to evolve over the years. Although leadership has many definitions, these definitions commonly refer to the traits, qualities, and behaviors of a leader (Horner, 1997). The study of leadership has been through many evolutions starting from the exploration of attributes of great leaders, noting that leaders are born (Bernard, 1926). Leadership theory then shifted to observing leaders in the context of their organization with the idea that leadership skills could be taught (Halpin & Winer, 1957; Hemphill & Coons, 1957; Saal & Knight, 1988). From this point, various leadership style theories have emerged, including transformational leadership, transactional leadership, servant leadership, and authentic leadership (Burns, 1978; George, 2003; Greenleaf, 1970).

Transformational leadership theories have been studied together, separately, and in-conjunction with other leadership theories for over 40 years (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership theory was originally developed by Burns as the concept that leaders and followers assist each other in advancing to a higher level of morale and motivation. Bass (1985, 1990) expanded on Burns's original concept by specifying that transformational leaders operate outside of their self-interests and enhance their own employees' interests by generating inspiration towards their purpose and how it correlates to the overall mission of the team. As transformational leadership theory evolved, four primary behaviors of transformational leadership were developed: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Avolio et al., 1991).

Limited research has linked the concepts of transformational leadership to athlete development (M. Smith et al., 2013). Within athlete development, transformational leadership occurs when athletes—whether holding formal or informal roles—elevate the interests of their teammates and encourage them to act beyond their own self-interests. Successful transformational athletes accomplish

this by building relationships, stimulating challenge, and exhibiting high moral integrity (Mak & Kim, 2016; M. Smith et al., 2013). One purpose of the current research was to explore in what ways, if at all, female athletes develop a transformational leadership style through their sport participation.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to explore the development of adult leaders and in relation to their past collegiate sport experience. A qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth opportunity to explore athlete perspectives as the researcher seeks to understand how leadership develops from collegiate sport participation. Although quantitative research may reveal what leadership develops due to participation, it cannot reveal how the development occurred (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999). Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research. A phenomenological study seeks to find common meaning of what and how participants experienced a concept or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research study was not a pure phenomenological study, as the researcher did not focus on one shared experience; rather, the shared phenomenon was the cumulative summary of several collegiate athlete experiences at multiple institutions.

As recommended by Creswell (2017), a minimum of 12 female participants were interviewed using purposeful sampling, and interviews were continued until saturation was reached (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to select participants that are associated with the phenomenon being studied. All research participants played on a collegiate rugby team. All participants were no more than 3 years removed from their collegiate level play and were currently active members of the workforce. All participants completed a survey collecting factual information including graduation class, demographics, number of years playing rugby, other sports played and corresponding number of years, and captain role. After survey completion, all participants partook in a semistructured one-on-one interview via the Zoom online video platform. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded manually by the researcher. Themes and subthemes were generated to articulate the essence of the experience to

understand how adult leaders perceived their leadership development and style in relation to their collegiate sport participation.

Scope and Limitations

This study was limited to females that previously participated in collegiate sport and thus did not account for the experience of male college athletes, who may have a different experience and process to leadership development. This study was limited to former female collegiate rugby athletes, all being no more than 3 years removed from their collegiate sport experience. This study included only self-perceived opinions on leadership style, not external perspectives on student-athletes leadership from coaches, administrators, or peers.

The study had several limitations. First, the study was limited to only former collegiate rugby players. Purposeful sampling decreased the generalizability of the findings. Second, it was difficult to isolate the effect the independent variables have on leadership development. Athletes may have gained their perceived leadership style from outside of sport; however, by studying recent postcollegiate athletes, the effect of time was reduced. There were many advantages to a qualitative approach and the use of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews provided rich content on a complex topic and allowed for follow-up questions with connections between several topics. In fact, research utilizing qualitative approaches have increased since 2006; however, while many advantages exist, the findings of a qualitative approach are not generalizable (Queiros et al., 2017).

Definition of Terms

Former collegiate athlete: This refers to individuals that have participated on a collegiate level sport team. For the purposes of this study, all former collegiate athletes played rugby on a college team for a minimum of one season.

Leader(ship) development: "Every form of growth or stage of development in the life cycle that promotes, encourages and assists in one's leadership potential" (Brungardt, 1997, p. 83).

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA): This is an athletic association that serves small colleges; it currently serves 308 student-athletes with 75% of institutions qualifying for national championships (NAIA, 2022).

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): This is a member-led organization dedicated to the lifelong success of college athletes. The NCAA is composed of 1,100 member schools in 50 states, with more than 500,000 competing athletes. In 1973, the NCAA established three divisions: Division I, Division II, and Division III (NCAA, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

NCAA Division I: DI is composed of more than 350 schools, 6,000 athletic teams, and 170,000 student-athletes. Student-athletes are eligible for full scholarships. All sports compete in the NCAA-run championships, except for football that subdivided into two distinct categories based on bowl eligibility (NCAA, 2021a).

NCAA Division II: DII is composed of 300 colleges. Student-athletes are eligible for partial scholarships, combining athletic scholarships with academic scholarships or need-based grants (NCAA, 2021b).

NCAA Division III: DIII is composed of 440 colleges and 195,000 student-athletes. Student-athletes are not eligible for athletic scholarships, but a majority receive some form of academic grant or need-based scholarship (NCAA, 2021c).

Pitch: This is the field that rugby is played on (SIS Pitches, 2022).

Team captain: This leader maintains an elevated role over the team, with specific responsibilities determined by the coaching staff (Newman et al., 2019). Team captains are voted on by their teammates, coach, or some combination of both (Brgoch et al., 2018).

USA Rugby College Rugby Association of America (CRAA): This is comprised of the premier divisions within Men's and Women's Collegiate rugby, including Men's D1A, Women's D1 Elite, Women's D1, and Women's D2. Student-athletes are eligible for full or partial scholarships, dependent on various factors (USA Rugby College Rugby Association of America, 2021).

Summary

The study of collegiate athletic participation and outcomes is a key conversation for those interested in both sport and higher education. The NCAA, college administrators, athletes, and sport enthusiasts promote sport for the competitive nature that sport facilities and the personal growth outcomes associated with participation; however, collegiate sport participation and long-term leadership development outcomes remain relatively uncertain (Hall, 2015; Hardin, 2015; Mull et al., 2005; Nesbitt & Grant, 2015; Scott, 1999; Weaver & Simet, 2015). Through this study, the researcher sought to further understand the leadership development process and outcomes of former female collegiate athletes. A qualitative approach was used to interview 12 former female collegiate athletes, all no more removed from college by 3 years. The results from this study provided information regarding collegiate sport participation and leadership development outcomes, specifically regarding whether and how coaching influences female athlete leadership development. The results of this research questioned the investment of collegiate sport and provided insights to the development of leadership style as a result of collegiate sport participation.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Leadership development in collegiate sport remains a relatively untapped research topic (Loughead, 2017). Previous researchers have conducted investigations in the areas of coach and team captain influence on immediate performance and behaviors. Studies have highlighted the link between sport participation and leadership skills; however, a gap in the research remains as it relates to how and what kind of leadership develops, specifically what kind of leadership style, as a result of team sport participation (Extejt & Smith, 2009; Hardin, 2015). The current researcher examined the role of collegiate team sport participation in the development of leadership among former female athletes. The nature of this study compelled a review of relevant literature. This review begins by examining the value of collegiate sport, both to the collegiate institution and players themselves, followed by a brief overview of leadership development and transformational leadership. Finally, literature on the role of women in collegiate sport, coach influence in athlete leadership development, and the impact of team roles on leadership development is discussed in support of the need for continued research on the topic of leadership development in collegiate sport.

Value of Collegiate Sport

Substantial funding in addition to strategic marketing efforts of collegiate sport may lead the public to assume there are strong leadership outcomes associated with college sport participation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). With both the colleges and college athletes investing in sport in various ways, it is critical that both the institution and athlete receive outcomes equivalent to the investment. The value of collegiate sport should not be underestimated, with athletic departments receiving millions of dollars in revenue and investing significantly into direct athlete aid, coach compensation, and facility development and enhancement (Berkowitz, 2012; Desrochers, 2013; NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2014). Collegiate sport also provides tremendous nonfinancial benefits to universities, some of which result in financial benefits, such as name recognition and institutional prominence (Denhart et al., 2009; Desrochers, 2013; Fort &

Winfree, 2013). Additionally, collegiate sport hugely impacts the athletes themselves while enrolled in college and after college (Voight, 2012).

Collegiate Financial and Nonfinancial Considerations

In 2010, Division I athletic programs were a $6 billion enterprise, with costs continuing to rise due to increased tuition costs and decreased state support (Desrochers, 2013; Desrochers & Kirshstein, 2012). From 2010 to 2015, median Division I athletic programs saw an increase in revenues of 110%, yet expenses rose by 129% (Fulks, 2016). Colleges typically spend three to six times as much educating student-athletes compared to their nonathlete peers (Desrochers, 2013). Division I and II colleges provide over $2.7 billion in athletic scholarships on an annual basis (NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2014). In Division I NCAA athletics, 53% of students receive some level of athletic aid, while 56% of Division II NCAA athletes receive some level of athletic aid. Although Division III athletes are not eligible for financial aid, 75% of athletes receive some form of academic grant or need-based scholarship, totaling $13,5000 on average (NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2014). Even with this information, conflicting information is available in terms of athletic cost data (Brady et al., 2015; Lipford & Slice, 2017; O'Shaughnessy, 2010; Wolverton et al., 2015). Inconsistencies are evident in what costs are measured and how these costs are calculated. Capital costs and debt service costs are often omitted, and the accounting of athletic scholarships or grants-in-aid is uncertain (Zimbalist, 2010). Although collegiate sports are big business, receiving most of their financial support from ticket sales, donors, and television contacts, athletic programs are not yet self-sufficient. The nature of collegiate athletics is a "winner take all" approach, in which only the top echelon of athletic departments reaps nonfinancial and financial rewards (Frank, 2004). In these cases, the benefits may dwindle with poor athletic performance (Zimbalist, 2010). Division I colleges are more likely to see these rewards, but there are little nonfinancial benefits and potential financial loses for Division II and III universities (Orszag & Orszag, 2005; Tomasini, 2005). For example, in 2012, the NCAA made a profit of $860 million and athletic conferences made $180 million from the 2012 football bowl games, with no athletic conference losing money (Berkowitz, 2012; Mandel, 2013).

The college athletic departments were left to absorb over $21 million of unsold tickets for these bowl games (Schrotenboer, 2012). In 2012, only 2.1% of intercollegiate athletic programs, all Divisions included, ended their fiscal year in the black (Brown, 2012; NCAA, 2012). When evaluating only Division I schools, in 2014, less than 10% of programs generated revenues in excess of costs, leaving athletic departments reliant on institutional support to fill the gaps (Brady et al., 2015; Lipford & Slice, 2017; Wolverton et al., 2015).

In addition to revenues, colleges receive institutional nonfinancial benefits from collegiate sports, although some of these benefits in the long-term remain in question as well (Desrochers, 2013; Fort & Winfree, 2013; McCormick & Tinsley, 1987; Pope & Pope, 2009). Collegiate sport provides name recognition, institutional prominence, and campus spirit for colleges (Pope & Pope, 2009). Success in collegiate sport and membership in a power conference also increases, even if briefly, applications, enrollment, and donations (Denhart et al., 2009; Desrochers, 2013; Frank, 2004; Kelly & Dixon, 2011; Pope & Pope, 2009; Stinson et al., 2012). College athletics has also been shown to increase graduation rates and alumni loyalty (Kelly & Dixon, 2011; Stinson et al., 2012). In accordance with the NCAA Constitution, Article 1.3.1, and its purpose to "maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program" (Division I Manual, 2021, p. 1), college athletics has been shown to develop teamwork, discipline, leadership, and character for participants (Denhart et al., 2009; Kelly & Dixon, 2011). With athletics requiring such a large investment and the questionable financial benefits, it is critical to clarify the leadership development outcomes of collegiate athletics (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Weight et al., 2014; Wolverton, 2008).

Preparation for Future

Student athletes receive many benefits while actively participating in college athletics, but a gap in the literature still exists concerning how college athletics prepares the student for their future, specifically in terms of their leadership development (Extejt & Smith, 2009; Hardin, 2015; Wright & Côté, 2003). When examining the overall undergraduate experience, there is overwhelming agreement that the skills and knowledge received during an

undergraduate education significantly aid in individual success in the global economy (Hart Research Associates, 2018). The essential learning outcomes as identified by LEAP's National Leadership Council (The LEAP Vision for Learning, 2011) and reinforced by employer priorities include the following four areas: integrative learning, knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, and personal and social responsibility. During the hiring process, business executives place the greatest emphasis on teamwork skills, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning (Hart Research Associates, 2018). Specific skills and experiences have been identified to support leadership development for an athlete's future preparation. Researchers have found that executive function, the collective cognitive processes including problem-solving, planning, inhibition, and decision-making are positively correlated to participation in sport (Barker & Munakata, 2015; Jacobson & Matthaeus, 2014).

The undergraduate experience may produce these results, but research is mixed regarding how collegiate sport participation influences these results (Ewing et al., 2002; Extejt & Smith, 2009; Spreitzer, 1994). Collegiate sport advocates have argued that participation in organized athletic teams contributes to the competencies and values necessary to succeed in the workforce such as leadership skills, goal setting, teamwork dynamics, reception to feedback, and interpersonal skills (Astin, 1993; Danish et al., 1990; Dupuis et al., 2006; Ewing et al., 2002; Ryan, 1989). Athletes report increased planning, problem solving, and decision-making abilities compared to nonathletes, signifying a potential link between sport and skills needed for successful leaders (Jacobson & Matthaeus, 2014; Ramchandran et al., 2016). Others have argued, however, that there is little or no relationship between athletic team participation and leadership skill development (Danish et al., 1990; Fine, 1987; Greendorfer, 1992; Spreitzer, 1994). In response, Weaver and Simet (2015) recommended several options to strengthen a student's leadership ability, both in the present and for their future, including the following: encouraging social cultural conversations, fostering high-quality mentoring

relationships, using an advisor or academic coordinator appropriately, and involving athletic administrators and coaches.

As only 2% of college athletes pursue a professional sport career, student athletes need to receive the educational and leadership experiences to be successful in their future careers (NCAA Recruiting Facts, 2014). Institutional barriers, such as available offerings or scheduling conflicts, often prevent these college athletes from pursuing their ambitions, specifically as related to teaching, coaching, or careers in education (Brown et al., 2018). College athletes will be entering a competitive job market with over 2 million bachelor's degree graduates on an annual basis (Hanson, 2021). The transition out of athletics can be difficult, especially for athletes who have not been properly prepared. For this reason, career assistance programs for athletes launched in the United States in the 1980s and assist athletes as they transition out of athletics and into careers. These programs often focus on life-work planning skills, self and career exploration, and career implementation (Pope, 2011). Although career assistance programs serve a role in career development, a significant need for a formalized leadership development program still exists within collegiate sport.

Although researchers have indicated a correlation between sport participation and the skill development that may improve leadership, a greater focus on intentional, formal leadership development for collegiate athletes may enhance leadership skills (Weaver & Simet, 2015). Formal leadership development programs for student athletes may create a more meaningful relationship between the athlete and the college and ensure a smoother transition to a life after college athletics. With extreme time limitations for student athletes, it is important that universities prioritize learning and development outcomes in the most productive manner (Miller & Jones, 1981).

Leadership Development and Transformational Leadership

It is important to understand how leadership is defined, including its history and characteristics. Leadership has evolved over the years with a multitude of definitions, with over 65 different dimension classification systems (Fleishman et al., 1991). Although leadership has many definitions, it commonly refers to the

traits, qualities, and behaviors of a leader (Horner, 1997). Leadership has been and continues to be studied through many lenses and subsections such as leadership and culture, leadership development, leadership as cognition, leadership theory, organizational leadership and structure, and ethics of leadership (Chemers, 2000; Dickson et al., 2012; Hunt, 2004). The study of leadership has been through many evolutions, starting from the exploration trait perspective to a behavioral approach (Hershey & Blanchard, 1979). From this point, various leadership theories emerged including numerous theories relating to leadership styles such as servant leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and authentic leadership (Horner, 1997; House & Mitchell, 1974; Schein, 1985).

This study sought to understand the connection more deeply between leader development and participation in collegiate sport participation, with transformational leadership sitting at the forefront as a theoretical framework. Therefore, leadership, leadership development, and transformational leadership were the primary topics of the literature review.

Leadership Development

Leader and leadership development sit within the field of leadership theory and research. The concepts and research relating to leader and leadership development are relatively new, dating back to the late 1990s. Day (2001) defined leader development and leadership development accordingly: "Leader development focuses on developing individual leaders whereas leadership development focuses on a process of development that inherently involves multiple individuals" (p. 64). Currently, and perhaps due to the relatively immature nature of the research relating to leader and leadership development, the concepts are rather complex.

The leadership development field has primarily focused on the set of the skills necessary for superior leadership. These skills can be grouped into larger categories to include strategic skills, interpersonal skills, cognitive abilities, and business skills (Mumford et al., 2007). Although these skills are necessary for leadership, this approach to leadership development is too functional, not necessarily describing the process of leadership development (Day, 2011; Mabey, 2013). An individual cannot be provided their identified missing skills with the

expectation that leadership competencies develop (Hibbert et al., 2017). With this in mind, a holistic approach to leadership development—also known as *leadership formation* within this specific field of research—is noteworthy of exploration (Grondin, 2011; Hibbert et al., 2017).

Leadership development is fundamentally multilevel and longitudinal, consisting of intrapersonal and interpersonal content issues along with process issues (Day et al., 2014). Intrapersonal content issues include concepts such as experience and learning, skills, personality, and self-development. According to empirical research on leadership development, the amount of time serving as a leader cannot be a sole indicator of leader performance (Bettin & Kennedy, 1990). In a study of U.S. Army Captains, Bettin and Kennedy (1990) found that experience was a significant predictor of leadership development while time in service was unrelated to leadership performance. In an essence, an individual may acquire more experience in a smaller amount of time compared to their peers. This differentiation may be attributed to happenstance, the possibility that an individual was placed in more situations to acquire experience at a faster rate, and/or the likelihood that an individual may learn more quickly as compared to their peers. Time and experience are not mutually exclusive (Bettin & Kennedy, 1990; Zacharatos et al., 2000).

Skills and skill development have also been linked to leadership development. Researchers have noted that acquiring certain skills at specific points in time may be more beneficial for leader development. For example, Mumford et al. (2007) conducted a study of U.S. military samples in which they found that technical training and skills were needed to move from junior to midlevel positions and problem-solving skills were needed to move from midlevel to senior positions. Marshall-Mies et al. (2000) reaffirmed this concept with their research relating to the needed cognitive and metacognitive skills for senior-level leaders. Personality traits have also been proven to be effective leadership predictors (Mumford et al., 2007). Self-development is offered as a predictor of leadership development; however, limited research has been conducted to validate this theory. Validated through research, and Reichard and Johnson (2011) proposed a relationship

between individuals who possess a desire to develop themselves and the strength of their leadership development. Social mechanisms and authentic leadership are identified interpersonal issues. Social mechanisms describe the role of relationships and social capital, including the influence of gender and race relations, on leadership development (Day, 2001). Authentic leadership has been connected to leadership development as it is built on the notion of trusting and genuine relationships that may be impacted by interventions such as training (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Positive modeling is a key means by which leaders influence their followers, and thus the followers develop their own leadership (Ilies et al., 2011).

Process issues are also a consideration in the formation of leader and leadership development. According to Day et al., (2014), "Process issues are those that shape the rate or pattern of development over time" (p. 70). Feedback is a type of process that organizations often utilize to facilitate leadership development. Several scholars have suggested the use of 360-degree feedback, feedback that is often given from multiple perspectives, including their own perspective, and including feedback from colleagues, subordinates, supervisors, and external stakeholders (Day et al., 2014). Individuals who rated themselves similarly to how others rated them were found to be more effective leaders (Fleenor et al., 1996). Researchers have also suggested that leadership development occurs when individuals write their own self-narrative, regularly revising their life stories, providing the opportunity for self-reflection, and self-concept clarity (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). As noted above, various factors influence leader and leadership development, some of which are relatively new concepts with much more to explore. The multilevel and longitudinal nature of leader and leadership development creates a challenge to comprehensively understand the process. Life experiences, personality, and training opportunities are all factors that contribute to leadership development (Day et al., 2014).

Hibbert et al. (2017) added to the body of leadership development research, identifying three elements of the leadership development process: experience of interpretation, dialogue, and interpretation of experience. The experience of interpretation is a life-long process, accumulating experience both reflectively as

lived but also evaluating experiences from one's history and traditions. Effective dialogue occurs within caring communities with the understanding that continual reevaluation is welcomed and encouraged (Hibbert et al., 2017). Interpreting our experience, "challenges us to think again, to recognize that we have been captivated by something we do not quite understand, that helps us to see our limitations and to seek to transcend them through conversation" (Hibbert et al., 2017, p. 612). As the current researcher sought to better understand the possible connection between collegiate sport participation and leadership development, through the lens of transformational leadership sitting at the forefront as a potential linking leadership theory, transformational leadership is reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theory was originally developed by Burns (1978) as the concept that leaders and followers assist each other in advancing to a higher level of morale and motivation. Transformational leaders work towards the benefit of their subordinates, overall team, organization, and community by inspiring and motivating. Bass (1985, 1990) expanded on Burns's original concept by specifying that transformational leaders operate outside of their self-interests and enhance their own employees' interests by generating inspiration towards their purpose and how it correlates to the overall mission of the team. Transformational leaders have a transforming or elevating impact on their followers (Newland et al., 2015). Judge and Piccolo (2004) noted, "Transformational leaders offer a purpose that transcends short-term goals and focuses on higher order intrinsic needs" (p. 755). Transformational and transactional leadership were developed simultaneously with the belief that leaders were either transformational or transactional leaders, but not both (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership was defined by Burns (1978) as the exchange relationship between leader and followers aimed at satisfying their own self-interests. Leaders exchange promises or rewards to followers for meeting agreed-upon objectives and goals (Bass, 2008; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). The three dimensions of transactional leadership include contingent rewards, management by exception-active, and management by exception-passive (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

As transformational leadership theory evolved, four primary behaviors of transformational leadership were developed including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Avolio et al., 1991). Idealized influence details the leader's ability to use their charismatic influence to become role models who are admired and trusted by their followers. Through this influence, followers buy into a shared vision with the leader. Intellectual stimulation also describes the type of work encouraging their followers to be creative, think outside the box, and take manageable risks (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Transformational leaders also provide individualized consideration for their followers, supporting followers how they need to be specifically supported. The focus on this leadership is always supportive, with the aim on meeting the needs of the individual before organization (Avolio et al., 1991).

In addition to the primary behaviors originally conceptualized by Bass (1985), others have conceptualized transformational leadership in various ways. Podsakoff et al. (1990) identified six transformational factors: articulating a vision, providing an appropriate role model, fostering acceptance of group goals, high performance expectations, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Rafferty and Griffin (2004) proposed five factors of transformational leadership: vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership, and personal recognition. Transformational leadership continues to be a well-studied theory within the leadership field with limited research being conducted relating to sport research.

Transformational Leadership and Sport Research. The bulk of transformational leadership research has been concentrated in the organizational setting and while there are similarities in the environment, many differences exist when comparing the organizational and sport settings (Arthur et al., 2017). Most of the transformational leadership research in sport has centered on the effects of transformational behaviors on followers, specifically coach leadership on players and captain leadership on teammates. Additionally, most empirical researchers have focused on young athletes, as gaining access to higher level athletes, such as

collegiate and professional levels, is more difficult and to the author's knowledge, only limited qualitative studies exist for this population (Arthur et al., 2017; A. B. Smith et al., 2016). Empirical researchers have modelled coaches' or peers' transformational leadership as a positive predictor on athletes' performance, aggression behaviors, organizational citizenship behaviors, satisfaction, and cohesion (Callow et al., 2009; Charbonneau et al., 2001; Cronin et al., 2015; Kao & Tsai, 2016; Lee et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2013; Tucker et al., 2010; Zacharatos et al., 2000). Empirical research has mostly utilized the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X; Bass & Avolio, 2000) and the Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory (Callow et al., 2009). Bass (1985) created a self-report measure of transformational leadership, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The MLQ has been constantly refined and is now the most widely used measure of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The MLQ model includes charismatic leadership, individual consideration, intellectual consideration, contingent reward, and management-by-exception (Bass, 1985). Transformational Leadership Inventory (TLI; Podsakoff et al., 1990) is another widely used measure of transformational leadership. The TLI (Podsakoff et al., 1990) measures six behaviors: identifying and articulating a vision, providing an appropriate model, fostering the acceptance of group goals, high performance expectations, providing individualized support, and intellectual stimulation. Within sport contexts, two transformational leadership measurements exist including the Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory (Callow et al., 2009) and the DTLI for youth sports (Vella et al., 2012). The DTLI (Callow et al., 2009) measures six transformational leadership behaviors and one transactional leadership behavior: individual consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, fostering acceptance of group goals and teamwork, high performance expectations, appropriate role model, and contingent reward (Callow et al., 2009). The two measures were created using items from the MLQ (Bass, 1985) and the TLI (Podsakoff et al., 1990), measures which originated in the corporate realm (Newland et al., 2015).

Effective transformational leadership increases motivation for the group, or team in this instance, and provides tools for the team members to become leaders themselves (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). Transformational leadership is linked to increased motivation, trust, effort, satisfaction, and effectiveness of leaders in sport and business (Newland et al., 2015; Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014). As transformational leaders utilize a variety of leadership behaviors and are thought to be highly effective, especially within uncertain conditions, this leadership style makes for a compelling focus for this study (Bass, 1998; Gomes, 2014). Sport leadership research has been primarily focused on the influence of coaches and their leadership. Sport leadership research continues to grow, however, and has minimally expanded to focus on demographics and team roles in sport. Even as the body of research on sport leadership continues to grow, large gaps in the literature remain, mostly focused on demographics in sport, team roles beyond the formal roles, and how and why leadership develops as a result of collegiate sport participation (Ewing et al., 2002; Extejt & Smith, 2009; Spreitzer, 1994).

Informal Leadership Development Through Collegiate Sport Participation

Due to the extensive investment in collegiate athletics, it is necessary to evaluate what type of leadership development college athletes experience as a part of their sport participation. The following sections provide an overview of how athletes develop as part of their sport participation and suggest how leadership development through sport may be strengthened by instituting formal leadership development practices, all according to the research.

Various scholars have noted that involvement in student clubs or organizations, such as sport, does strengthen personal development and leadership characteristics (Astin, 1993; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Kuh & Schuh, 1991). Sport has proven to be an ideal venue for leadership development due to the dynamic nature of sport competition, dependence on positive social interactions, and overall structure of a team (Kerwin & Bopp, 2013). Intercollegiate athletics is defined as an organizational setting as it has its own social and cultural context (Pascarella & Smart, 1991). Involvement in this context promotes identity development, self-esteem, autonomy, interpersonal skills, communication skills, and leadership

abilities for student athletes (Astin, 1993; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Kuh & Schuh, 1991). Athletes report higher levels of leadership compared to nonathletes (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999; Ryan, 1989). Ryan cited that athletic involvement is positively associated with overall satisfaction with the college experience and motivation to earn a degree. Coaches agree with the importance of leadership to their team's success (Todd & Kent, 2004; Weaver & Simet, 2015). Although examinations of leadership roles many times have been focused on coaches, a need exists for peer leaders as they perform functions within the team that are more applicably demonstrated by teammates (Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980; Hirt et al., 1983). As Weaver and Simet (2015) noted,

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

Limited research is available regarding leadership and leadership development in sport with most relevant research measured through the lens of leadership skills and not necessarily the process of leadership development (Day et al., 2014; Hibbert et al., 2017). Simply gaining skills associated with leadership does not constitute being a leader (Hibbert et al., 2017). There is much to learn and understand relating to how leadership development occurs and the type of leader that student athletes may become as part of their sport involvement.

With the time and energy college athletes invest in their sport, the role of colleges in the development of leaders is vital to the success of student athletes (Crow et al., 2012; Posner & Brodsky, 1992). College athletes primarily focus on their sport while enrolled in college, with research indicating that most athletes spend more than the permitted 20 hours a week in athletic practice, over 38.5 hours a week in athletic-associated activities, and that 94% of athletes report foregoing a class due to practice or travel constraints (Marx et al., 2008; NCAA, 2011). College athletes often have the title of "leader" bestowed upon them, primarily because of their athletic abilities. These "leaders" are held to a high standard, both on and off

the field, with pressure to perform within their sport and in the classroom

(Provencio, 2016). With such high pressure to be leaders on their team and within

the university and the greater community, it is vital that student athletes receive

formalized leadership development training while enrolled in college. Although

few individuals will argue with the importance of leadership for personal and

organizational effectiveness and the NCAA may tout leadership development in

their marketing approaches, most colleges do not provide formalized leadership

outcomes, much less leadership programs, for their student athletes (NCAA, 2020b;

Posner & Brodsky, 1992; Voight, 2012); however, almost every college has an

established leadership education program for students (Hirschhorn, 2002). The

establishment of student leadership education programs assumes that institutional

leaders believe in the value of the leadership development process, so the question

remains, "Why do colleges not prioritize specific leadership development programs

for their student-athletes?" Several recognizable challenges exist for administering

a formalized leadership program for collegiate athletes, such as busy schedules,

limited resources, or departmental buy-in (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1998; Fransen et

al., 2014). Weaver and Simet (2015) agreed with the importance of student-athlete

leadership development:

> Leadership programs designed for traditional students are likely to be
> ineffective for a typical student-athlete because of the student-athletes' lack
> of attendance. Thus, it is important to develop experiential learning
> opportunities that focus on leadership development while the athlete is
> participating in their sport. (p. 54)

Despite the challenges of incorporating specific athlete leadership development

programs into the already busy schedule of student athletes, it is a vital component

to assisting in athlete and team success (Miller & Jones, 1981).

Formal Leadership Development Programs for Student Athletes

Although the NCAA uplifts the concept of leadership and leadership

development within collegiate sport, a formalized leadership model is notably

absent. To the best of the current researcher's knowledge, no model exists that

describes leadership development within sport, despite references to the

phenomenon of sport and leadership (Fransen et al., 2014). This sort of research does exist for the generalized student population but is notable absent for the collegiate athlete subpopulation, a subpopulation nearly half-a-million strong every year (Barnes, 2015; McDowell et al., 2018). According to the NCAA (2020b) website, its leadership development program seeks to

> Provide education and training for college athletes, coaches, and administrators to assist with the transition to life after college sports, to foster the growth of the next generation of leaders and to encourage athletics administrators to translate lessons learned through competition. (para. 1)

As a formalized NCAA leadership model, framework, or roadmap is not available to college administrators, few colleges have facilitated their own student-athlete leadership development programs (Voight, 2012). The University of North Carolina was the first college to implement a student-athlete leadership development program in 2004, the Richard A. Baddour Carolina Leadership Academy, by contracting with a commercial leadership development company. According to their website, "the *Richard A. Baddour* Carolina Leadership Academy develops, challenges and supports student-athletes, coaches and staff in their continual quest to become world class leaders in athletics, academics and life" (Leadership Academy, 2018, para. 1.). The Academy includes five progressive levels of leadership programming and an annual summit for student athletes. It also includes various levels of leadership programs and certifications for staff, including a mentoring program and a program solely for women athletic leaders (Leadership Academy, 2018). Although there are many concerns about outsourcing leadership development, other Division I colleges have adopted this model. Contracting outside companies for leadership development is costly and often comes as a standardized approach, disconnected from the university philosophies, culture, or vision (Goldsmith et al., 2004; Goleman et al., 2002; Myatt, 2013). With mixed reviews of contracted leadership development programs, many universities have opted to utilize their own approach, insourcing staff and leaders for their program. For the most part, these responsibilities are being absorbed into staff's current

position; however, some universities have hired director-level positions overseeing leadership development, a relatively new job position (Voight, 2012).

Voight and Hickey (2016) examined 62 athlete leadership development programs within Division I colleges, with varying approaches to leadership development including monthly workshops, programs for different college years, classes exclusively for team captains, and comprehensive leadership processes such as courses, mentoring, and service learning. The 62 student-athlete leadership development programs compiled by Voight and Hickey (2016) represent 25% of available athletic departments, meaning that 75% of student-athletes do not receive focused leadership development experiences. Without standard outcomes measurements, the quality and credibility of these limited collegiate athlete leadership programs is unknown. For example, the student-athlete leadership program at Arkansas State strives for academic excellence, athletic success, and building community ambassadors. Arkansas State details seven groupings of leadership offerings: strength of the pack (physical health), running into the future (job preparation), lessons for the pack (team captain focused), leading the pack (university leadership), strengthening the Red Wolf (transitioning from college), Red Wolves basics (life skill foundations), and Red Wolves community (Leadership Red Wolves, 2021). Lafayette College takes a slightly different approach to student-athlete leadership development. The Lafayette Oaks Leadership Academy seeks to "develop, challenge, and support Lafayette student-athletes and coaches in their quest to become effective leaders in academics, athletics and life" (Oaks Leadership Academy, 2021, para. 2). Lafayette College partners with an outside firm to provide interactive workshops, 360-degree feedback, individualized coaching, peer mentoring, online training, and educational resources (Oaks Leadership Academy, 2021).

Women in Sport Leadership

The current researcher sought to answer five research questions directly related to the perceptions of former female collegiate athletes. For this reason, it is vital to understand the role of women in sport leadership. The researcher also

examined previous studies centering on how women experience leadership development through sport participation.

The number of women working in intercollegiate athletics continues to rise, with over 14,000 women employed in 2014 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Women hold appropriately 35% of administrative roles and 25% of head coaching positions within the collegiate environment (Irick, 2011). Additionally, the number of women in graduate assistant or intern roles continues to dramatically increase, rising over 400% from 1996 to 2010 (Irick, 2011). To ensure representation and equality within collegiate athletics, the Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) position was created in 2001 by the NCAA. This position is assigned to the highest-ranking woman in the college's athletic department and within the conference offices as well. Women must also be represented, as notated by the guidelines of each collegiate division, in the NCAA governance structure (Yiamouyiannis & Osborne, 2012).

The role of women in collegiate sport leadership continues to grow, yet little is known regarding how women experience leadership development as a part of their sport participation. Researchers have proven that women experience leadership development differently compared to their male counterparts (Ely et al., 2012; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2010). Specific leadership courses for women and other leadership opportunities, such as mentoring and coaching, may be beneficial to develop a diverse workforce (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2010). This same concept applies with the collegiate sport arena, although little is known about how female athletes make meaning of their acquired leadership concepts outside of the team experience and within other personal and professional domains (Fuller et al., 2018).

Limited studies have been focused on female collegiate athletes relating to the leadership development as credited by their sport participation (Fuller et al., 2018; Newland et al., 2015). Galante and Ward (2017) conducted a quantitative research study with 635 collegiate women, 32.9% of whom identified as Division I collegiate athletes. Using both the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Posner & Kouzes, 1988) and the Rosenburg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenburg, 1965), results revealed significantly higher scores for female collegiate athletics compared to

nonathlete collegiate females in the following three categories: global self-esteem, model the way (setting an example of excellence), and encourage the heart (recognizing contributions).

Fuller et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative research study with 295 female collegiate athletes who attended a co-ed leadership forum. The sample represented athletes from Division I, II, and III and 19 different sports. Athletes were asked two questions: "In terms of your leadership abilities, what makes you unique to the world?" and "In the next 5 years, how do you plan to use your leadership abilities to positively affect society?" The results from the study indicated four themes: desire to be change agents, a commitment to success, the ability to lead by example, and capacity to self-reflect. The results offered a counter-narrative to the often-noted perspective of women in sport leadership regarding self-limiting behaviors such as lower self-efficacy (Burton, 2015; Fuller et al., 2018).

Newland et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study of 11 female athletes, aged 18–22 years old with questions "that enabled inquiry into the presence of specific transformational behaviors of current and former coaches and how the athlete experienced those behaviors" (p. 6). Female athletes were chosen as participants in this research due to their preferred participative style of coaching (Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985). Four major themes emerged on how female athletes perceived their coaches: caring, motivating, teaching life lessons, and trusting. These themes were then compared to the four concepts of transformational leadership: individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985; Newland et al., 2015). Table 1 notates how the identified themes from the research correlate to the concepts of transformational leadership. Intellectual stimulation did not appear consistently in the themes, although it was alluded to through some practical examples (Newland et al., 2015).

Table 1

Themes of Research Compared to Transformational Leadership Concepts

Themes of Research	Transformational Leadership Concepts
Caring	Individualized consideration
Motivation	Inspirational motivation
Trusting	Idealized influence
Teaching life lesson	Idealized influence

Note. This table refers to the themes of research comparative to the transformational leadership concepts adapted by Chelladurai and Arnott (1985). This researcher sought to understand the connection between leadership development and collegiate sport participation in female collegiate athletes. As the researcher sought to provide a solid background of research material, significant gaps in the current body of knowledge were identified relating to leadership development and collegiate sport participation (Fuller et al., 2018; Newland et al., 2015).

Coach Influence in Athlete Leadership Development

The current researcher sought to better understand how leaders develop as a result of collegiate athletic participation. Coaches serve as prominent role models in the lives of their young athletes, including influencing their leadership development (Hamilton & LaVoi, 2018). McGuire (1992) noted, "The quality of an athlete's experience can never exceed the quality of the leadership providing it" (p. 12). Numerous studies articulate the value of coaches on athlete performance, attitudes, and performance. Coaches who provide social support and a more democratic style produce more satisfied athletes (Horn et al., 2011; Sullivan & Kent, 2003; Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986). A coach's social support behavior influences athlete satisfaction with teammates, sport-related work, and school itself (Weiss & Friedrichs, 1986). Additionally, few scholars have found that preferred coach behavior is dependent on specific athlete characteristics, including the notion that gender may influence preferred coaching behaviors (Chelladurai & Carron, 1983; Riemer & Toon, 2001; Sherman et al., 2000).

At the core of transformational leadership is the idea that a leader has a transforming, or elevating, impact on their followers (Newland et al., 2015). Coaches should be effective in many ways that a transformational leader should be effective (Gomes, 2014). Coaches who demonstrate transformational leadership may enhance the quality of their athletes' sporting experiences (Gould et al., 2007). There is evidence suggesting that coach transformational behaviors are linked to greater athlete intrinsic motivation, increased athlete effort, and team task and social cohesion (Callow et al., 2009; Charbonneau et al., 2001; Kao & Tsai, 2016; Price & Weiss, 2011; Rowold, 2006).

> The practices of many successful coaches echo the characteristics of the transformational model. While success in this model may include more wins than losses, it is best described as a positive experience for both player and coach, where lessons of life are learned and future leaders are groomed…The benefits of the transformational leadership model are undeniable. It is the one style of leadership that results in unparalleled performance as well as the edification of both coaches and athletes. (Armstrong, 2001, p. 2)

Both empirical and qualitative studies have confirmed the effects of transformational coaches on their athletes. Rowold (2006) tested transactional and transformational leadership effectiveness in a study of martial arts students using the MLQ-5X (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Their results indicated that while transactional leadership was significantly correlated to leader effectiveness, transformational leadership accounted for additional variance in leader effectiveness. Gomes et al. (2017) used the Multidimensional Scale of Leadership (Chelladurai et al., 1998) to evaluate coach leadership styles among swimming and handball athletes. Thir results revealed that two transformational components predicated athlete leadership satisfaction.

Additionally, multiple studies have analyzed transformational leadership characteristics of coaches and athlete efficacy, noting greater athlete intrinsic motivation from coaches displaying transformational leadership attributes (Arthur et al., 2011; Charbonneau et al., 2001; Gomes, 2014). In a qualitative study of five

expert Canadian female university coaches, Vallée and Bloom (2005) noted four characteristics of coaches that paralleled transformational leader attributes: coaches' individual attributes and how these influenced their leadership behaviors, coaches' personal desire to foster individual player growth, organizational skills of the coach, and the coach's vision with athlete buy-in. In a qualitative study, Newland et al. (2015) explored the impact of positive coach experiences from the perspective of the player. The themes revealed a close comparison to the characteristics of transformational leadership.

Most research has centered around immediate coach influence and leadership style on athlete behavior and performance. To the current researcher's knowledge, research has not been conducted to fully understand how coach influence impacts an athlete's leadership style after their participation in collegiate sport is complete. Transformational leaders have not been shown to produce other transformational leaders in the way servant leaders develop other servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1970). It cannot be assumed that a coach displaying transformational leadership will result in their athlete also displaying transformational leadership; however, consistent research has been conducted to understand how transformational leadership can be taught. Armstrong (2001) noted that athletes are less likely to display inappropriate behaviors if their coaches exhibit exemplary behavior. Within the business context, in rigorous and nonrigorous training designs, significant changes in transformational leadership were found as a result of the training (Barling et al., 1996; Kelloway & Barling, 2000; Kelloway et al., 2000). To the current researcher's knowledge, an investigation has not been conducted to understand the impact of training on transformational leadership in the sport context.

Team Roles and Leadership Development in Collegiate Sport

Through this study, the researcher sought to better understand how leadership develops as part of collegiate athletic participation. As this study evaluated team sport, the examination of team roles are a necessary component of the sport and the research analysis. Athletics provides the opportunity for athletes to occupy both formal and informal team roles. The type and number of these

formal and informal roles on a sport team offers different leadership opportunities comparative to other co-curricular group activities (Duguay et al., 2016). Ideally, a team roster should be composed of 85% team leaders, with 19% occupying a formal team role and 66% occupying informal team roles (Crozier et al., 2013). Teammates are instrumental in the formation and advancement of cognitive, social, and leadership development (Agans et al., 2018). Team leaders, both formal and informal, influence team structure, team member attributes, team confidence, team outcomes, individual outcomes, and leadership behaviors (Cotterhill & Fransen, 2016; Crozier et al., 2013).

Team captains are appointed to a formal leadership role on the team by the coach, teammates, or a combination of the two (Loughead et al., 2006). Team captains influence their teammates behavior due to their legitimate power, the power given to individuals occupying certain roles (Lunenburg, 2012). Brgoch et al. (2018) explored the role of team captains from the viewpoint of coaches. Coaches described the role of team captains in five categories: technical (game tasks, coordination), ambassador, leadership (role model, motivator), team unity, and integrity. In a qualitative study, Dupuis et al. (2006) interviewed six former Canadian collegiate hockey team captains. Their results indicated that team captains engage in several leadership behaviors with emphasis on improving overall team performance. These specific tasks include mentoring teammates, organizing team activities, and serving as a role model and internal and external liaison.

Although much of sport leadership research has centered on the role of team captains, team captains are not the only leaders on the team (Fransen et al., 2014; Loughead & Hardy, 2005; Wheelan & Johnston, 1996). Informal athlete leaders influence the team through interactions with teammates (Brgoch et al., 2018). Informal athlete leaders influence their teammates using referent power, the power that develops as others like, admire, or respect an individual (Lunenburg, 2012). These informal leaders often act as cultural architects for the team (Cotterhill & Fransen, 2016). A recent study surveying 4,451 athletes in nine different sports found that only 1% of athletes indicated that their team captain was the best leader

in all four leadership roles including task, motivational, social, and external. Additionally, 44% of the teams indicated their team captain was not perceived as the best leader in any of the four categories (Fransen et al., 2014). In another study validating this finding, using the social network approach to leadership, the informal leaders were perceived as the best leader on the team (Fransen et al., 2015a). Fransen et al. found that informal leaders were perceived as the best leader when considering the motivational and social leadership role while the team captain was perceived to be the best in terms of task and external leadership responsibilities.

Holmes et al. (2010) studied 76 male and female athletes using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to better understand athlete desires for peer leaders. The Revised Leadership Scale for Sport (RLSS; Zhang et al., 1997) was utilized, replacing the word "coach" with "peer leader" along with two open-ended questions. Athletes identified specific desirable qualities for their peer leaders, both on and off the field. Athletes identified the need for peer leaders to be hardworking, set an example, maintain good interpersonal skills, understand the needs of their peers, and be able to offer support. Slight differences were found in male and female athletes, in that male athletes prioritized work ethic and performance, while female athletes prioritized encouragement, personality traits, and schoolwork.

Limited studies have observed the transformational impact of teammates by analyzing peer leadership, both in the context of formal and informal team roles. Callow et al. (2009) used the DTLI to assess leadership behaviors of their team captains in frisbee players in the United Kingdom. Transformational behaviors were found to predict task and social cohesion. Price and Weiss (2011) validated these findings in their study examining youth female soccer players; although, this study was expanded to encompass all team leaders, not specifically team captains. To the current researcher's knowledge, no scholars have directly connected team roles with transformational leadership development.

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to demonstrate the body of research that is currently available relating to the purposed study examining the role of collegiate team sport participation in the development of leadership among former female athletes. The following sections were explored as part of the literature review: the value of collegiate sport, leadership development theory and transformational leadership, women in sport leadership, coach influence in athlete leadership development, team roles and leadership development in collegiate sport. It is evident from the literature reviewed that leadership development within the context of collegiate sport remains a relatively untapped research topic (Loughead, 2017). Further research is needed to understand the impact of collegiate sport participation on former female collegiate athletes.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how collegiate sport participation influences female athlete leadership development and leadership style. There is a demonstrated need for this level of exploration as the popularity of collegiate sport continues to grow; yet significant gaps in the literature remain pertaining to how leadership is developed as a result of collegiate sport participation, specifically the leadership style that female athletes may develop (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999; Fisher et al., 2000; Fransen et al., 2014; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992; Voelker et al., 2011). In this qualitative study, the researcher examined this phenomenon by exploring the lived experiences of prior female collegiate student-athletes and their perceived leadership development and style as a result of collegiate sport participation. This chapter is a presentation of the findings of this research study.

Research Questions

The development of good research questions is the most important part of the research process. A research question should give shape and direction to the research study and challenge researchers to view matters from a new perspective (Agee, 2008; Lipowski, 2008). According to Lipowski (2008), a "research question is a narrow, challenging question addressing an issue, problem, or controversy that is answered with a conclusion based on the analysis and interpretation of evidence (p. 1667). The current researcher sought to answer the following research questions, according to the perceptions of females who previously participated in collegiate sport:

1. How do female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through sport participation?

2. What is the role of collegiate sport participation in the development of adult leadership styles?

3. How does the role of the coach influence the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style?

4. How do team roles, both informal and formal, influence the female
   collegiate experience and their leadership development?

5. In what ways, if at all, do female college athletes demonstrate
   transformational leadership as adults?

Research Design

The selection of a research design is informed by considering factors such
as the nature of the problem or question to be explored, the researcher's association
to the question or problem, and the intended audience for the research study
(Creswell, 2003). The answers to these questions led to the selection of utilizing a
qualitative research approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018),
"Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning
individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 3). Qualitative
research methods often focus on individual meaning, understanding, and reporting
the complexity of a scenario (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative investigators
view the world as subjective, rather than objective, assuming there are many
different types of reality that are dependent on individual perspectives (Creswell &
Poth, 2018; Pascale, 2012). Research is often drawn from emerging questions, such
as one-on-one interviews or focus groups, observations in the participants' setting,
and studying written or transcribed reports. Research data are transcribed from
specific to general themes, with the researcher ultimately producing interpretations
of the meaning of the data. In qualitative research, environment and sociocultural
context affects the research with the researcher becoming part of the research
process as he/she is interacting with the study (Pascale, 2012).

Creswell (1998) identified four types of qualitative research methods:
biography, grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenology. Phenomenology
identifies what is inherent and unchanging in the meaning of the item or idea under
study. A phenomenological study seeks to find common meaning of what and how
participants experienced a concept or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018;
Moustakas, 1994). The data interpretation includes some form of the researcher's
own experiences, which should be recognized during the onset of data collection
(Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher is engaged within the

research process, the interpretative legitimacy of the researcher is critical as they utilize their "intuition, imagination and universal structures to obtain a picture" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). This research study provided an opportunity for former female collegiate athletes to share their lived experiences and perceptions relating to athletic participation and leadership development which can be most effectively understood through phenomenological research. This study was not a pure phenomenological study, as the researcher did not focus on one shared experience. Rather, the shared phenomenon was the cumulative summary of several former collegiate athlete experiences at multiple institutions.

Bracketing

The goal of phenomenological research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the research participants, finding a common meaning of what and how participants experienced a concept or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Munhall, 2007). As the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the researcher should participate in the practice of bracketing. Bracketing is the process of deliberately putting aside one's own beliefs and knowledge about the phenomenon under study. A researcher that can successfully put aside their own beliefs and knowledge will limit their own influence on the research participant and research process (Carpenter, 2007).

The findings of a phenomenological research study are mediated through a human instrument. As humans cannot be totally objective, it is vital for the researcher to be aware of their own values, interests, and beliefs prior throughout the research process (Crotty, 1996; Parahoo, 2006). Bracketing should begin with reflexivity, a "key thinking activity that helps us identify the potential influence throughout the research process" (Chan et al., 2013, p. 3). A reflexive diary may be helpful to better understand and examine the preconceived values and beliefs of the researcher. The reflexive diary allows the values, interests, and beliefs of the researcher to be brought into consciousness, providing an opportunity for the researcher to reexamine positions that may influence the research process (Chan et al., 2013; Primeau, 2003; Wall et al., 2004). During the interview process, bracketing can be achieved by utilizing a semistructured interview process. A

semistructured interview requires a set of predetermined open-ended questions, but also allows for probing as interesting interests or concerns are shared by the research participants (Morse & Richards, 2002). As the researcher actively listens and asks appropriate probing questions, the curiosity of the researcher is maintained, allowing the participants to freely express themselves (Chan et al., 2013). The research study followed the bracketing methodology, to include maintaining a reflexive journal and conducting semistructured interviews.

Participants and Sampling

The participants in this study consisted of former female collegiate athletes who played collegiate-level rugby at various institutions across the United States within the past 3 years. Participation was open to all former collegiate rugby athletes, regardless of collegiate athletic division. In order to secure 12 research participants for the study, the researcher worked with a contracted consultant of a national rugby training organization. The contracted consultant has been serving the organization since 2014 and is a former rugby player and current executive coach and performance specialist. To recruit participants, the researcher also reached out to qualifying participants through various rugby Facebook groups; Women's & Girls Rugby League, Rugby Womx's Mentorship Group, and Women's Rugby Network. Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify, recruit, and secure participants for this study. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to select participants that are associated with the phenomenon being studied (Palinkas et al., 2015). When utilizing purposeful sampling, research participants must meet specific eligibility criteria to participate in this study (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The eligibility criteria for prospective participants were as follows:

- Former female collegiate athletes playing collegiate-level rugby at various institutions across the United States within the past 3 years;
- Having participated in collegiate-level rugby for a minimum of 1 year; and
- Being actively employed, full-time or part-time.

The participants in this research study received information regarding informed consent (Appendix A). Additionally, at this time, participants verified that

they met the eligibility criteria. The following items were included in the informed consent:

- an overview of the purpose of the research;
- a description of how the research would be conducted;
- a clear statement that they acknowledged that they are participating in a research study;
- acknowledgement that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could remove themselves at any time;
- the potential risks and benefits of the study;
- compensation information;
- an overview of how their confidentiality and data would be protected; and
- the researcher's contact information for questions or concerns.

Research Setting

The interviews for this study were conducted via Zoom, a mainstream video conferencing software. Zoom provides researchers with a cost-effective and convenient alternative to in-person interviews. With research participants located throughout the United States, utilizing a video conferencing software is the most practical and affordable tool for qualitative methods (Gray et al., 2020). All interviews were scheduled individually and anticipated to last approximately 1 hour in length.

Data Collection

This study illuminated the lived experiences of collegiate athletes and their perceived leadership development. Semistructured interviews were utilized as they offer the best opportunity to capture the essence of the phenomenon, allowing probing questions as interesting ideas are shared by the research participants (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Semistructured interviews allow for more conversational flow, promoting the listening skills of the researcher, and encouraging openness from the participants (Chan et al., 2013).

As phenomenological researchers seek to find common meaning among the lived experiences of a central phenomenon, the current researcher incorporated the following qualitative research practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018):

- Semistructured interviews: 60-minute Zoom interviews that included the same set of interview questions, asked in the same order to create some consistency and connection, along with appropriate probing follow-up questions that arose during the interview process (see Appendix B).

- Reflexive journal writing: Reflexive journaling is a proven technique for "documenting experiences, values, bias, and the emotional state of the researcher" (Janesick, 2015, p. 1). Reflexive journaling began at the onset of the data collection process.

- Interview follow-up: As recommended by Saldaña and Omasta (2018), interviews continued until saturation was reached. Follow-up contact with participants took place as needed to clarify a response or ask additional questions based on emerging themes.

All interviews were audio- and video-recorded, and the researcher took notes during the interviews. Recording the interview allowed the researcher to focus on the responses of the participant and seek opportunities to ask probing questions as appropriate. All interviews were transcribed in a word-for-word format for analysis using Otter.ai.

Ethical Considerations

There were several ethical considerations that should be noted within the research process. First, all participants received an informed consent document explaining that their participation in the study was voluntary and confidential. All participants freely decided to participate without pressure or coercion. The informed consent also explained the benefits and risks of participation and notes that participants may withdraw from participation at any time. All audio recordings and written documents were kept on the researcher's personal computer. The researcher's personal computer was password-protected and stored in a locked house. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality

and any identifiable traces back to individual participant responses. As a student and researcher at the administering university, Southeastern University approved this project via the Institutional Review Board (Appendix D). As an ethical consideration, the researcher maintains a previous working relationship with the organizational contact at the national rugby training organization who is assisted to secure research participants. The researcher followed all institutional research best practices to avoid potential biases.

Positionality Statement

In research, it is important for the researcher to clearly identify their individual world view and the position adopted regarding the research topic at hand (Holmes, 2020; Rowe, 2014). Positionality influences what research is selected for investigation, how research is conducted, its outcomes, and results (Grix, 2019; Rowe, 2014). The current researcher is a White, formally educated woman from a middle-class, two-parent household currently functioning as a member of the middle class, serving in leadership at a not-for-profit organization. All of these factors impact the way in which the researcher understands the world around her, but also the way in which she engages in research and create space for others to participate in critical dialogue. She has moderate viewpoints related to political and social issues which may influence her personal views related to leadership development of collegiate athletes. She has participated in sport my entire life, either in playing them or cheering on those who do; however, she does not have formal collegiate sport participation experience. She is a seasoned leader in the not-for-profit space, leading in various roles for over 14 years. The researcher strongly values transformational leaders who lead with a servant heart, believing that every person has the potential to lead from wherever they are, but acknowledging that not all have the privilege of doing so, desire to do so, or have been given the skills to do so. The researcher has been intrigued by leadership development throughout my professional career and gained an interest in leadership development relating to student-athletes while pursuing a doctorate degree in organizational leadership at Southeastern University. Her experiences and interests certainly impact the lens through which she views leadership development and the collegiate athlete

experience. As mentioned in previous sections, specific strategies such as reflexive journaling and utilizing a semistructured interview process were employed throughout the research process to bracket potential biases that may have emerged throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Data Analysis

Although the intent of data analysis is rather simple, to make sense of text and image data, the process of analysis is rather complicated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data analysis consists of organizing the data, conducting an initial read-through of the transcripts, coding and organizing themes, developing and assessing interpretations, visualizing the data, and presenting an account of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once the interviews were completed, the data analysis process began.

For this study, the method of thematic analysis was utilized. Thematic analysis is a method of "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis is often attractive due to its flexibility, leading to a wider range of applications (Clarke & Braun, 2016). Thematic analysis underscores the themes which are most important within the phenomenon being studied. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 82). Thematic analysis can be applied to produce data-driven (inductive approach) or theory-driven (theoretical) analyses. The six stages of thematic analysis, each occurring separately or simultaneously, are as follows:

1. Familiarization with the data: The researcher listens, transcribes, reads, and re-reads the data from research process.
2. Coding: The researcher creates concise labels from phrases or sentences of the data text.
3. Generating themes: The researcher identifies patterns from the codes created in Step 2. Themes are often broader than codes with the possibility of several codes combining into one theme.

4. Reviewing themes: The themes are confirmed to reflect the stories from the data; if not, the researcher must rework the themes.

5. Defining and naming themes: A detailed analysis of each theme is generated, ensuring the title and description are succinct and informative.

6. Writing up: The thematic analysis findings are presented with evidence presented from the data. The write-up presents a credible and coherent story about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The research data were coded manually. The coding process began with open coding, the process of identifying themes from the raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Multiple coding passes were conducted as the interview transcripts were coded using the three methods of *in vivo*, values, and process (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). *In vivo* coding places emphasis on the actual spoken word of the participants. Values coding assesses the participant's integrated values, attitudes, and beliefs. Process coding reveals actions or processes by identifying words ending with "-ing" (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). All identified codes were typed in Microsoft Excel and sorted into relational categories, through the process known as axial coding. The relational categories were evaluated and compared, bundling together relational categories to create emerging categories. Using selective coding, emerging categories were compared to identify overarching themes and subthemes. Themes were generated to articulate the essence of the experience to understand how adult leaders perceive their leadership development and leadership style as a result of their collegiate sport participation.

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to explore how collegiate sport participation influenced female athlete leadership development. The current researcher examined this phenomenon by exploring the lived experiences of prior female collegiate student-athletes and their perceived leadership development and style as a result of collegiate sport participation. This chapter included an in-depth account of the qualitative nature of this study, detailing why a phenomenological approach using thematic analysis was utilized. In the following chapters, detailed information on the research participants and the findings from this study are

presented. The dissertation concludes with conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research and practice based on the findings.

Chapter 4 – Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how collegiate team sports participation influences adult leadership styles in former female athletes. Although the NCAA promotes leadership development in collegiate sports participation, prior research is inconclusive regarding how collegiate sports participation contributes to leadership development and styles (Fransen et al., 2014). With no formalized leadership development model in place within the NCAA and the continued substantial investment in collegiate sports, it was necessary to better understand the influence of collegiate sports on leadership development (Voight & Hickey, 2016).

Data Collection

A phenomenological research design was employed to examine how women's collegiate rugby sport participation influenced leadership development and styles for former female athletes. The study was guided by five research questions and 11 interview questions. After research approval was given by the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board, the participant recruitment process began. A consultant for a national rugby development organization assisted in the recruitment process, utilizing her contacts to recruit former collegiate rugby athletes. A total of six participants were identified with her assistance. To reach data saturation, another six participants were recruited by connecting with former female collegiate athletes within Facebook rugby groups. The following rugby groups were utilized for recruiting purposes: Women's & Girls Rugby League, Rugby Womx's Mentorship Group, and Women's Rugby Network. In total, 12 participants contributed to the research. The research participants included 12 women, all former collegiate rugby athletes, no more than 3 years removed from their collegiate sport participation. All research participants had played collegiate rugby for a minimum of 1 year and were actively employed, either part-time or full-time.

A simple questionnaire was administered prior to the interview to identify the playing history and demographics of each participant. Table 2 details the results

of the playing history and demographic interview questionnaire. All research participants were asked to identify their collegiate team sports; however, for confidentiality purposes, the college names are not disclosed. Instead, the division of each collegiate team has been identified and disclosed within Table 2. To protect the identity of participants, random numbers from P1 to P12 were assigned to each research participant. The interviews ranged between 26 and 58 minutes, with an average interview time of 42 minutes.

Table 2

Interview Questionnaire Results

Participant	Years of Collegiate Rugby Participation	Held a Formal Leadership Role	Years of Rugby Participation Pre-College	Participated in Identified Rugby Development Program	College Graduation Year	Employed Full-Time or Part-Time	Current Age	Racial Background	College Division
P1	4	Yes	0	No	2021	Full-time	22	White	NCAA DI
P2	4	Yes	0	Yes	2020	Full-time	27	White	NCAA DII
P3	4	Yes	0	No	2022	Full-time	25	White	USA Rugby D1
P4	4	Yes	3	No	2020	Full-time	25	White	USA Rugby D1
P5	4	Yes	4	No	2022	Part-time	21	White	NCAA DI
P6	4	Yes	0	No	2019	Part-time	25	White	NCAA DI
P7	4	Yes	4	No	2022	Part-time	22	White	USA Rugby D1E
P8	4	Yes	2	Yes	2019	Full-time	27	White	NCAA DII
P9	3	Yes	0	Yes	2020	Full-time	24	Latino and White	NAIA Varsity
P10	4	No	7	No	2020	Full-time	24	Hispanic	USA Rugby D1E
P11	4	No	2	No	2021	Full-time	23	Black	NCAA DII
P12	4	Yes	0	Yes	2020	Full-time	37	Black	NAIA Varsity

Note. College Division column includes the abbreviations "D" for Division and "D1E" for Division 1 Elite.

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, and were both audio- and video-recorded. The audio recordings were uploaded into Otter.ai for transcription purposes. All transcripts were reviewed and cleaned to correct any transcription errors. The transcriptions were exported to Microsoft Word and saved on the researcher's password-protected computer. The coding process was rigorous and comprehensive. The coding process began with open coding, which is the process of identifying themes from the raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Each participant transcript was reviewed seven times. The first review ensured the accuracy of

transcriptions. The second review identified codes using *in vivo* coding while the third review ensured accuracy of the second review. The fourth review identified codes using process coding techniques, while the fifth review ensured accuracy of the fourth review. The sixth review identified codes using values coding, while the seventh review ensured accuracy of the sixth review. All initial coding was completed manually, indicating codes on the margins of each transcript. All codes were typed in Microsoft Excel and sorted into relational categories through the process known as axial coding. The relational categories were evaluated and compared, bundling together relational categories to create emerging categories. Using selective coding, emerging categories were then compared to identify overarching themes and subthemes (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). The findings, identified as themes addressed the five research questions.

Themes

The experiences of the 12 former female college athletes, when analyzed according to the research questions, encompassed five major themes. The themes that emerged were as follows: transformational experience, formation of leadership foundations, coach influence, growth through relationships, and leadership beliefs. The order in which the analysis and findings are presented in the study are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Research Analysis and Findings Order as Presented in the Study

Research Question	Themes	Subthemes
RQ1	Transformational Experience	Self-Confidence
		Diversity and Inclusion
		Resiliency
RQ2	Formation of Leadership Foundations	Leadership Self-Confidence
		Adaptability
RQ3	Coach Influence	Champion
		Teacher

		Gender Role Interactions
RQ4	Growth through Relationships	Teamwork
		Responsibility
		Mediation
RQ5	Leadership Beliefs	Leadership by Example
		Leadership Behind the Scenes
		Leadership by Motivation

Theme 1: Transformational Experience

The theme of transformational experience was prevalent throughout the research. The transformational experience theme most closely connected to Research Question 1, which asked, "How do female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through sport participation?"

Participants noted that the experiences and skills learned through their collegiate rugby careers did result in a transformational experience; however, questions remain regarding how the transformational experience influenced their leadership development. Participants did not always refer directly to their transformational experiences in terms of leadership development. Five interview questions were asked to understand how female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through sport participation:

IQ1: Please describe your overall experience playing collegiate rugby.

IQ2: Please describe what you believe to be most impactful about your collegiate rugby participation. What did you learn or how did you grow?

IQ3: What did you learn about leadership through your participation in collegiate rugby?

IQ4: What, if any, specific experiences, during your time participating in collegiate rugby directly influenced your leadership development?

IQ5: From your perspective, did any specific experience or learning influence you differently because of your gender?

All 12 participants referred to their collegiate rugby sports career as a transformational experience during the interview. Participants referred to this

transformational experience 15 times, using words such as "life-changing" and "transformed life." Participant 2 thoughtfully and positively described her rugby experience, noting, "And just the rugby culture is just very different than anything I've ever experienced. It had an overwhelming impact on my life, then as an athlete and now as I navigate life post college." Participant 1 shared similar sentiments when asked about her college rugby experience: "It was extremely positive. I have no idea what I would do if I didn't do rugby. I was able to build a community and those are my best friends now. So, it just completely shaped everything." Participant 4 spoke about the transformation that occurred in her life because of rugby participation:

> I think it taught me a lot of things, not only about myself, but I grew in so many areas that I didn't think I could ever possibly grow. And if I went back and looked at me coming in freshmen year, I think I was a completely different person. By the time I graduated, just in the way I carried myself and how I express myself to others.

Participant 8 spoke about how rugby saved her life:

> The first thing I always tell people when they ask me about rugby is, I would not be the person I am today without rugby. It helped me grow not only as an athlete, but as a person as well. I'm a better leader for it. I'm a better (industry) provider for it. I'm a better teammate for it. I'm better just all around. I'm better because of rugby, in a nondirect way, it saved my life. School was really hard. College was really hard as I know it was for a lot of people but my teammates that I ended up friending on the rugby team, were the ones who kind of pulled me through and kept me going and gave me space to grow as a person and an athlete. So yeah, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for rugby. To put it simply.

As participants described the transformation that they experienced through their sport participation, the subthemes of self-confidence, diversity and inclusion, and resiliency were concepts supported their transformational experience. Table 4 illustrates this theme, as well as its subthemes and associated codes.

Table 4

Codebook for the Theme of Transformational Experience

Theme	Categories	Codes	Occ.
Transformational Experience	Self-Confidence	Confidence	39
		Belief in oneself	8
	Diversity and Inclusion	Inclusive	13
		Accept	6
		Welcoming	7
		Diversity	11
	Resiliency	Adversity	9
		Physicality	13
		Fight	9
		Tough	7

Participants experienced meaningful, transformational involvement in collegiate sport, and with the assistance of peers and adults, they began to discover themselves, accelerating the process of leadership development. Peer and adult influences assisted in leadership development and through the sport of rugby, participants were able to develop and strengthen their self-confidence, gain exposure to new and diverse people and ideas, and experience situations that led them to be compelled to stand up for a strong belief (Komives et al., 2005).

Self-Confidence. Self-confidence was a subtheme of the transformational experience theme. Self-confidence is a critical component of the leadership identity process. Participants referenced a belief in oneself when communicating about how they internally processed their own growth and development. Participants repeatedly referred to the confidence that they received from participating in college rugby. The word "confidence" was used 39 times throughout the 12 interviews. The theme of self-confidence was created to include the codes of belief in oneself and confidence. The results of the current research study indicated that participation in collegiate rugby aided in the strengthening of a foundational level

of self-confidence, which contributed to their overall collegiate rugby transformational experience and their leadership development. The foundational level of self-confidence referred to within this subtheme was defined by Axelrod (2017) as a stable personality trait that first develops in early childhood but continues to be developed and strengthened throughout life. The current participants repeatedly referred to the confidence that they received from participating in college rugby. The word "confidence" was used 39 times throughout the 12 interviews.

Throughout the interviews, participants narrated their experiences in collegiate rugby, experiences that required them to develop their own self-confidence in order to better lead themselves and their teammates. These experiences were all part of their leadership development journey. Participant 11 commented on the impact of college rugby as follows:

For me, the confidence that rugby brought was the most impactful aspect of playing…If I went back and looked at me coming in freshmen year, I think I was a completely different person. By the time I graduated, just in the way I carried myself and how I expressed myself to others.

Participant 9 spoke about the impact of collegiate rugby: "I think that at least for me, the most impactful was the confidence that it brought." Participant 3 shared similar sentiments, stating, "Rugby gave me the confidence of knowing that I have something to contribute. I can do things if I just take action to do it." Participant 12 shared how her coach instilled confidence in the players by involving them in building strategies for team play: "I think it instilled a lot of, like confidence in us as players to be like, yes, we are capable enough to be part of that process."

Throughout the interview process, participants emphasized the self-confidence they received from the sport of rugby as it promoted body positivity. Nine out of 12 participants commented on body positivity. Participant 6 shared a powerful statement: "Obviously, we play games to win. But the emphasis is not on winning. It's on building confidence in us as young women…It made my more confident. It made my love and appreciate my body and other people's bodies." Participant 5 emphasized the importance of body positivity in young women during

the formative years of college: "While I played rugby as a high schooler, as a college athlete, it was even more important to belong to a community. Being comfortable in your own skin goes a long way while you're awkwardly navigating college." Participant 9 spoke directly to rugby body positivity: "I guess that was the biggest shock when I joined rugby, to have all these women super confident in their body and they all look different." During interviews, eight participants used the phrase "Every body is a rugby body" at some point throughout their interview. Participant 8 expanded on this phrase and what it means to her:

> One of the taglines that we use is, every body is a rugby body. Because no matter what your size, shape, color, whatever, you're gonna fit in. That's just the nature of the sport. It's a community. Rugby comes from a deep-rooted culture and history that we hope to continue to grow."

Diversity and Inclusion. Diversity and inclusion were subthemes of the transformational experience theme. The diversity of teammates and the inclusion that collegiate rugby promoted contributed to the transformative experience for participants. Participants did articulate minor connections between their diversity and inclusion experiences and how this directly influenced their leadership development. Diversity and inclusion were often referenced together, but also noted separately. Diversity includes all the unique traits of an individual while inclusion effectively brings together and involves diverse individuals (Pennington, 2020). Participants spoke about diversity in terms of race, religion, political affiliations, body types, sexual orientation, and athletic abilities. Participant 1 noted the diversity of her rugby teammates and how it transformed her life:

> I've met my queer and nonbinary friends through rugby. Some of my best friends are women of color. There's a bunch of different political backgrounds. I feel like I've gotten world real experience. I didn't get that from my school, but I got that from the connections that I made through rugby.

Other participants spoke about the concepts of diversity and inclusion in terms of their growth. Participant 8 spoke about how her collegiate rugby experience has translated to her current work:

Working in healthcare, we see a very diverse group of people. All of the rugby teams that I've played on have involved a very diverse group of people, whether that be in their sexual orientation, whether that be in their religious views, their race, everything. All and everything. I've luckily had the opportunity to befriend different types of people while playing rugby. So, working in healthcare, that gave me the insight on how to speak to different people, how to interact with them without being offensive or disrespectful, or anything like that. That's definitely been a huge, huge plus from my years of playing rugby.

Participant 1 spoke about the diversity and inclusion of the collegiate rugby experience: "In rugby, you can be bigger, skinny, tall, short. We welcome all. As long as you work hard, you can play. I was able to build that community and those are my best friends now."

The concepts of inclusion were mentioned in terms of accepting diverse opinions, athletic abilities, body types, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion. Participants spoke about the immediate acceptance of others because it was a part of the naturally engrained rugby culture. Participant 11 spoke about playing collegiate rugby as a Black woman: "As a whole, I didn't consider race a factor while on the pitch. My teammates encouraged me and supported me through some tough life situations. They were some of my biggest allies."

The interviewees all expressed more excitement over inclusion and acceptance within community than winning. Participant 9 commented on how different types of players have different roles to fill, stating, "There isn't one way to be good at the sport." Participant 6 commented with similar sentiments about inclusiveness within rugby:

You join a rugby team and you are instantly in a family…It doesn't matter your athletic ability, your body size, shape, whatever your skill or even if you don't know what rugby is at all. Pretty much if you can show to practice and hold a rugby ball, you're a key player.

Participant 3 shared her thoughts regarding the inclusivity of women's rugby:

I've had a lot of conversations with people over the years of how they feel

like it's kind of an inclusive space, for everyone, including misfits. It's just,

you know, you've never felt like you've fit in anywhere else. It doesn't

matter where you're from, what you do, who you are, it's this inclusive

space, that kind of catch all for everybody."

Participant 12 echoed similar thoughts about inclusiveness, tying in the uniqueness

of the sport to the inclusiveness:

People just know, rugby is a hard sport to master the rule. There's so many

rules and they're constantly changing, like every year. So, the people that

know how to play, when we see like newbies coming in, we already

understand that we're dropping you in an ocean and asking you to swim

without floaty. So that's why everybody well, we played each other where

we already have that notion like, Okay, listen, we can't treat them like

they've been watching basketball all their lives. Because first of all, rugby

isn't a widely available like the traditional sport. So, we have to approach

everything differently. There's literally a spot for anybody type any person

on any rugby team. Like you don't have to know how to play at all, it will

get figured out.

A few participants did more clearly make a connection between diversity

and inclusion and their leadership development. Now as a coach, Participant 6

formulated her goal to "create a community for a bunch of different people"

through experiencing this sort of environment as a collegiate rugby player.

Participant 1 spoke about the positive effect of including all opinions when

discussing how college rugby influenced her leadership development: "Making

sure that you really hear the voice of the people that you're supposed to be leading.

That's like well changed, like my perspective of leadership." Participant 9 echoed

these sentiments when discussing how collegiate rugby influenced her specific

leadership style:

Yes, definitely. I would say a very inclusive leadership style. I think before

it would be very easy to choose the best players and invest everything into

them. Or in games and stuff, only bring along the people who have the most

to offer up front or that kind of talent. In rugby, there's so many positions, fifteen in total, but I feel like the culture of rugby in general, and like women's rugby, is anyone who wants to play will play. We were excited to have everyone and it's like you put in the work, then you earn your time on the field. And finding strengths and people were like, maybe they don't pick up the sport as quickly. You know, I think that would influence my leadership in general, finding the ways that people have to contribute and pointing out their strengths and lifting them up.

Resiliency. Resiliency was a subtheme of the transformational experience theme. As collegiate rugby athletes, participants experienced challenging situations, increasing their perceived resilience, and contributing to the overall transformational experience of collegiate rugby. The results of the research study indicated that participants found resiliency-building transformative, with this impression continuing to influence them in their postcollegiate careers; however, only a few participants articulated direct connections between resiliency and leadership development. Participant 10 directly referenced the resiliency that was built from participation in college rugby and how this resiliency continues with her today:

I think one of the biggest things that I learned from rugby was that I could be incredibly resilient. I could deal with what needed to be dealt with. I think that was a major theme throughout – I can do anything. I can do anything for any time required. I can set a period of time for me to get something done and I can do it. I know I can be resilient, but I also know, I shouldn't have to be resilient against certain things.

Participant 11 echoed similar sentiments of resiliency development through participation: "Rugby provided me with a purpose, a purpose bigger than myself. Having to show up day in and day out, regardless of what's happening outside of rugby, tested me in ways that I have never experienced."

As noted by several participants, women's rugby is a unique sport, being the only full-contact sport for women at the collegiate level. The full-contact nature of the sport led to many comments regarding the physicality of the sport and

required mental toughness. Participants referenced concepts of resilience when describing the physicality and mental toughness required for the sport of rugby: "Rugby is about being mentally tough" (Participant 6), "Rugby is a tough sport" (Participant 8), and "You put your body on the line with these people for 80 minutes" (Participant 5). Participant 11 spoke about having the required mental and physical stamina:

> The discipline was the most impactful part of playing. The coach could immediately tell if we had done what we were supposed to do—eating right, doing the proper workout, taking time for recovery. I would say having the mental strength was also a big factor. With it being so competitive, you have to have the strength to overcome.

Participant 8 shared similar sentiments regarding the physicality and mental toughness of the sport:

> You got to do the things that you might not want to do, you got to, you know, especially when it came to fitness or conditioning. It wasn't fun, it wasn't pretty sometimes, but you had to do it. And kind of that mentality of like, you've got to push through it, you got to keep going.

College rugby prepared Participant 7 for work and life following college:

> It was physically demanding. I think having to go through something that hard, it just builds resilience. I would say the most impactful part was honestly probably having to deal with adversity of injury and not always seeing eye to eye with my coach just because those experiences allowed me to grow and I've taken those things onto the workforce.

Participant 12 also spoke about the challenges, both physically and mentally, of playing rugby and how it has now prepared her for work:

> Rugby is a is a physically taxing sport and it's mentally taxing too because it's a very strategic game. And it's just rough. Like it's a very rough game. So, since I've been playing rugby for the last nine years now, it's my ninth year going into it. It's just made me more mentally tenacious, like, I have like rhino skin now. You know, I'm kind of relentless. Like I just don't believe in failure, because I was on a championship team for years. So, I

know how hard you have to work on a rugby team, just to achieve those goals. So now I just take that same action and use it in my day to day.

A few participants directly connected their collegiate rugby participation with their leadership development. Throughout the interview, Participant 6 recounted her time playing collegiate rugby, sharing about the inclusive culture that she experienced as an athlete. She connected her time playing with a present-day story about how she leads as a coach, constantly encouraging her girls to be "rugby fit, a type of fitness she described as being mentally tough, a form of resilience described within the research. Participant 5 recounted her difficult experience managing an ineffective coach as a senior on the team. As a leader on the team, she was often left to deal with the aftermath of an overly aggressive coach. She spoke about managing the crisis behind the scenes and continuing to encourage her teammates. This experience led her to learn "crisis management aspects of leadership." Because of this experience, she believes that she became a better leader and was able to "better handle the effects of the COVID pandemic within the workplace." Participant 3 shared a story about her rugby experience, before the team was elevated to varsity status. The women's rugby team was operating as a club team with a joint board for both the men's and women's teams. The women's team dealt with enormous conflict through this shared board and decided to go their separate ways. She shared the effects of this experience:

> Though it was not a positive scenario, it really enabled us to rise up, come together, and make a decision that significantly impacted the team for the better…This gave me an opportunity to grow in a way that I didn't get in the classroom. While I did well in the classroom but there weren't a lot of leadership opportunities.

Gender Inequality and Resiliency. The research sought to understand whether any experiences influenced the athletes differently because of their gender. There was overwhelming agreement that women's collegiate rugby was treated differently due to either gender and/or the nonconventional nature of the sport, being a less mainstream sport compared to traditional sports such as basketball and soccer. Participants repeatedly referenced the lack of resources available to them

and the rugby team from the university. Participants perceived that the inequalities they experienced because of their gender and the nonconventional nature of the sport, lead to the participants developing resilience. Participants noted this resilience as a significant transformational factor in their overall collegiate experience; however, participants articulated that this resilience development only slightly influenced their leadership development journey. Participant 7 noted the lack of resources and support given from the school to the women's collegiate rugby team, saying, "I think part of that is gender and part of that is the sport of rugby is just not as popular as others." Participant 2 shared similar thoughts: "I think we definitely had less resources than other teams had that were under the school umbrella." Participant 7 noted that her collegiate experience and the lack of equality has contributed to her leadership development: "I learned that you have to fight for things, and that you're not always going to be given everything. I have to fight for thing and stand up for what I believe in." Participant 3 shared how her college club team moved to varsity status and the personal effects of the process on her:

> My freshmen year, we were a club sport, and we ended up getting elevated to varsity my sophomore year. The only reason this happened is because teams or generations of rugby alums before us had started this kind of movement to elevate us to varsity status. And this just happened right before my sophomore year but it's because of Title Nine. We got varsity status, but we weren't given all of the perks that the other varsity teams were getting. For example, we didn't receive any recruitment spots, which was basically the entire point of varsity status…So unfortunately, we had to fight a lot with the athletic director about equity in terms of resources and recruitment. It was never ending. But the one thing that I really appreciate about rugby, in terms of the sport itself, the rules, the size of the field, the size of the ball, it's all the same across the board. Nothing is different from men to women, not even the tackling parameters. Everything is the same across the board. But the outside factor of politics is where it all kind of

changed. I think that's why I have definitely adapted a more assertive leadership style today.

Summary. The transformational experience theme most closely connected to Research Question 1, which asked, "How do female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through sport participation?" Through collegiate rugby involvement, participants developed and strengthened their self-confidence. Through collegiate rugby, participants were exposed to a wide spectrum of individuals with diverse thoughts and ideas and also encouraged to be inclusive of all within the rugby community. Through participation in the unique sport of women's rugby, participants experienced a physically demanding sport with gender equality challenges. Collectively, participants did not frequently interpret the transformation they experienced as part of a leadership development process.

Theme 2: Formation of Leadership Foundations

The theme of formation of leadership foundations was prevalent throughout the research. The formation of leadership foundations theme directly connected to Research Question 2, which asked, "What is the role of the collegiate sport participation in the development of adult leadership styles?" Two interview questions were asked to understand the role of collegiate sport in the development of adult leadership styles:

IQ6: Do you feel that participation in collegiate rugby influenced you to develop a specific leadership style? If so, how?

IQ7: How has your college rugby experience prepared you for work and life post college?

According to the interviewees, participation in collegiate rugby served as an avenue to develop foundational leadership skills and behaviors, which may have had some influence on adult leadership style. The two foundational leadership skills and behaviors that were identified are indicated as subthemes: leadership self-confidence and adaptability. Table 5 illustrates the theme, its subthemes, and associated codes.

Table 5

Codebook for the Theme of Formation of Leadership Foundations

Theme	Categories	Codes	Occ.
Formation of Leadership Foundations	Leadership Self-Confidence	Confidence	39
		Value	7
		Explore	4
	Adaptability	Change	21
		Openness	4

Leadership Self-Confidence. The data indicated that leadership self-confidence is a subtheme of the formation of leadership foundations theme. The word "confidence" was used 39 times throughout the interviews; however, the results of the research study revealed two separate subthemes relating to self-confidence, general self-confidence and specific self-confidence. Specific self-confidence, identified in this subtheme as leadership self-confidence, is a changing mental and emotional state associated with a specific task or situation at hand (Axelrod, 2017).

Participants were able to develop their leadership self-confidence through specific rugby experiences such as leading through the unknown and leading through difficult times. Participants noted how the development of their leadership self-confidence influenced their current work, leadership development, and leadership style. Participant 10 spoke about the discovery of her leadership self-confidence, regardless of playing time,

> I was never a consistent starter. I had to find my role on the team. I didn't have to be a starter to be on the team. There was still plenty of other stuff we have to get done. My confidence grew and I discovered I could be valuable to the team without being a star player.

Participant 7 shared how her leadership self-confidence grew through challenging times:

> As a sophomore captain, I had to deal with behavioral issues of players who were older than me. I felt like that was pretty challenging. Just wondering if

I would be respected, but also wondering if I was able to handle that

situation. My sophomore year taught me that I was capable of dealing with

hard issues outside of my comfort zone.

A couple participants directly referenced how the development of their

leadership self-confidence has supported their career. Participants 8 and 9 shared

stories of how navigating tough situations in college rugby as a team leader

prepared them for work. Participant 9 recounted a story about how the leadership

self-confidence instilled in her through rugby equipped her to navigate a difficult

conversation with a client. Participant 8 shared an example of how her college

rugby experience has prepared her for work:

I think the confidence aspect, especially with my work in cardiac device,

it's not easy stuff. But having the confidence to not only reassure the

patient, but also ask questions. I don't think I would've had the confidence

to do my work without the confidence rugby gave me.

While only a few participants directly referred to their leadership style,

Participant 11 shared a thoughtful response to the question of developing a certain

leadership style. Participant 11 spoke about how she developed leadership skills but

was unsure whether she developed her leadership style through collegiate rugby

participation:

I don't know if it was a certain type, necessarily, I think I definitely grew in

that area. I think my lack of confidence as a player kind of contributed to

that. I don't think I could be a leader in the rugby world in terms of captain

or whatever. But I had gained enough skill that I was branching out. So by

the time I was a senior in college, I was the Vice President of Finance for

our programming board for the university. So like, I think I developed

skills, maybe not my type of leadership. But I knew that it was something I

could do, maybe just not in that scenario, but I knew I could be a leader

somewhere else.

When referencing concepts relating to leadership self-confidence, a few

participants commented on their leadership style. Participant 3 described her

leadership style as "take action," an approach that she was able to develop because

of her leadership self-confidence growth throughout her collegiate rugby career. As a collegiate rugby player, Participant 8 directly referred to her leadership style:

> I have adapted a more assertive leadership style. You know, thinking back to even the beginning of high school, I used to be the shy, quiet, smart kid who just kind of kept to herself. Getting into college and starting to play rugby, that changed a lot for the better. I'm just more comfortable with being the person to raise their hand first, or speak up first, or do the things that nobody else wants to do.

Participant 10 also shared the impact of utilizing a DiSC Profile (2022) on her ability to communicate and lead up: "I think that [this type of profiling] provided me with information because now I can go up to supervisors and ask them to communicate with me this way and also encourage them to use this sort of resource within our department. I don't know if this would be my leadership style but it's an example of how I do lead."

Adaptability. The results of the research study indicated adaptability as a subtheme of the formation of leadership foundations theme. Participants demonstrated growth in the skill of adaptability throughout their collegiate rugby career and noted how this skill influenced both their leadership development and leadership style as career professionals. Most participants did not demonstrate a familiarity with formal leadership styles, but more broadly described their leadership style. By being open to change, participants were able to develop and strengthen their skillsets and leadership abilities throughout their college career. Change was omnipresent through the interviews with participants experiencing changes in coach and player leadership, divisional changes, and change in various life transitions. Throughout these changes, however, participants reported their ability to adapt, communicating a positive experience even throughout tremendous times of change.

Participant 1 commented how change influenced her perspective of leadership and how this extended beyond her sports participation to her job: "The changes that we went through, especially as a junior and senior, really affected my perspective of leadership. This perspective shift influences how I lead my team at

work." Participant 9 spoke about what she learned about her leadership style through participating in college rugby: "To meet people where they're at with leadership." Participant 2 spoke about learning how to be part of a team and how this change influences her leadership work style:

> Coming in as a freshman, I had never played a traditional team sport. In high school, I ran cross-country and I was completely dependent on my own performance. I had to learn how to be part of a team. This was a big change for me and caused me a good bit of stress. Having others so dependent on my performance weighed on me when I first started. But my teammates leaned in and encouraged me to do my best and I ended up thriving, even being a co-captain my senior year. As a supervisor, I use this experience as a reminder when we bring on new employees.

Participant 2 continued to describe her experience, explaining the importance of learning and adapting through rugby:

> Figuring out how to lead the team and still be friends with a lot of people was really hard at that age. And trying to figure out the balance of how to be a strong leader, and also a confidant, and a friend. Definitely, I'd say my leadership style definitely developed a lot from those positions and just how to interact with people and gain respect instead of creating fear among my teammates, like some leaders do.

Participant 5 described her leadership journey while playing collegiate rugby. Throughout her playing career, she learned that she needed to change her approach to leadership, as teammates were not responding to her "headstrong, very tenacious" approach. Her experience encouraged her to adapt her leadership based on the needs of the teammate. As a leader within her current career role, she now uses this same approach when leading her followers. Participant 12 spoke the changes that her leadership style went through as a result of collegiate rugby participation:

> You know, for me, I've had a different experience compared to my peers. I got a late start. I started working before attending college. I was used to working and leading my guys a certain way but then I started playing

college rugby in a high-performance environment. This made me stop and reflect on my leadership and how effective I was as a manager. I've made a lot of changes in how I lead because of rugby.

Summary. The formation of leadership foundations theme directly connected to Research Question 2: "What is the role of the collegiate sport participation in the development of adult leadership styles?" Two subthemes emerged including leadership self-confidence and adaptability. Participants demonstrated the development and strengthening of foundational leadership skills and behaviors as a result of their collegiate rugby participation. The skills and behaviors that they acquired from their collegiate rugby participation contributed to the development of their adult leadership style.

Theme 3: Coach Influence

The theme of coach influence was prevalent throughout the research with along with the three subthemes of champion, teacher, and gender role interactions. The coach influence theme directly connected to Research Question 3, which asked, "How does the role of the coach influence the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style?" Two interview questions were asked to understand the role of the collegiate rugby coach in the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style:

> IQ8: Please describe how your coaches led you and the team. How would you describe his/her leadership style?
>
> IQ9: What, if anything, did you coach do that influenced your leadership development or leadership style?

The results of the research indicated that the role of the coach did influence the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style. The coach experiences that the former female athletes encountered during their rugby collegiate carrier influenced the development of their specific leadership style, as also indicated in the leadership beliefs theme. Many similarities exist in coach experiences and how participants have now tailored their leadership approach. Table 6 illustrates the theme, subthemes, and associated codes.

Table 6

Codebook for the Theme of Coach Influence

Theme	Categories	Codes	Occ.
Coach Influence	Champion	Empower	6
		Encourage	13
	Teacher	Skill	6
		Teach	9
		Challenge	7
	Gender Role Interactions	Positive experience	12
		Effective	11

Coaches have a tremendous influence on the outcomes of their athletes and teams, influencing immediate outcomes such as performance but also often personally impacting athletes (Poczwardowski et al., 2002). Through interactions with their coaches, whether positive or negative, participants learned more about leadership and their own leadership style. Participant 6 spoke about how her coach served as a role model to her and how her coach influenced her leadership style:

> I learned the best type of leadership is leadership through example. So, the people that I looked up to, were my captains and my coaches when I first joined the team. They were consistent, dedicated, and humble. They didn't have to talk about it. They just did it. So, I learned leadership by watching them just lead by example.

Participant 12 detailed how the relationship with her coach influenced how she interacts and communicates with others in a professional setting:

> So, my coach, he just knew us, like he knew us on a more personal level. And we had a rapport with him where we felt super comfortable with him. This made it easier to be completely open. I was never a social butterfly when I was a little kid. I was always in the corner reading a book. I was an extreme introvert. While in college playing, he made me more social with people. So that translated to me easily being able to talk to anybody, all my

employees, I know exactly who they are, how many kids they have, you
know what they like to do outside of work.

Participant 3 spoke about how her coach influenced her leadership development by
maintaining positivity while bringing the team together:

She had this way of just being a very positive and integral coach who
obviously cared very deeply. You know, it was obvious she spent a lot of
time putting together practices and developing plans. I probably had more
insight into this because I was captain and I had more time with her. We
had hard times, but she was able to maintain positivity and maintaining this
positivity doesn't mean that she forgot about all the bad things. It just
means that getting people together in a positive way is a very effective way
of leading and creating positive change.

Champion. Participants spoke highly of their coaches as they served as
personal and team champions, encouraging players to perform at their best and also
encouraging players to fight for equality. Coaches played a large factor in how
athletes viewed the equality of the sport, encouraging players to fight for equality
in the sport within the university setting. Participant 6 spoke about her experience
with her coach, describing how "off the field, she was more like fighting for
equality and fighting for that kind of stuff. And that side of her I appreciate, and I
think I learned a lot from her and those things I am going to carry on." Participant
11 described her coaches style as "tough love," serving as a champion for women's
rugby:

I think my coach was very much like tough love. She was there to hype us
up. But she also wanted us to have a strong understanding that we were
getting treated differently because of who we were, what sport we were
playing, because we were women. That's where the tough love was coming
in. She wanted us to do our best because she thought others would
immediately find a way to tell us we weren't enough if they saw gaps in our
performance.

Participant 10 noted that her coach continued to encourage the team to fight for what they deserved, even when they were not receiving the deserved recognition and resources:

> In my university, I think it was made more apparent because my coach reinforced our toughness, always telling us how we were the toughest people on campus. Before I came, the team had won one national championship. But the school was very much still only focused on men's ice hockey. And then we won another national championship and there was still minimal acknowledgment. My freshmen year, we didn't have a field to play on but the men's soccer team got a new stadium.

Participant 4 echoed these sentiments, crediting her coach for pushing the team to stand up for equality, by sharing a story of how her coach would encourage the team to voice their opinions: "She empowered us that even though we are women, we can sit at the table with anybody, and ask for whatever we want and whatever we deserve."

Teacher. Coaches served as teachers for their players, both on and off the pitch. Participants described how their coaches taught them the technical skills of the game but also served as a teacher off the pitch. Participant 6 described how she lost trust and confidence in her coach because she perceived her to have less knowledge of the game. From this experience, she learned the importance of balancing technical knowledge with leadership soft skills. Participant 9 voiced appreciation over her coach's style. Our coach debriefed practices, focusing on "progress, not perfection" and creating a "safe space to try new things." Participant 9 noted that she has adapted a similar philosophy, encouraging her work colleagues to share their own perspectives, giving them the space to voice differing opinions. Participant 2 spoke about her appreciation for her coach and his ability to balance strategy with motivation, also providing encouragement for team members to lead each other. Participant 2 detailed how this coaching style influenced her leadership and communication:

> The first coach we had was very strategic in the way he taught his rugby plan. He was very specific on what he wanted. But also, I'd say that he was

a motivational leader. He was big into team huddles and team bonding. But

they weren't very vocal when we were actually on the pitch. That forces

you as a captain, or forced me as a captain, to communicate a lot more than

I think a different coaching leadership style would have.

Participant 4 also shared a story of how her coach taught her the value of nonverbal

communication and relationships:

My freshmen year, I definitely would not have been a leadership candidate

for sure. I was just very shy and I avoided eye contact if critical

conversations. My coach was like, "I'm gonna start grading you on eye

contact." She knew I was very competitive and cared about my grades, so

she assumed I would respond to her grading something. Through this

process, I learned the importance of eye contact in fostering relationships.

Rugby coaches encouraged players to remain open to diverse points of view

and accept others for themselves, teaching players the value of diverse opinions.

Participant 1 noted, "My coach held us to a very high standard. She encouraged us

to value everyone, regardless of our bias." Participant 12 shared similar sentiments:

"Our coach taught us that all players had unique roles to fill. There was a spot for

everyone. Well, she also reinforced this outside of the pitch. Everyone is here, on

this earth, for their own unique purpose." When describing how she grew through

participation in collegiate rugby, Participant 4 explained how her coaches

encouraged athletes to broaden their relationships within the university:

Our coaches challenged us to get to know every single one of our professors

by name. They challenged us to be friendly and kind to the cafeteria staff

and to the maintenance staff. Everyone we came across, we were challenged

to be people that they would recognize and know by name. By the time I

graduated, I knew at least half of the school staff and that just kind of opens

your eyes to like everyone's different walks of life and it really gave our

team a positive reputation.

Gender Role Interactions. Gender role interactions emerged as a subtheme

of coach influence. Participants indicated a distinct difference between how male

and female coaches lead their team. The differences noted influenced their

leadership development and perceived leadership style as participants shared more values that align with female coach behaviors compared to male coach behaviors. Participant 8 shared that she believed her coach was successful in her leadership because of her ability to adapt to the needs of the players. Near the end of her collegiate career, the rugby team struggled to recruit and retain talent so the "coaching style changed to less tough love and more of like, how can we help you, retain you…The newer generation of rugby players needed more of verbal confirmation like, I see you, I acknowledge you, I accept you, I'm here for you…My coach was able to pull her softer side into coaching, demonstrating more of a nurturer role when needed."

Participant 1, 3, 5, 11, and 12 detailed their more positive experiences with woman coaches, comparatively to male coaches. All five participants provided examples of how woman coaches better related to their team in terms of care and concern, motivation techniques, social examples, or tactical execution such as tackling. Participant 1 and 11 shared that their male rugby coaches did not provide enough guidance on tackling techniques and from the participant perspectives, the male coaches were often afraid of causing injuries by emphasizing and practicing tackling techniques. Participant 12 shared that her male coaches often didn't understand the health needs of the women's team, often disregarding physical needs. Participant 3 and 5 remarked that her experience with male coaches was often negative, noting that male coaches were often yellers. Participant 3 shared her perspective on why yelling is not an effective for women's sports:

> Well, girls, I don't know what it is. But I don't think that we can't handle the stress of being yelled at. It's more like, I'm out here for fun. I don't want to feel like crap when I leave the field. There's a lot of other things that I can do for fun that don't involve me being yelled at.

Participant 5 shared similar sentiments, comparing her male coach and female coach in terms of effectiveness:

> He oftentimes made players feel uncomfortable in terms of his intensity. He would lead the team in, it's all about winning, you have to be better, you have to do this. His leadership style was definitely aggressive. Our assistant

coach the following year was amazing. She was more lead by example. She really tried to help people, spending as much time as needed to teach them. It was a huge contrast.

Summary. The coach influence theme directly connected to the third research question, which asked, "How does the role of the coach influence the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style?" Three subthemes emerged: champion, teacher, and gender role interactions. The results of the research demonstrated the importance of the coach influence on the athlete's college experience and the development of their perceived leadership style. Participants leveraged their collegiate rugby experiences, including experiences involving their coaches, to adjust their leadership style while in college but also postcollege within their professional careers.

Theme 4: Growth Through Relationships

The theme of growth through relationships was prevalent throughout the research. Three growth through relationships subthemes were identified to include teamwork, responsibility, and mediation. During their collegiate rugby career, participants served as leaders, both formally and informally, and the roles influenced their college experience and leadership development. The growth through relationships theme was connected to Research Question 4: "How do team roles, both informal and formal, influence the female collegiate experience and their leadership development?" Two interview questions were asked to understand how team roles influence the female collegiate experience and their leadership development:

IQ10: Please describe your role on the team.

IQ11: How did your role on the team influence your leadership development, both at the time of participation and now?

Table 7 illustrates this theme, its subthemes, and the associated codes.

Table 7

Codebook for the Theme of Growth Through Relationships

Theme	Categories	Codes	Occ.
Growth through Relationships	Teamwork	Collaborate	6

	Teamwork	21
	Responsible	16
Responsibility	Ownership	5
	Decision-making	8
	Manage conflict	7
Mediation	Communicate	15
	Bridge	5

Teamwork. Participants explained how serving as a member of the team influenced their collegiate experience. Participants described their informal role as a teammate, sharing stories of the teamwork they experienced while playing college rugby. For some participants, team camaraderie served as a highlight of their collegiate career, while others described the benefits of this teamwork in greater detail. Participant 2 highlighted the uniqueness of the sport, stating, "The rugby culture is very different than anything I've ever experienced. Like the teamwork and social camaraderie between team. It's so different." Participant 3 joyfully recanted her experience playing rugby as follows: "The camaraderie was amazing." Participant 6 spoke about teamwork regarding the supportive environment offered while playing rugby: "We are a family and we're in full support of each other," while Participant 4 offered similar sentiments, "You're there every day together, you're working hard towards a common goal."

Many participants shared how their teamwork experiences during collegiate rugby influences them today. Participant 1 shared, "I learned how to be more collaborative in terms of my leadership style, you know, and not overshadow the other leaders who are there as well." Participant 8 spoke about how she interacted with underclassmen, taking the opportunity to teach them but also learn from them: "I was able to help them but also use those opportunities where I was teaching them something to learn myself. At the end of the day, we were one team."
In describing her current leadership style, Participant 4 spoke about the important of collaboration and teamwork:

I'm coming into a role where I'm head coach and I'm a young head coach. I recognize the fact that I don't necessarily have all the answers. I'm learning that I have to lean on my team, just like how I leaned on my team while playing.

Many participants spoke about the dynamics of balancing teamwork with another priority such as accountability, personal goals, and effectiveness. Participant 1 shared her thoughts about balancing teamwork and accountability:

Senior year, I was captain and I tried to do due diligence, hold people accountable, but not be overbearing, and just create relationships with people and figure out what my team needed. This remains a priority for me."

Participant 5 shared her natural inclination to help others but also her struggle to maintain a balance:

Being someone who played a lot of rugby in the past, I always felt like a natural tendency to help and try to teach other people. The more I could help, the better team we became. I'm still trying to figure out how I can balance these priorities. How do I meet my goals while also focusing on the team?

Participant 11 also shared her struggles balancing teamwork and effectiveness:

Leadership is mostly about working collectively. It's sometimes this kind of dichotomy where you have to act collectively and get collective. But then you have to make sure you're moving forward and making decisions. And it's, honestly, something I struggle with. But it's something that I first learned as I stepped into rugby.

Responsibility. Participants felt a strong sense of responsibility for their teammates and the entirety of the team. The subtheme of responsibility may have been influenced by the large number of self-identified formal leaders, with 10 out of 12 participants identified as formal leaders and the other two participants identified as informal leaders. The responses of the participants demonstrated how their responsibility impacted their collegiate experience and influenced their leadership development. Participant 6 communicated a strong sense of

responsibility for her teammates, stating, "I am in support of them, of all things in rugby, and also outside of rugby." Participant 5 spoke about the weight of her responsibility: "As a leader, everything you do has impact. Everything you do is put under a microscope. Someone is always looking up to you." Participant 8 echoed similar sentiments regarding her leadership responsibility: "The coaches put a lot of trust and responsibility on us. As the captains we had to keep everyone focused and motivated during practices." Participant 4 spoke about her leadership beliefs, including the leadership responsibility of the entire team: "As a leader, you don't make decisions on your own. You take the whole team into account."

Participants shared stories highlighting their responsibility for the team, both on and off the pitch. When asked to describe her role on the team, Participant 1 said, "I always took care of the freshmen. I made sure everyone was taken care of and okay. They called me mom. It wasn't just about rugby for me. We were a little group, a little family." Participant 5 discussed off the pitch related responsibilities:

There was always something, whether it was COVID related, personal life, or coaches. And so, it was managing things that could potentially derail the team but at the same time still putting on the face for the rest of the team of being like, this is what we need to do to get where we're going. It really taught me about being a leader and having to prioritize but also working behind the scenes. It's a thankless job but it all means something.

Participant 3 expressed that off-the-pitch responsibilities sometimes outweighed the on-the-pitch duties:

I took on a lot of roles that were outside of just being on the pitch. I think the biggest role that I felt that I was taking on was trying to keep us together as a cohesive group, even though there was drama going on outside the team.

Participant 2 described her responsibility as a key form of leadership development and growth:

I grew as a leader and a person. I had to learn how to be part of a team that was not really good. I helped grow the team and create a team for the future.

That was a big undertaking that encouraged me to lean into my leadership

even more.

Participant 9 shared similar sentiments about how the responsibility as a captain

influenced her own leadership development:

I took my role very seriously and I think that influenced my leadership

development. I don't know if I would have taken it upon myself to do all

the things I did but because I was captain and had that title, I did. If I saw

someone was really working hard, I would text them after practice and

acknowledge their hard work. Because in my head, I was like, This is my

job, because like, I need to be the one lifting people up and noticing

everybody.

Mediation. Mediation was another subcategory of the growth through

relationships theme. Participants were able to develop and strengthen relationships

with their teammates by serving as a mediator on their behalf. Participants referred

to themselves as a moderator, an individual that would be a connector between

teammates and between players and coaches. Based on the responses from the

participants, the role of the mediator affected their collegiate experience and

influenced their leadership development. Participant 1 spoke about the importance

of uniting the team together, indicating, "You have to really emphasize the team's

voice and make sure that everyone's heard. When you think of the leader, you think

of the head, but you really need to think of the whole body." Participant 8 described

the role as captains as mediators:

The best way that as a captain and co-captain of how we liked to advertise

ourselves was as a bridge between the team and coaches. If there was an

issue that the team saw with how practices were being run, or when lift

sessions were being scheduled, instead of the coach hearing 10 voices at the

same time, they would go to us as the captains and the captains would relay

this information to the coaches…So, I think we were definitely expected to

be the bridge between the two because sometimes, especially with the later

group of athletes who came through, sometimes there was a disconnect.

Some coaches were perceived as too rough and emotionless or not

approachable. So as captains, we had to be the ones to kind of break that barrier of like, no, this coach cares about you, they want you to succeed. This is just a different coaching style that they might have."

Participant 9 spoke about her experiences in this as a captain and mediator:

I assumed a leadership position in that role, partly because I just got along with everybody but I was also a good moderator, or like interpreter. I was like, okay, I don't really think she meant to use that tone. I think she was just stressed or something, you know. The feedback my coach had given me was that she liked the way I communicated. She would relay things to me to tell other members of the team because she knew other people didn't respond well to the way she worded things all the time. And so it also meant I was speaking up more during meetings to contribute my thoughts or try to honestly speak on behalf of someone.

Participant 5 shared her experiences as a mediator, managing two different coaches as a captain, one coach experience being negative while the other coach served as a positive example:

We had a coach and he was really headstrong. It was all about winning to him. He was always yelling at us, telling us we had to do better and we had to do XYZ. We would have to step up and follow behind him and do the damage control, cleaning up the mess that he would make. We then had an assistant coach by senior year and her leadership style was amazing. The difference as well is that she was a rugby player and was coaching our team while recovering from an injury. She led by example, really trying to help people and spending as much time as needed to teach people and get them to learn.

Several participants shared their learnings from serving as a mediator. Participant 3 explained how her role as a captain influenced her leadership development as a stronger mediator:

You know, because as a captain again, instances where we had to deal with confrontation, or conflicts between players, conflicts between the players and the coaches, being involved in those types of situations allowed me to

> hear different people's perspectives, the different point of views, and that
> just opened up my understanding and my eyes to how people think
> differently, what's expected, what to ask, how to support people differently.

Participant 7 explained how mediation was a key leadership lesson learned during
her time playing collegiate rugby:

> I learned about the balance between pleasing the team and pleasing your
> coach and having to be that mediator between the two sides. And how
> you're going to see that anywhere, between a boss and coworkers, or
> different coworkers.

Participant 8 shared how her experience as a mediator has developed her ability to
manage confrontation as a leader:

> My head coach always said that women aren't always the best with
> confrontation. When I think of something that rugby has taught me is how
> to deal with that discomfort in a positive and impactful way. Many times I
> had to deal with confrontation between teammates. You're not confronting
> your teammate to be negative, you're just trying to find a solution so rugby
> taught me how to navigate those fine lines.

Participant 4 spoke about her coach using DiSC profiles as a tool to strengthen
communication and conflict resolution skills:

> Our whole team had DiSC profiles. Our coach really focused on
> communication within the team. So, we all had to study other teammates
> profiles, to make sure we at least knew relatively what our teammates were,
> and how we can best communicate on the field and work together as a team.
> Also, she was really big on conflict resolution. So, we did a conflict
> resolution workshop where you found out how your communication style
> deals with conflict and how we handled conflict as a team. This tool has
> become invaluable for me as I now supervise a handful of young
> professionals.

> **Summary.** The growth through relationships theme directly connected to
Research Question 4, which asked, "How do team roles, both informal and formal,
influence the female collegiate experience and their leadership development?"

Three subthemes emerged including teamwork, responsibility, and mediation. During their collegiate rugby career, participants served as leaders, both formally and informally, and these roles influenced their college experience and leadership development. The significant number of formal leaders (e.g., team captains) within this research study may have contributed to the formation of this theme and corresponding subthemes.

Theme 5: Leadership Beliefs

The theme of leadership beliefs was prevalent throughout the research with the subthemes of leadership by example, leadership behind the scenes, and leadership by motivation. The leadership beliefs theme is connected to Research Question 5, which was, "In what way, if at all, do female college athletes demonstrate transformational leadership as adults?" Table 8 illustrates this theme, as well as its subthemes and associated codes.

Table 8

Codebook for the Theme of Leadership Beliefs

Theme	Categories	Codes	Occ.
Leadership Beliefs	Leadership by Example	Role Model	7
		Lead by Example	14
	Leadership Behind the Scenes	Behind the Scenes	12
		Supportive	8
	Leadership by Motivation	Motivate	21

Based on the results of the research study, participants demonstrated transformational leadership during their collegiate career but also continued this approach in their postcollege careers. Throughout the interviews, participants shared examples and stories of transformational leadership in action as athletes and as career professionals. Two research questions were asked in order to understand whether and how participants displayed transformational leadership as adults:

IQ12: How would you describe your leadership style within your professional setting?

IQ13: What is an example of a time you have demonstrated this leadership style?

Leadership by Example. Leadership by example is a subtheme of the leadership beliefs theme. Participants directly referenced leadership by example or used like wording in expressing leadership by example concepts. Leadership by example is comparable to the transformational leadership dimension of idealized influence, relating to a leader serving as a role model by demonstrating consistent, ethical behaviors (Bass, 1985). Participant 4 spoke about her typical approach to leadership as a rugby player: "I was always the kid who didn't really want to talk as more lead by example." Participant 12 described gaining a new leadership philosophy as a result of her collegiate rugby participation: "I'm going to work hard. And if I can show people how to do the same that will be my thing." Participant 6 spoke about how she viewed effective leadership based on her experiences:

> I learned the best type of leadership is leadership through example. So, the people that I looked up to, were my captains and my coaches when I first joined the team. They were consistent, dedicated, and humble. They didn't have to talk about it. They just did it. So, I learned leadership by watching them just lead by example.

Participant 9 spoke about the how she went about leading her teammates,

> Other people don't even notice that I'm trying to be the leader. I wanted to be subtle in that way. I want everyone to feel like we are working together and it's not me at the top going down and telling people what to do.

Participant 11 shared similar thoughts: "Being a leader is about showing up, day in and day out, as an example for your team. Leadership is less about your needs and more about the needs of your team." Participant 3 echoed these sentiments, saying, "Leadership is mostly about action. It's about action and listening to the people around you." Participant 5 was the only participant that directly referred to a specific leadership style, servant leadership, during the interviews:

> For me, being a leader, getting to share the sport with people that I love and getting to step up to that role, really changed the way I see the team. It's not

about playing for myself, but like servant leadership, trying to give my

skills and my time to people to help them see the sport the same way I did.

Leading Behind the Scenes. Leading behind the scenes is a subtheme of
the leadership beliefs theme. Leadership behind the scenes is comparable to the
transformational leadership dimension of idealized influence (Bass, 1985). In
addition, individuals that display leadership behind the scenes demonstrate
selflessness in leadership, a main premise of transformational leadership (Bass,
1985). Participants spoke about their leadership beliefs, often referencing the
concept of leading behind the scenes. This concept was applied while they were
playing collegiate rugby but continues with them as career professionals.
Participant 11 commented on the importance of leading behind the scenes, "The
work happening behind the scenes is far more important than what others see while
on the pitch. Without the behind-the-scenes work, we couldn't even step foot on the
pitch." Participant 2 shared about how her leadership evolved, starting from behind
the scenes: "I worked hard outside of practice and games to make sure we were
game ready. It was about making sure we were physically ready for games but also
mentally ready for games." Participant 12 shared the connection between working
hard behind the scenes and success, whether in rugby or in one's career. Participant
10 shared an example of how a leader on her rugby team inspired her to lead behind
the scenes:

> One of my best friends on the team was also very quiet, behind the scenes
> individual. But I could see her taking over leadership roles and so I was able
> to do the same thing. I wasn't given the title of captain, but I think I had a
> leadership role in coach trusted me to make sure all the gear was ready. Or
> that we had a checklist or that my teammates were gonna have their scrum
> cap, their mouthguard, their boots, or just make sure all the little things
> were getting done.

Participant 4 described the importance of both leading by example and doing
leading behind the scenes:

> I learned that leadership is not the one who speaks the loudest. Leadership
> is largely based on your actions and how you carry yourself and how you

interact with others. Being a leader is about doing the hard work, the
behind-the-scenes stuff. That's the less glorious parts of leadership that I
really learned to master because that's what you really need to succeed and
be a good leader.

Participant 11 commented on how her behind the scenes philosophy is now
relevant in her career:

I understand how the success of the team is reliant on the work that happens
in the background. When we have meetings, we are mostly reporting, with
some room for collaboration, but the real, the time consuming, tedious
work, happens in the background. I am okay being in that space. I actually
thrive in that space. Maybe that's because I'm used to filling that role as a
rugby teammate.

Leadership by Motivation. Leadership by motivation is a subtheme of
leadership beliefs. Leadership by motivation is comparable to the transformational
leadership dimension of inspirational motivation, a dimension that requires the
leader to communicate excitement to motivate followers toward a shared vision
(Bass, 1985). Participants lead their teammates by motivating them, both on and off
the pitch. This style of leadership was effective as collegiate athletes and thus the
participants display this leadership behavior as career professionals. Participant 10
commented on the team motivation she experienced: "I always thought we
encouraged other teammates. We'll teach you everything we can during practice to
make you feel comfortable and prepared." Participant 11 spoke about motivation
from her perspective: "When it came to game day, it was more about being upbeat
and getting people motivated. Making sure people didn't really have their heads
down." Participant 4 detailed the various motivation tactics of the team leaders:
"Motivation was key to keep morale up on our team. Each one of us motivated our
teammates in different ways." Participant 9 spoke about motivating her teammates
to improve, explaining, "I wanted to find ways to push my teammates and propel
them forward." Participant 2 shared similar sentiments: "Being a leader on the pitch
made me step up and figure out different ways to motivate a team."

Participants referenced how the motivation they experienced while playing college rugby now influences them as career adults. When referring to her current leadership style in her professional setting, Participant 11 noted, "I tried to be more aware of other people and their responses. That taught me a lot about how to motivate different people." Participant 1 spoke about her learnings as a motivator:

I'm a motivator and mentor. It was the same with rugby. We had bigs and littles that we needed to support. I found out then that I wanted to help people so now, I help people as a mentor in my position.

Participant 5 is applying her learnings to motivate her current work team:

Understanding that I need to tone down and be more approachable. Some of the people I'm working with may be freshmen who just came out of high school. And so, understanding that you want people to feel the comfortable and motivated.

Participant 2 spoke about the influence of her rugby leaders on her motivational skills and how she applies this skillset to her volunteer and paid jobs:

I run a women's team out here and I coach a youth team. I am also a full-time exercise physiologist. So, I work with people every day, and I have to motivate people to do the things they don't necessarily want to do. My leaders in rugby taught me the balance of different types of motivational skills and leadership skills, and how to work as part of a team.

Summary. The leadership beliefs subtheme directly connected to the fifth research question: "In what way, if at all, do female college athletes demonstrate transformational leadership as adults?" Three subthemes emerged including leadership by example, leadership behind the scenes, and leadership by motivation. Based on the results of the research study, participants demonstrated transformational leadership during their collegiate career but also continued this approach in their postcollege professional careers.

Summary

The results of the research indicated the five major themes of transformational experience, formation of leadership foundations, growth through relationships, coach influence, and leadership beliefs. Subthemes for each theme

were also identified during data analysis. Throughout the interview process, participants shared personal stories, demonstrating these themes in action both while playing at the college level but also while engaged in their postcollege careers. There were no apparent differences in the findings of participants from different college divisions, nor from individuals that participated in the identified rugby development program. While the results of the research sought to comprehensively answer all research questions, significant questions remain regarding how collegiate sports athletes experience the process of leadership development. The following chapter is a discussion of the importance and relevance of the research findings, which are compared to those in the current body of literature and interpreted to form conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The current study examined how participation in collegiate team sports influences adult leadership development and leadership styles. A phenomenological approach was used to capture the shared experience of 12 former female collegiate rugby athletes. In this chapter, the researcher addresses the importance and relevance of the research findings, discusses the implications of the findings, and recommends future research opportunities.

Research Questions

The following five research questions were answered through the findings.

1. How do female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through sport participation?
2. What is the role of collegiate sport participation in the development of adult leadership styles?
3. How does the role of the coach influence the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style?
4. How do team roles, both informal and formal, influence the female collegiate experience and their leadership development?
5. In what ways, if at all, do female college athletes demonstrate transformational leadership as adults?

The findings indicate that the former female athletes perceived to experience benefits from their collegiate rugby participation as it pertains to their leadership development and current leadership style; however, gaps remain in fully understand the process of leadership development through collegiate sport participation. The research findings in relation to the literature and research questions are presented in the following sections.

Research Question 1

The field of leader and leadership development is relatively new and complex. Leadership development "focuses on a process of development that inherently involves multiple individuals" (Day, 2001, p. 64). This research study sought to understand leadership development and sport participation, specifically

asking the question, "How do female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through sport participation?" Previous researchers have noted that leadership development is an ongoing, dynamic process that varies across time and context (Castillo & Trinh, 2018; Day, 2011). Leadership development is more than developing skills into identified gaps (Hibbert et al., 2017). Leadership development consists of intrapersonal and interpersonal content issues along with process issues (Day et al., 2014). The participants noted the *transformational experience* of collegiate rugby; however, most participants did not directly connect this transformational experience to their leadership development. The subthemes of transformational experience *include self-confidence, diversity and inclusion,* and *resiliency.* This transformational experience may or may not have influenced their leadership development in a way that was difficult for participants to process or articulate as young career professionals. This section further explores how the transformational experience theme and corresponding subthemes are related to previous literature along with the gaps this research relating to leadership development.

All participants noted the transformational experience of collegiate rugby by sharing their experiences and stories. Participants used such terms as life-changing, impact, and transformed. Previous scholars have referred to this type of experience as transformational learning. Transformational learning "occurs when individuals critically reflect on their environment, and, through this reflection, they transform their thinking and view of the world" (Megheirkouni & Roomi, 2017, p. 468). Transformational learning researchers have found that this sort of learning has been more successful with groups learning together, from and with each other (De Haro & Carrión, 2011). Collegiate rugby provides an optimal group dynamic as diverse individuals work together for a common cause. Transformational learning is affected by several factors, and these may differ across contexts. Transformational learning may be promoted by being open to alternative viewpoints, engaging in discourse, an activating event that exposes a discrepancy in assumptions, revising assumptions and perspective, and acting on revisions (Cranton, 2002; Dewey, 1938; Mezirow, 2000).

The results of this research study align with previous research related to transformational learning as participants were able to learn with and from each other (De Haro & Carrión, 2011). The culmination of their participation resulted in a transformational experience with emphasis on growth related to self-confidence, diversity and inclusion, and resiliency. Participants noted this transformational experience as they discussed the influence of specific situations on their personal development. Participants noted that the collegiate rugby environment aided in their self-confidence, specifically as it relates to body positivity. Participants also noted that the collegiate rugby environment encouraged diversity and fostered inclusion. The sport of rugby requires diverse skills, prompting peers and coaches to invite and include all types of women. This culture of inclusion extended off the pitch as participants recounted how they applied the lessons learned on the pitch to other collegiate and postcollegiate experiences. There is a direct connection between resiliency and self-confidence, as researchers have noted that resiliency can be developed by promoting a positive concept of self-worth (Berstene, 2014). The challenging situations that participants experienced contributed to their transformational learning and increased their perceived resilience, according to their perceptions. These challenging situations include the mental and physical toughness regarded for collegiate level rugby play and the gender inequities they experienced during collegiate play.

A few participants made a clearer connection to these transformational experiences and leadership development as they discussed changes and advancements in their leadership due to specific experiences. Participants noted that their leadership perspectives and the way they lead within their careers shifted because of rugby participation. Although evidence of transformational learning occurred, the results of this study did not clearly define the connection between transformational learning, transformational experiences, and leadership development; therefore, the current findings cannot substantiate that the participants' transformational experiences contributed to leadership development. Participants may have had a difficult time expressing or articulating their collegiate rugby experience in terms of leadership development. Further research is needed to

understand how female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through sport participation.

Research Question 2

Previous researchers have indicated the importance of developing skills and trying out leadership styles in realistic situations (Collins et al., 2017; Vidic & Burton, 2011). The current researcher sought to understand collegiate sport participation and adult leadership styles, specifically asking the question, "What is the role of the collegiate sport participation in the development of adult leadership styles?" Collegiate rugby provides a platform for this type of development through providing situations in which leadership can be experienced. The results of the research indicated that participation in collegiate rugby served as an avenue to develop *foundational leadership skills* and behaviors for the participants, which likely played some role in contributing to the development of their leadership style. The two foundational leadership skills and behaviors that were identified are indicated as subthemes: *leadership self-confidence* and *adaptability*. The results of this research study suggest that leadership self-confidence and adaptability are foundational to participant leadership style.

Participants demonstrated development in their own leadership self-confidence, a type of specific self-confidence that is a changing mental and emotional state associated with a specific task or situation at-hand (Axelrod, 2017). While self-confidence was identified as a subtheme in the transformational experience theme, leadership self-confidence is an advanced form of self-confidence that participants reported was developed and strengthened from participation in specific collegiate rugby experiences. Many participants gained this specific collegiate rugby experience by navigating through unknown and challenging situations, often during their tenure as rugby captain or co-captain. Participants detailed uncertainty in their role, leading challenging players, and managing difficult conversations. Through these situations and challenges, participants enhanced their leadership self-confidence with this development influencing their current careers and self-perceived leadership style. Individuals with higher levels of self-confidence are more likely to emerge as leaders

(Greenacre et al., 2014). The leadership self-confidence that participants acquired propelled a more confident leadership style, which participants referred to as "take action" or "assertive leadership." It is important to note that the high number of formal leaders within this research study may have contributed to this subtheme since team captains are often placed in situations that require navigating unfamiliar and advanced situations.

Participants demonstrated high levels of adaptation as they navigated a tremendous amount of change throughout their collegiate rugby career. Participants notated these changes from the beginning of their journey, learning how to balance the demands of rugby and school, along with social aspects in the college environment. Participants used verbiage related to change and adaptation when referencing both their collegiate rugby experience and early workforce experience. Adaptation is the response to change initiatives (van den Heuvel et al., 2013). Researchers have indicated that athletes who feel autonomously motivated toward self-growth will be more open-minded and receptive to change. The current investigator did not measure athlete motivation; although, the results of the research did indicate that the participants believe in the value of leadership by motivation. Additionally, the support of coaches and teammates also impacts athlete response to change (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011). This study did find that coaches had a significant influence on leadership style; however, the study did not directly link the role of the coach and player attitudes of motivation. Furthermore, the concept of resiliency, a subtheme identified as transformative, has been connected to change and change adaptation. "Resilience is one way of preparing our colleagues to expect and handle any type of change" (Berstene, 2014, p. 40). The results of this study did find connections with the role of resilience in leadership development; therefore. Further research is needed to understand why and how participants were receptive to change.

Many participants noted that their sport experiences caused them to alter their own leadership style. These findings are in line with previous research findings on the importance of role models, experiences, and reflection as a means to form individual leadership styles (Pankow et al., 2018). It is important for

individuals to be placed in environments to develop skills and try out leadership styles in realistic situations and appropriate settings, an environment such as collegiate rugby (Collins et al., 2017; Vidic & Burton, 2011). Through trial-and-error, participants observed their own leadership behaviors that they perceived as both effective and ineffective. Participants 1 and 8 reported how their leadership styles shifted after experiencing a role as a leader on the rugby team and confirmed that they now continue this leadership style as working adults. Participant 9 described her inclusive leadership style, something she learned after being a part of the rugby community. Participant 5 spoke about how her leadership style has morphed over time, after observing that her leadership style as a rugby leader wasn't effective. She now uses this same more-effective leadership approach as a manager.

Not every participant confirmed that their sports participation directly contributed to developing their adult leadership style. Several participants spoke about their current leadership style but also noted that they are still learning and developing as a leader, to include their leadership style. Participant 11 noted that she learned leadership skills during her collegiate rugby experience, but not necessarily her leadership style. The results of this research study identified that experiences of collegiate rugby contributed to a leadership foundation, particularly in the form of leadership self-confidence and adaptation, which had some influence on adult leadership styles.

Research Question 3

The immediate, performance-based impact of sport coaches is well documented within sport leadership research (Cronin et al., 2015; Kao & Tsai, 2016; Lee et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2013). The current researcher sought to understand long-term, non-performance-based influence of coaches, specifically asking the question, "How does the role of the coach influence the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style?" The results of the research indicated that the role of the coach did influence the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style, resulting in the *coach influence* theme. The subthemes of

champion, *teacher*, and *gender role interactions* were concepts that emerged in the data regarding the coach's role and the athlete's perceived leadership style.

College athletes are constantly interacting with others, not only building relationships with them, but also learning and growing through these interactions. While some of these relationships are with teammates, coaches serve as strong models for these young athletes (Hamilton & LaVoi, 2018). Coaches have a tremendous impact on an athlete's immediate outcomes such as training process and performance outcomes; however, in this study, participants described less of a focus on the competition and more on creating a supportive environment, confidence building, and challenging them off the pitch (Jowett & Arthur, 2019). Participant 9 spoke about how her coach instilled confidence in her as a player and also involved the team in developing strategy. She now incorporates this into her leadership style, uplifting team members and promoting teamwork. Participant 4 shared how her coach instilled confidence in her by accepting her personality and leadership style. As a result of this encouragement, she continues to lead by example, being less vocal but still feels she is effective in her leadership. Participant 3 shared stories of her coach influence, emphasizing the value her coach put on relationships. Because of this experience, Participant 3 now understands the value of relationship-building and incorporates this value into her leadership style.

Previous researchers have focused on the relationship between coach and athlete as a predictor of athlete satisfaction, motivation, and performance (Jowett & Arthur, 2019). Significant gaps in the literature remain regarding coach transformational leaders and their influence on athletes, or followers (Gorgulu, 2019). Participants may have been influenced by the transformational behaviors of their coach; however, additional research is needed to understand this phenomenon, including coach transformational behaviors and the influence of these behaviors. Additionally, gaps in the literature remain regarding the role of the coach in the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style. The essence of coaching effectiveness has yet to be captured and fully understood (Jowett, 2017). The results of this study established the important role of the coach as a champion and

teacher for their athletes. Participant leadership styles were influenced by their coaches, coaches that primarily served as champions and teachers for their athletes.

Additionally, the results of this research study indicated that all coach behaviors and/or leadership styles had the potential to facilitate the development and physiological growth of athletes, whether those coach behaviors were positive or negative. This finding conflicts with previous research, research that stated that positive coach behaviors and/or styles facilitate athlete development and physiological growth while negative coach behaviors and/or styles undermine athlete development and physiological growth (Horn et al., 2011). Participants shared stories of how their coach(es) led them on the team and how their leadership influenced their leadership development and style. Participants were able to learn from coaches that were perceived as negative in their leadership, altering their leadership style in an attempt to lead differently than the negative leadership they experienced. When encountering positive coach leadership styles, participants were able to use this behavior to inform their own leadership style. From the perspective of Participant 7, her coach had limited knowledge of the game of rugby and although she described her coach as a good motivator, she also said the coach was not effective overall. The coach's lack of technical knowledge made it difficult for the team to trust the coach, resulting in decreased performance and a less-than-positive team culture. Now, as a career professional, Participant 7 emphasized the importance of trust with her team, aiming to build trust as the top priority. Participant 5 gave examples of two extremely different coaches she encountered during her time playing college rugby. She learned different leadership skills from both experiences and incorporates them into her overall leadership style.

As a significant finding for discussion, participants described their coaches with varying behaviors and these variations mostly aligned with gender. Participants described their female coach leaders as motivators, empowers, caring, understanding of individual and team needs, teachers, relationship oriented, and inclusive. Participants indicated that many female coaches also encouraged their players to fight for equality in sport and beyond. Alternatively, many participants described their male coach leaders as aggressive, unaware of individual needs,

winning-oriented and strategic. Coach gender preferences remain underresearched (Norman, 2016). The available literature is mixed regarding gender preference for female athletes, mainly due to a shortfall of female coaches; therefore, female athletes have limited exposure to female coaches (Kalin & Waldron, 2015). While previous research regarding gender coach preferences is mixed, the findings from this research study do align with limited research concerning coach gender preferences of female athletes. Research has found that female athletes prefer female coaches as role models, modeling behaviors of empathy, cohesion, and body appropriate behaviors (Beckner & Record, 2016). Additionally, Norman (2016) stated that "evidence also suggests that male coaches, unwittingly, play a role in the perpetuation of the stereotype of women as the less able, less competitive and frailer athlete" (p. 192). Some participants did voice appreciation for their male coaches and their behaviors; however, the majority of the participants' perceived that their current leadership styles align with the behaviors demonstrated by female coaches. The results of this research study suggest that coaches play a significant role in the development of an athlete's leadership style, as athletes learn from their coaches and model positive behaviors.

Research Question 4

Team members participate in both informal and formal roles, influencing team structure, teammate attributes, team confidence, team outcomes, individual outcomes, and leadership behaviors (Cotterhill & Fransen, 2016; Crozier et al., 2013). The current researcher sought to understand team roles and leadership development, specifically asking the question, "How do team roles, both informal and formal, influence the female collegiate experience and their leadership development?" Previous research has centered on the role of formal leaders, most often captains on sport teams; however, limited research is available on the influence of team roles within female collegiate sport on leadership development (Cotterhill & Fransen, 2016). The results of this research study indicated the *growth through relationships* that participants experienced, influencing their collegiate career and aiding in their leadership development. *Teamwork*,

responsibility, and *mediation* were all subthemes of the growth through relationships theme.

Team sports require athletes to work, and sometimes live together, to reach common goals. While this can be a challenge for an individual, it is often more challenging for team leaders (Voelker et al., 2011). In this research study, 10 out of 12 participants served in a formal leadership role on their team while the other two participants noted informal leadership roles. For the purposes of this research, all formal leaders identified as being captains or co-captains at some point during their collegiate careers. According to the research, with one exception, coaches selected the captains and co-captains. From the perspective of the participants, they were chosen for their role for one or more of the reasons following reasons: previously demonstrated leadership skills; potential to demonstrate leadership skills; and/or position on the field. Two rugby positions are more likely to be assigned as captain, the fly-half and the scrum-half. The fly-half is widely considered the most influential player on the pitch, with most attacks being facilitated with their leadership. The scrum-half is another key position, acting as a link between the forwards and the backs (Jenkins, 2019). While informal leaders serve a vital role on sport teams, with only two participants identifying as informal leaders, the results cannot be expanded to include a discussion on informal sport leaders.

Leadership development occurs as a result of individuals experiencing intrapersonal content issues, interpersonal content issues, and process issues (Day et al., 2014). The results of the research suggest that the growth through relationships theme aligns with these principles. Participants expressed the value of teamwork, both as active participants and facilitators of teamwork. Several participants spoke about the challenges of navigating the philosophy of teamwork and ensuring individual and team effectiveness, a process that required inward reflection and outward action. Participants detailed their responsibilities, both on and off the pitch. Participants assumed tremendous responsibilities for the team, providing additional time and attention to ensure the needs of the team and individuals were met. With most participants serving as formal leaders on their respective teams, participants served as mediators, a form of feedback within

process issues. As mediators, participants served as the bridge, connecting teammates to teammates, teammates to coaches, and coaches to teammates. These values align with previous research findings indicating that athlete leaders display the following characteristics: ability to serve as a liaison between team and coaches, ability to serve as a role model, and ability to demonstrate a collaborative working style. (Camire, 2016; Dupuis et al., 2006; Wright & Côté, 2003). Many participants noted that they were originally intimated by their leadership role, but all participants acknowledged the growth opportunity that their role provided. As participants shared their stories and experiences, it was evident that participants valued the opportunity to learn and grow through relationships.

Research Question 5

Transformational leadership theory was originally developed by Burns (1978) as the concept that leaders and followers assist each other in advancing to a higher level of morale and motivation. The current researcher sought to understand transformational leadership in former collegiate athletes, specifically asking the question, "In what ways, if at all, do female college athletes demonstrate transformational leadership as adults?" As transformational leadership theory evolved, four primary behaviors of transformational leadership were developed: including idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Avolio et al., 1991). From the data collected during the interviews, female college athletes describe adult leadership behaviors that parallel the dimensions of transformational leadership. Table 9 indicates how each transformational leadership element relates to the themes and corresponding subthemes.

Table 9

Leadership Belief Theme and Identified Subthemes in Relation to Transformational Leadership Dimensions

Transformational Leadership Dimension	Subthemes
Idealized Influence	Leadership by Example
Individual Consideration	Leadership Behind the Scenes

| Inspirational Motivation Intellectual Stimulation | Leadership by Motivation |

The results of the research study indicated that collegiate rugby plays an important role in athlete leadership development; while some questions remain about this process, the results of this research study indicate that the former female rugby athletes display some transformational leadership behaviors as adults. The themes of *leadership by example* and *leadership behind the scenes*, for example, demonstrate points of similarity to the transformational leadership dimensions of idealized influence and individualized consideration. Idealized influence details the leader's ability to use his or her charismatic influence to become role models who are admired and trusted by their followers (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Individual consideration is described as leaders providing personalized support for the needs of their followers (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Participants directly referred to leading by example, serving as role models to their team, and providing individual guidance to their fellow teammates. As a result, participants continue this approach in their professional careers, providing examples and stories of such interactions within their current workplace. Participant 5 noted that her goal as a leader is for people to say, "Wow, that's someone I would like to be or be like." Participant 7 detailed the importance of demonstrating trust and mutual respect within her team, behaviors she hopes her colleagues will display in return. Participant 12 spoke about providing individual attention to her employees with the goal of inspiring them to a bigger vision: "I build a rapport with people. I need to know who you are, why you are, why you're who you are, what you're doing here. And then I explain and encourage their role in the big team." Participant 4 detailed how her coach encouraged the team to forge a relationship with each individual on campus, regardless of their status. As a career professional, she continues to develop these strong relationships with colleagues, noting that she believes that most of her leadership value comes from the personal care and consideration she demonstrates for others. Another primary tenet of transformational leadership is selflessness, a characteristic that is evident as leaders support their followers in a behind-the-

scenes role. Participant 10 noted that she continues as a behind-the-scenes leader at work, demonstrating consistent strong work ethic in order to inspire her colleagues. Participant 1 spoke about her opportunity to serve as a subject matter expert to new hires, noting that she views it as a mentorship opportunity to help other colleagues and her department find success. She compared this opportunity to her rugby leadership, citing the similarities between a rugby mentor and mentor at work.

The theme of *leadership by motivation* demonstrates connecting points to the transformational leadership dimensions of inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. Inspirational motivation is the ability for a leader to communicate a clear vision in a manner that excites followers to perform at their highest level (Avolio & Bass, 2002). Participants noted that they received motivation from their coaches, as the coaches motivated them to learn and develop within the game but also inspired them to personally develop as young women. Participants also provided motivation to their teammates and detailed how they motivated their teammates on and off the pitch, encouraging fellow players to push themselves through challenging situations. Participants spoke about how their experience as collegiate players continues to influence them as career professionals. Participant 2 spoke about her current leadership style: "Individually, one-on-one with the people I work with, it's definitely a more motivational leadership style." Participant 8 detailed the importance of a supportive, motivating team environment, encouraging her colleagues to ask for help when needed, as each person can assist in meeting the team goals. Intellectual stimulation also describes the type of work encouraging their followers to be creative, think outside the box, and take manageable risks (Avolio & Bass, 2002).

When describing their current leadership style, participants used words that describe their motivational nature, but these words also encourage growth and stimulate challenge. Words such as push other people, propel them forward, help others, teach, and move forward. While playing collegiate rugby, Participant 11 enjoyed reviewing game and strategizing. Now as a career professional, she enjoys the process of innovation and spoke about how she challenges her colleagues during the innovation exercises. Participate 4 spoke about challenging her fellow

colleagues to show up as their best selves every day with the idea that the team is dependent on it. Participant 12 shared her solution-oriented approach to leadership, encouraging her employees to lead with a solution first attitude, remembering to keep the entire team in mind. Similar words were also used when describing the participant's resiliency experience as their coaches pushed them to advocate for themselves. Previous researchers have connected transformational leadership and organizational resiliency; however, a gap in the literature exists relating to personal resiliency development and intellectual stimulation within transformational leadership (Dartey-Baah, 2015; Valero et al., 2015).

The four transformational leadership dimensions related to all four of the leadership beliefs subthemes. The transformational leadership dimensions of idealized influence and individualized consideration related to the subthemes of leadership by example and leadership behind the scenes. These results indicate that the former female collegiate rugby athletes demonstrate transformational leadership as adults.

Theoretical Implications

There are several theoretical implications emerging from this research study. The results of the study confirmed previous research of how leadership development occurs, as a result of experiencing intrapersonal and interpersonal content issues along with process issues (Day et al., 2014). The results of the research conflicted with those of previous investigations relating to the skills necessary for athlete leaders. The research agreed that athlete leaders should display certain nonsport skills and behaviors; however, the research did not align with emphasis on the high sport skill required for captains (Kim, 1992; Wright & Côté, 2003). The results of the study aligned the three identified subthemes with all four transformational leadership dimensions, signifying that the participants, all former female collegiate rugby athletes, demonstrate transformational leadership as adults. The results of this study add to the overall body of literature relating to collegiate sport participation and transformational leadership.

Previous researchers have indicated that coaches have a more immediate impact on an athlete's immediate outcomes such as training process and

performance outcomes. While this may be true, the findings from this study indicated less of a focus on the competition and more on creating a supportive environment, confidence building, and challenging them off the pitch (Dobosz & Beaty, 1999; Poczwardowski et al., 2002). Additionally, relating to coach influence, previous researchers have noted that the type of coach behaviors and/or leadership styles can either facilitate or undermine the development and physiological growth of athletes (Horn et al., 2011). The results from this study revealed that all coach behaviors and/or leadership styles facilitate the development and physiological growth of athletes, whether those behaviors were positive or negative. Last, as relating to coach influence, participants described their coaches with varying behaviors and these variations were mostly aligned with the coach's gender. While previous research regarding gender coach preferences is mixed, the findings of the current study do align with limited research concerning coach gender preferences of female athletes (Beckner & Record, 2016).

Practical Implications

In addition to theoretical implications, there are several practical implications from the results of this research study. The results of this research study indicate that coaches play an important role in the formation of an athlete's leadership development and leadership style. Participants learn from interactions with their coaches, embracing both positive and negative behaviors to harness for their own development. College athletic directors should consider ways to collaborate with their coaching staff and other leadership professionals to clarify the leadership skills desired for their collegiate athletes. With this clarity, universities can make more informed decisions on collegiate athlete leadership offerings and relevant training for coaches. Although the participating athletes in this study reported to experience leadership development and believed their leadership style was influenced as a result of their collegiate athlete participation, greater leadership development may be possible with formal strategies or coach training in place.

The results of this research study found that the experiences and skills learned through collegiate rugby did provide a transformational experience to

athletes; however, significant questions remain on the process of leadership development through collegiate sport participation. Based on the interviews, formal leadership programs were not available to the collegiate rugby participants. This is not surprising, as previous researchers have noted that 75% of student athletes are enrolled in colleges that do not provide a standardized leadership development program (Voight & Hickey, 2016). While findings are limited, formal leadership development programs, specifically designed for student-athletes has been demonstrated to be an effective tool for leadership development (Weaver & Simet, 2015). Voight (2012) published the first collegiate sport team application and assessment of a leadership development program. The results of the leadership development program confirmed improved team communication, team cohesion, teammate play, and individual play. More research is needed to understand the potential value of formalized leadership development programs. Regardless of the availability of a formal leadership development, it is recommended that collegiate athletic administrators inventory the leadership development offerings available for their college athletes. A formalized inventory may reveal gaps and opportunities to the administration.

Throughout the interview process, participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their collegiate rugby experiences. Based on the conversations and observable body language, participants were enthusiastic and reflective in nature when recounting their experiences. Colleges should provide an avenue for college athletes to debrief and reflect on their collegiate sport journey, with a focus on interpersonal, intrapersonal, and process content issues. Research has proven that reflection is an important tool to promote learning, self-understanding, and leadership development (DeRue et al., 2012; Park & Millora, 2012). The opportunity for athletes to share these experiences would provide additional insight on how leadership development occurs.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations regarding this research study. First, all interviews were conducted via Zoom. While the use of videoconferencing was necessary to reach participants across the United States, there are limitations, as

also defined by previous research, to using a videoconferencing software. Nonverbal communication and the full range of body language was not available for observation, with a camera limited to upper chest position only. Participants were not always fully present during interviews, with some participating between meetings and even while driving (Irani, 2018; Oliffe et al., 2021). At times, this limitation seemed to shorten their responses.

Additionally, this research study did not include observations of participants engaged in sport, or document review. The scope of this study only included the participant's subjective perceptions of their own leadership development and style. Without different data sources, triangulation—which often adds validity to a research study—was not possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Furthermore, the time lapse between when the participants were actively involved in collegiate rugby and the time of the interview should be noted. Although participants were no more than three years removed from their collegiate rugby experience, it is unknown whether participants experienced other factors that may have contributed to their leadership development and style during this time differential. It is also possible that because of the time lapse, participants may remember their sports participation differently than it occurred.

Through intensive study, the current researcher sought to understand the shared experiences of former female athletes. Due to the particularity of this research, the results of the study cannot be generalized (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, researcher bias is a common limitation in phenomenological research. The researcher took care not to insert her personal biases during the interviews or analysis of the data, but there is a possibility that inadvertent and/or unconscious bias occurred.

Recommendations for Future Research

While collegiate rugby provided a transformational experience, the researcher could not fully explore understand how female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through collegiate sport participation. Further investigation is needed to better understand how college athletes experience the process of leadership development through collegiate sport

participation. Many former female athletes noted that collegiate rugby participation influenced them to change their perspective of leadership and thus their own leadership style; however, many also noted that their leadership style is still in development. As the participants are closely removed from their collegiate sports experiences, future research could include additional follow-up interviews with these participants to understand how their leadership styles adapt over time and if their learned collegiate rugby leadership remains with them.

Apart from future research recommendations for female collegiate athletes and leadership development, other areas of future research are suggested. First, the results of this study indicated that female athletes have a unique college athlete experience, often feeling less-than compared to their male peers. Future research needs to be conducted to understand the nuances and ways to better support female collegiate athletes. Second, additional research is needed to understand the influence of sport on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Although diversity and inclusion initiatives have increased over the last decade in higher education, many of these programs fail to make a long-term impact (Dover et al., 2020). One of the most resonant themes in this research was the experience of inclusion and belonging as a catalyst for transformation. As contemporary organizations strive to develop inclusive mindsets in their employees, future research could explore how collegiate sports participation, coaching styles, and team roles may influence an individual's capacity to cultivate environments of inclusion and belonging.

Third, the research participants included all self-identified leaders, with 10 out of 12 participants serving as formal leaders. From the experiences of the two nonformal leaders, it was clear that they still had clear responsibilities on the team. Although the collegiate athlete leaders reported their experience and leadership development, more research is recommended to understand the perspective of team followers, those that would not identify as team leaders. Fourth, future studies could include male collegiate athletes, including segmented rugby athlete groups, to determine whether there are differences in adult leadership style and the leadership development process.

Fifth, additional research is needed to understand the influence of collegiate athlete leadership development programs at universities that implement their own leadership programs. Sixth, this research study found that all coach behaviors facilitate the development of collegiate athletes; however, this finding does not align with previous research. Additional research is needed to better understand the coach influence in collegiate sport. Last, additional research is encouraged to include more athletes in general. By expanding research to include a larger number of participants, research could eventually lead to new theories regarding the impact of collegiate team sports and leadership development and styles.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how collegiate sport participation influences female athlete leadership development and leadership style. Through this study, the researcher explored the shared experiences of 12 collegiate rugby participants, seeking to understanding how female collegiate athletes experience the process of leadership development, how participation influences an athlete's perceived leadership style, the influence of coaches and team roles on their leadership development, and how former female athletes display transformational leadership as adults. The results confirmed the transformational experience of collegiate rugby participation; however, significant questions remain regarding the process of leadership development within collegiate sport. The findings confirmed that team roles influence the leadership development process and coaches influence leadership development and leadership style. This study also demonstrated that female athletes uniquely experience college sports, specifically collegiate rugby, and these same athletes display specific behaviors that align with transformational leadership postcollege in the workplace. There are several theoretical and practical implications of this research along with numerous recommendations for future research. Most importantly, however, this research demonstrated that cultivating leadership within collegiate sport can have a powerful impact on students while enrolled in school but also in their postcollege careers. The impact of collegiate sport may be amplified with the support of formalized leadership development programs.

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Appendix A
Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study on Collegiate Team Sport Participation and Adult Leadership Development.

You were chosen for the interview because of your participation in collegiate sport, specifically collegiate rugby. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be part of the research study.

This interview is being conducted by a researcher named Sarah Grai, who is a doctoral student at Southeastern University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this interview is to learn more about the participant's experiences relating to collegiate sport and her leadership development. The researcher is completing this study in partial fulfillment of a doctoral degree.

Procedures:

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an interview via Zoom lasting approximately 1 hour. The interview will be recorded and transcribed at a later time. Follow-up questions may be necessary and will be conducted on an individual basis.

Voluntary Nature of the Focus Group:

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the interview. No one at Southeastern University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the interview. If you decide to join the interview now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Focus Group:

There is the minimal risk of psychological stress during this interview. If you feel stressed during the interview you may stop at any time. There are no benefits to you from participating in this interview.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this interview.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research study. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the interviews.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Sarah Grai. The researcher's Dissertation Chair is Dr. Bethany Peters. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at sgrai@seu.edu or the instructor at bdpeters@seu.edu.

If you want to communicate privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board at irb@seu.edu or Dr. Jennifer Carter, the Chair of the Southeastern University PhD/DSL programs, at jlcarter@seu.edu.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

☐   I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the interview.

Printed Name of Participant	
Participant's Written Signature	
Researcher's Written Signature	

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Part 1: Demographics and Background

Q1: How many years did you participate in collegiate rugby?

Q2: What collegiate athletic team were you a part of?

Q3: Did you hold a formal leadership role while on the team, such as captain or co-captain? If yes, what role did you hold?

Q4: How many years did you participate in rugby prior to your college career?

Q5: How many years were you a part of the national sport development organization?

Q5: Did you graduate from college? If yes, what year did you graduate?

Q6: Are you currently employed full-time or part-time?

Q7: What is your current age?

Q8: What do you identify as your racial background (if you feel comfortable to share)?

Part 2: Collegiate Sport Participation and Leadership Development

RQ1: How do female college athletes experience the process of leadership development through sport participation?

IQ1: Please describe your overall experience playing collegiate rugby.

IQ2: Please describe what you believe to be most impactful about your collegiate rugby participation. What did you learn or how did you grow?

IQ3: What did you learn about leadership through your participation in collegiate rugby?

IQ4: What, if any, specific experiences, during your time participating in collegiate rugby directly influenced your leadership development?

IQ5: From your perspective, did any specific experience or learning influence you differently because of your gender?

RQ2: What is the role of collegiate sport participation in the development of adult leadership styles?

IQ6: Do you feel that participation in collegiate rugby influenced you to develop a specific leadership style? If so, how?

IQ7: How has your college rugby experience prepared you for work and life post college?

RQ3: How does the role of the coach influence the development of an athlete's perceived leadership style?

IQ8: Please describe how your coaches led you and the team. How would you describe his/her leadership style?

IQ9: What, if anything, did you coach do that influenced your leadership development or leadership style?

RQ4: How do team roles, both informal and formal, influence the female collegiate experience and their leadership development?

IQ10: Please describe your role on the team.

IQ11: How did your role on the team influence your leadership development, both at the time of participation and now?

RQ5: In what ways, if at all, do female college athletes demonstrate transformational leadership as adults?

IQ12: How would you describe your leadership style within your professional setting?

IQ13: What is an example of a time you have demonstrated this leadership style?

Appendix C
Email Recruitment Template

<u>Subject Line:</u> Collegiate Rugby Athlete Perspectives Needed

<u>Body Copy:</u>

Good (insert morning, afternoon, evening).

My name is Sarah Grai and I am a doctoral candidate at Southeastern University. I am conducting a research study on Collegiate Team Sport Participation and Adult Leadership Development.

The goal of this research study is to explore how female collegiate sport participation influences athlete leadership development. This study will examine the sport participation history of college athletes, the influence of coaches on their leadership development, their current career path, and how participation in team sport influences their current leadership style.

Participation will consist of a one-hour interview, held via Zoom. Your identity will remain anonymous. While there is no compensation being offered for participation, your insights will significantly aid to the body of research available relating to sport leadership.

Would you like to help? To see if you are eligible, please read the requirements below.

Who can participate?

- Former female collegiate athlete, all playing collegiate-level rugby at various institutions across the United States
- Former female collegiate athletes must be no more than 3 years removed from collegiate rugby participation
- Previous participation in collegiate-level rugby to have occurred for a minimum of one year
- Previous participation in the American Pro Rugby Training Center program
- Must be actively employed, full-time or part-time.

If you fit these requirements and are interested in helping, sign-up by clicking here.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for helping us further sport leadership research.

Sarah Grai

Doctoral Candidate

Southeastern University

Appendix D

Institutional Review Board Approval

SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE: March 25th, 2022

TO: Bethany Peters, Sarah Grai

FROM: SEU IRB

PROTOCOL TITLE: Collegiate Team Sports Participation an Adult Leadership Development

FUNDING SOURCE: NONE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2022 BE 03

APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: March 25th, 2022, Expiration Date: March 24th, 2023

Dear Investigator(s),

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled, Collegiate Team Sports Participation an Adult Leadership Development. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol pending the following update:

- Please add IRB contact information to the informed consent (irb@seu.edu).

Any changes require approval before they can be implemented as part of your study. If your study requires any changes, the proposed modifications will need to be submitted in the form of an amendment request to the IRB to include the following:

- Description of proposed revisions;
- *If applicable*, any new or revised materials;
- *If applicable*, updated letters of approval from cooperating institutions

If there are any adverse events and/or any unanticipated problems during your study, you must notify the IRB within 24 hours of the event or problem.

At present time, there is no need for further action on your part with the IRB. This approval is issued under Southeastern University's Federal Wide Assurance 00006943 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the IRB's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Rustin Lloyd
Chair, Institutional Review Board
irb@seu.edu

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